

EDI & The Outdoors: Has the rock climbing community become more or less equitable, diverse  
or inclusive?

HPED 5000- Honours Thesis

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## **Abstract**

Rock climbing communities have been dominated by white, middle class men. While more diverse peoples now flock to crags, cracks, and mountainsides, a question arises: does the growing number of climbers equate to more diversity and inclusion in climbing communities? Interest in and accessibility of rock climbing has increased since the 1990s, but it is unclear if this popularity corresponded with an increase in the inclusion of groups other than white men. In this research project, I ask “how has the rock climbing community become more or less equitable, diverse, or inclusive?” I conducted a literature review of academic and non-academic writing about rock climbing, finding 17 articles and 1 book that consider issues and interactions in the climbing community regarding the topics of sex, gender, race, equality and feminism. These selected articles address issues in rock climbing such as racist and sexist route naming, male dominated communities, the high ratio of white people to Black, Indigenous & people of color (BIPOC) individuals in these spaces, as well as gender and sexual representation and diversity within the rock climbing community. In this thesis, I will outline my findings, the overlaps in current research, gaps in the literature as well as recommendations for future actions. In this thesis, it becomes clear that there is a distinct lack of equity diversity and inclusion in the rock climbing community for women, queer folks, Black and Indigenous climbers. More needs to be done overall to highlight the work of marginalized communities in the outdoors, as well as more literature written by, instead of about, these same communities.

## Introduction

Within the climbing community, whether at indoor climbing gyms or outdoors at local crags like White Buddha near Bragg Creek, there is a gap in representation between white men to women, BIPOC, queer and other non-white male climbers. There is a discrepancy in representation within the climbing community, and does not correlate to the actual intersectionality that exists. Although many reasons exist to explain why the climbing community is exclusive in its nature, such as income, expenses, time and physical accessibility of these areas, this article will focus on race, gender identity, sexual orientation and some of the history behind why these are barriers to participation in the climbing community.

Within this literature review, I have grouped subjects and topics together for the flow of writing. I recognize fully that those within each community, race, gender, sexual orientation, and culture have unique experiences and barriers that they face, and none should be examined under the same light. For the purpose of this paper, I will be grouping topics in the same sections as the literature that I reviewed prompted very similar results in the realm of the rock climbing community. This intention is not to say that these groups are all the time, but within the examination of the literature I used, the results were quite similar and connected in the avenues I was reviewing.

## Methods

A comprehensive search was conducted through the MRU library database, grey literature search, and library physical resources that relates to the topic of *has the rock climbing community become more or less equitable, diverse or inclusive?* The library searches that were conducted utilized *SPORTDiscus*, *PsychINFO*, *Gender Studies Database*, *SocINDEX*, *Hospitality and Tourism Complete*, and *EBSCOHost*. The searches included terms to retrieve

articles where rock climbing (with like terms included) would be pulled. These papers could be in the subject areas of gender, race, diversity, inclusion, equity, mountaineering, feminism, misogyny, sexism, women, sexuality, BIPOC, people of color, outdoors, historical rock climbing culture, patriarchal controls and more. Advanced searches were completed, where search terms were exploded to increase search results, and include various like terms (ie. climb vs. climbing vs. rock climbing). Many searches were conducted to retrieve the 17 articles and one book included in this literature review. Search results yielded between 10,000 results to 300,000 results for literary articles, books, websites and blog posts. Prior to this review, I analyzed the book and articles and saw that there were recurring themes throughout the literature. Within the review I noted some particularly interesting papers, but did a complete review of all selected articles, pulling themes such as the historical onset of climbing, colonialism, feminism for women & queer climbers, and Black & Indigenous climbers. I also analyzed the gaps in the research, as well as the overlaps, and summed up the literature. All 17 articles and the book were looked through for recurring and poignant themes, and stories and quotes were provided from a few articles to solidify the findings.

*Research Question/Search Table*

	Area of interest	Group of interest	Influencing ideology	Outcome
Key Concept	EDI	Rock climbing community	Culture	Influence

Synonyms	-equity -inclusion -diversity -representation -gender -race	-rock climbers -mountaineers -indoor climbing -climbers -free climbers -gyms	-society -groups -programs -individuals -influencers	-positive cultural change -negative cultural change -no change -need for change
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### Inclusion Criteria

The search results were limited to English language articles pulled between 2001 and 2023. Articles which were qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methodology were included in this review. Articles that mentioned women's experiences in rock climbing, mountaineering and the outdoor industry were mentioned. Articles regarding women's experiences outside of these parameters, or in different or non outdoor or rock climbing industries were excluded. Articles included have no location specificity, and include articles from Canada, the United States, the Andes and more. After assessing the abstracts of these articles and their relevance to the rock climbing subjectivity of this review, 17 articles and 1 book were selected for use.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English</li> <li>rock climbing community</li> <li>English language literature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>duplicate articles</li> <li>non english</li> <li>articles dated older than ____ years??</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• english speaking communities/region</li> <li>• equity, diversity, inclusion in rock climbing</li> <li>• cultural norms and shifts in the rock climbing community</li> <li>• Research on the perceptions of climbers as to their feeling of inclusion/ over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disability &amp; accessibility</li> </ul>
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## Literature Review

### *Historical culture in rock climbing*

Although the aim of this review is not to focus fully on the historical climbing industry, evaluating and understanding the introduction of outdoor and indoor climbing is integral in understanding diversity and inclusion in the climbing community. Outlining how barriers and biases developed that limited the participation of women, racialized, and queer climbers is integral to understanding contemporary barriers to inclusion in rock climbing.

In *A New Form of Modern Sport: The Beginnings of Lakeland Rock Climbing 1880–1914*, Huggins (2023) explores the development of rock climbing in Britain, and how the distinction of rock climbing set it apart from the already alive sport of mountaineering. Huggins' research is important for this literature review on EDI and rock climbing because it begins to build a picture of the early participants of rock climbing, and who the sport was available to.

"The sports of rock climbing and mountaineering were often seen as synonymous activities until

close to the 1880s, both often requiring knowledge of the area, mountaineering skills, and the know-how to use equipment properly and safely. When British rock climbers and mountaineers began moving in different directions, rock climbers focused on alpine skills, using equipment and techniques to further their climbing experience (2023). In the 1880s mountaineering clubs were exclusively male, excluding women from participating in the sport and industry (Huggins, 2023). This article discusses that some clubs allowed women to participate, such as the English Lake District, but this was far from the norm and there were no women “regulars” in the climbing community (Huggins, 2023). Lake District is widely seen as the birthplace of rock climbing, and the new activity was expanding into the “Aple, Tyrol, Dolomite, Saxony or Canada” mountaineering communities as well, so with this growing sport it seems only fit that the expansion meant that the worldwide community would be engaged, but in its representation really only included men (Huggins, 2023).

Hunt (2018) discusses in their article that in the mid to late 1800s, people began to view mountains as places to love and explore, rather than places to be feared, which seemed to contradict the early perspective of what people thought of the alpine environment . This article looks at the love of mountain climbing that was inspired by the first ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786, which allowed the world to see mountains as “playgrounds” and less of a death sentence. But Hunt (2023) as well as Wigglesworth (2021) argue that with ascents came the “claiming” of mountains, and fed into the already active colonialistic and imperialistic influences . We can see effects of this same mentality today through the first ascent route naming privileges- such as what Wigglesworth addresses in their article- that end up with racist, misogynistic or derogatory being used in rock climbing . Hunt states in their article, in conjunction with another author- Schama (1996)- remarks that “some knew “what would become a commonplace in eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries: that the possession of a mountaintop was a title to lordship” as ‘conquest transferred prestige from the mountain to the climber” (Hunt, 2018). This shows that mountain climbing was more than just achieving a goal, it was taking charge and control of an area for imperial gain and empiristic growth. This same notion is seen being used today with something as simple as climbing guidebooks, which in turn can act as a ‘deed’ or a claim of the area, reaffirming that colonialism is a generational act, and it is seen as a feat to be the first ascender on a route (Hunt, 2018., Wigglesworth, 2021). When looking at this influence within EDI and rock climbing, even current actions such as route naming or being the first ascender, these articles showcase that diversity has not truly been achieved, and colonialistic mindsets are still very much active.

Wilkinson (2019) discusses in their article that from the development of climbing in the Lake Districts in England, climbing “gyms” began to gain popularity as far back as 1939, where climbers at universities- especially the University of Leeds in England and the University of Washington- began using buildings and architecture to practice their skills . Climbers would essentially use any location they could to climb in the beginning, but in the 1980s, indoor climbing walls were built to be able to bring the outdoor focused sport indoors for more accessibility and convenience (Wilkinson, 2019). Of course, these walls also inspired growth and progress, prompting the development of better and more technical holds, as well as a setting that was conducive to practice and mastery, such as well built walls and proper route setting (Wilkinson, 2019).

The progress and prosperity associated with the introduction of indoor climbing gyms was primarily focused on young male university students and climbers, and lacked the diversity and inclusion of other outdoor enthusiasts. The expansion of climbing worldwide prompted in



itself the inclusion of a broader community- women, queer, black and indigenous climbers- but as we begin to dive into the literature, this inclusion was not as broad as it should have been.

### *Gender, Feminism and Queerness in the outdoors*

Out of all the articles I selected, most were focused on feminist, queer and female climbers. I don't believe that this really meant that there was more or less inclusion for these communities, but conversely shows that people are beginning to write more about the need for inclusion for women, queer folks and feminism in all sporting avenues, and particularly within rock climbing. 11 of my articles, written by Bradlewy, Cutter, Davis, Dilley, Gray, Heath, Mendoza, Preston and Wigglesworth together drew a picture of what was missing the mark for women, queer folk and feminism in the rock climbing community. The need for gender inclusivity runs deeper than just allowing women or queer folks to occupy climbing spaces, it means that like their male counterparts, they are allowed to grow, enjoy, be supported and thrive in this space. There are many aspects where women and queer folks are othered in these spaces by white men, whether consciously or unconsciously, that divides the community and remains non inclusive. Many of these articles prompted a consensus that although there is progress within the climbing community, as more women are being recognized for their success, there are also ways in which more needs to be done. As many of the articles I looked at do agree, I took time to look at a few articles that dive into a few different focuses, such as route naming, physical ability and gender inclusivity.

Men have dominated climbing spaces, leaving little to no room for other groups to enjoy this space. Women, genderfluid and non-binary climbers have been "othered" in climbing spaces, further building an environment for a masculine dominated space to exist (Mendoza, 2020). Several articles discuss and analyze gender representation in the outdoor industry, and how this

exclusivity is damaging the community. Mendoza (2020) discusses the climbing industry in the Andes, looking at aspects of ecotourism, including climbing, and how these areas are massively gendered, spending time even assigning gender roles to certain outdoor areas. Mendoza discusses the “alpine masculine” mindset that exists in the areas where more strength or physicality is assumed to be required (p 208, 209). Mendoza's research offers an explanation as to why climbing spaces have been dominated by men. Mendoza discusses the concept of the 'alpine masculine' mindset that engrains in climbers that you must be masculine, or at least keep up with the fast paced masculine ‘energy’ to occupy space in the climbing community. This overtly masculine expectation, possibly inadvertently, limits the amount of participation for other genders, labeling them as ineffective (Mendoza, 2020). Mendoza continues to discuss that “the supremacy of this masculine subject depends upon processes of spatial marginalization that devalue the presence of othered subjects- women and non-alpine men- within key domains of nature, especially the Andean backcountry marked by glaciers and mountains” (Mendoza, 2020, p 209). Nature is seen as rugged, tough and dominating, and if you don’t have these attributes yourself, if you aren’t a white man, then society dictates that your success in the alpine environment will be massively limited.

A similar outlook of this gendering of rock climbing can be seen in Wigglesworths’ article about misogynistic naming for climbing routes (2021). As Wigglesworth discusses, it is tradition that the first person that successfully ascends a route has the privilege to choose a name for that route (2021). This honor, although a very cool opportunity, has in turn led to routes being named with “misogynistic, racist, homophobic, transphobic or ableist route names” (Wigglesworth, 2021, p 2). Wigglesworth discusses that this is not only the case for Canada, but these derogatory route names can be seen in guidebooks and online across North America,

Australia and the UK (2021). Issues regarding route naming are not novel, seeing the same trend of discriminatory route names being used and recognized since 1996 (Wigglesworth, 2021). This route naming process is traditional and widely accepted, so route names are not often opposed as it is a first climb, first name situation (Wigglesworth, 2021). Some of the route names that Wigglesworth noticed on a climbing trip were on a cliff named 'Panty Wall' (2021). Some names included "Silk Panties, The Last Panty, Boxer Rebellion and Sacred Undergarment Squeeze Job, Tampon Applicator, She Got Drilled, Pussy Whipped, Slippery When Wet, Quick and Slick and The Reacharound" (Wigglesworth, 2021). This in itself creates a highly degrading, exclusive and male dominated gendered climbing culture, all just from a given route name. The dominating identities behind the route names are white and misogynistic.

Perceived ability is a massive aspect when addressing gender in rock climbing. In Davis' article, they state that "success in rock climbing relies on a combination of athletic skills and traits often hegemonically defined as feminine (grace, balance, petite) and masculine (strength, endurance, muscular)" (p iv, 2022). It is generally assumed that to be a climber, you should have a huge amount of upper body strength as well as endurance; traits often stereotyped to men (Davis, 2022). Males are assumed to be the stronger, more dominant gender, which in turn should then mean a higher rate of success in climbing, but the gap in performance of female climbers is shrinking in relation to male athletes in terms of performance. Climbing is a societally deemed "masculine sport", much like many other sports, and when non-male individuals participate in climbing, they are often othered or belittled, even in their moments of success (Davis, 2022). This is in relation to mainstream sporting culture, where segregation of gender often leaves women feeling like they are assumed to be unable to compete against male ability or attention, and this mentality is perpetuated by cultural and societal influences. Davis

states that “comparable to mainstream sporting culture, sex segregation and gender distinction in climbing leave women feeling as though they are ‘other’, outsiders to the predominantly male community, even though this is incongruent with the way they view themselves” (p 2, 2022). The climbing community is massively unequal in its gender representation, and many articles I looked at agree that much of this can be attributed to non-male climbers being told that they do not have the ability to succeed due to their physical attributes.

### *Black & Indigenous Alpines*

For the purpose of this literature review, I have combined my sections for Black and Indigenous outdoor enthusiasts. The barriers faced by racialized individuals are of course very unique and the combining of these two topics is not to minimize these obstacles, but to show the similarities in relation to rock climbing. The articles selected for this review were both combining and individualizing the experiences of both Indigenous and Black climbers, and my aim was to showcase these as best I could, while simultaneously showcasing the individuality and importance of each of these communities. I reviewed one book and 5 articles that addressed BIPOC experiences in nature, rock climbing and outdoor activities, and the ways in which equity plays a large part in why rock climbing continues to be an exclusive sport.

Colonialism has, unsurprisingly, had a massive effect on the rock climbing community, both currently and historically. Once nature started to be seen as more of a playground than a danger, Europeans and settlers in North America flocked to the crags to climb to the top. As with tradition, mountains would be peaked, land would be claimed, and the domination of nature would begin (Hunt, 2019). Much like with the first ascent of Everest, success would not be possible without the guidance of the Sherpa people (Hunt, 2019). The Sherpa people were not often highlighted in the success stories on top of the peak, but instead, the white tourists would

be featured, and their self-indulgent domination of the land would be applauded (Hunt, 2019). Hunt discussed in their article that the accomplishment of climbing a mountain (and peaking one as daunting as Everest would truly be impressive) needs to be multifaceted, acknowledging the “pluralistic accomplishment” of the community, rather than of the singular, white, male narrative (Hunt 2019, p 3). There are Euro-centric social structures that dominate traditions, which in turn hurt the progress of reconciliation (Wigglesworth, 2022). Wigglesworth continues in their article that nature is so often seen as an environment to conquer, stating that “colonizers uphold a human-centered approach that views the nonhuman environment as empty and passive, which validates their claims for imposing on the land” (2022, p 603). Colonialistic ideologies view that humans have control over nature, while Indigenous communities view nature as something to respect and admire, much like a mother figure (Wigglesworth, 2022). Colonialism demanded for the land to be conquered, which highly contested the Indigenous mindset that the land was in fact the one to admire. With outdoor climbing, we do see an overall lack of understanding about nature, with rock climbers often focused on their success, rather than on the environment itself, but very few times do we see climbers truly understand and admire nature. This ideology is honestly a bit frightening, and seems to avoid thought about a climbers impact and interaction with the land that they are so passionately trying to conquer.

A similar colonialist mindset can be again observed in route and feature naming, particularly with naming features with racist slurs. In their article, Wigglesworth’s discusses that 938 geographic features across 37 US States bear a slur used for Indigenous women, the s-word, with some of those locations even being utilized for the Winter Olympics (2021). In Canada, 25 racist geographic locations using the same slur have been removed, but there are still 21 locations that showcase racist, misogynistic and colonialistic naming traditions (Wigglesworth,

2022). These derogatory route names often indicate something that can be “completed”, “topped out” or “conquered”, which gives interesting insight into the historical colonialistic motives of dominating women and Indigenous communities, especially in a sexually controlling context.

In almost every sporting avenue, there is a massive representation gap present between white and BIPOC athletes. The impact of colonialism can be seen in many aspects of Canadian and international culture, and is incredibly evident within the rock climbing sector. In Harper’s article they state that the “ideological foundations of U.S. national parks, forests, and related protected areas draw from eugenicist interests to save “the best” in nature for the White race considered the purest among humanity” (p 10, 2022). White colonial settlers often perpetuate racist and exclusive ideologies that create barriers for participation for the BIPOC community. Harper continues to write that “parks and public lands are not neutral spaces. The racist systems that historically permeated public land institutions have implications for the outdoor opportunities they afford today” (p 10, 2022). The climbing community, and these authors, have seen an issue with inclusion for BIPOC individuals, largely stemming from the exclusivity driven by colonialistic ideologies.

Powell discusses in their article that outdoor spaces are coded as white, and similar to gender, people who don’t conform to the dominant appearance or orientation are “othered” quite quickly, and have to work much harder than their white or male counterparts to be seen and valued (2021). Othering, in regard to gender, religious, sexual orientations, beliefs and more is a tactic used by white people to close off a space to those they feel are inadequate to occupy it. This happens quite often in climbing communities. Rejection in climbing can be closely connected to race- or to the similar construct of social class- and in turn develops an atmosphere where diversity is not respected or valued (Davis, 2022). Within Davis’ interviews for her article,

it was stated that “race, socioeconomic status and other factors play into a lack of inclusion in [rock climbing]”, and the intersections of these various cultural and social determinants have often left the BIPOC community feeling othered and excluded (p 80, 2022). Critical race theories argue that race in itself does not exist, but colonial mindsets and sociocultural privilege has assigned privilege to white people, and white male climbers, while othering BIPOC communities.

When looking at equity within the rock climbing community, it is difficult to not analyze the price tag that comes with the sport. Usually in climbing gyms, gear is available to anyone who would want to pay the drop in facility fee. At YMCA’s in Calgary, the rock climbing drop in fee for a 45 minute open climb session is \$12.00, and you are required to use the gear that the YMCA provides (YMCA Calgary, 2024). If you are a member, and have paid \$90 per month for an adult membership plus the \$75.00 sign up fee, plus any memberships for your children, only then you are able to drop in for climbing for \$0 (YMCA Calgary, 2024). Many other climbing gyms require a drop in fee, or an optional monthly membership, so although no personal gear is required, there is still an additional fee for a quick climbing session. When climbing outdoors, many areas are usually free to go to (well- not including a park pass or entry fee) but the bigger costs begin adding up when you tally up travel costs, lodging, food, climbing harness, ropes, carabiners, Grigri’s or ATC’s, gear for anchoring, climbing cams, and that is just the minimum, unless you go with an experienced friend. Wigglesworth's article states that “it is easier to get to the top first when you have the access, time, gear, money, training, travel, mobility for the outdoors, financial costs, time, family responsibilities, and gender role socialization” (2021).

Societally today, BIPOC communities are coded as being lower class, and therefore living in a lower income bracket, and in return are unjustly treated as such. Swanson discusses in

their article, from a survey conducted by Powers et al. in 2019, it was found that BIPOC individuals were “less likely to utilize parks, and members of lower income were less likely to participate in recreation programs provided by Parks & Recreation agencies' ' (2023). Swanson goes on to discuss that in another survey conducted by Winter et al., it was seen that money was the number two reason that BIPOC individuals didn’t participate in outdoor activities, which came second behind time reasons. (2023). The outdoor industry has minimal consumeristic interest from BIPOC climbers, mostly because there are so many constructed barriers that don't allow full participation from these communities (Swanson, 2023). The outdoor industry has attempted to focus on growing their consumer interest, but similar to gender, having done little to no research regarding race or ethnicity means a lower result for inclusion and growth (Swanson, 2023). Swanson argues that there has been some forward progress for the inclusion of women in outdoor activities, but the barriers faced by the BIPOC community continue to limit access and inclusion in climbing (2023). In 2020, during the height of the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter protests began to draw attention to the issues that BIPOC communities face, which drove home the need for inclusion in society, especially in the realm of rock climbing and the outdoor industry (Swanson, 2023). The articles I have found continue to state that more needs to be done in the rock climbing industry for more inclusion and equity for BIPOC athletes.

## **My Input**

### *Overlaps in literature*

There is a consensus among the articles that I analyzed that there is a distinct lack of diversity represented within the outdoor community, and more specifically, within the rock climbing community. From women & queer folks to black and indigenous individuals, and all the intersectionality that exists in between, more needs to be done. From the onset of rock climbing, the literature I analyzed agrees that the world is progressing in the realm of inclusion



for women in sport, but not enough that the diversity is not, for the majority, in favor of white men. This is even more the case when looking at the participation rate of individuals who don't conform to societal gender binaries. The sporting world is almost exclusively controlled and representative of the white, male population. This is not to say that women are not successful, or are not excelling in their sport, but most of the available coverage and attention is placed on men. Rock climbing is no different, and the authors in the papers that I analyzed agree with this.

For Black and indigenous rock climbers, there is a distinct lack of diversity and equity in the outdoor sector. In regards to representation within indoor and outdoor climbing spaces, we see these spaces coded as "white", and those who exist outside of this attribute are often silently excluded. It is agreed that the articles I analyzed see this exclusivity within the sport of rock climbing, but also in the avenues related to rock climbing, such as with the price and time commitment needed to participate in such an expensive sport. Societal barriers made for black and indigenous climbers, although unique for both communities, intersect to show that the sport is excluding these individuals. This can be seen within the price point of climbing gear, accessibility of outdoor and gym climbing areas and the time needed to access these spaces. The articles I read through saw different barriers for racialized communities, with BLM marches and monetary restraints at the forefront for one, and multigenerational trauma and colonialism for the other, but many of these intersections of race and colonialism exist in the rock climbing sector.

The articles I read were negative towards the amount of evident diversity, equity and inclusion represented within rock climbing. This is not to say that there is no progress, or that there is nothing being done within these communities, but the research I looked at did not showcase many situations where women, queer, feminist, black or indigenous communities were being equally or fairly represented. The overlap in the literature shows that there was a true and

distinct lack of representation in rock climbing for these communities, with little to no effort from other communities, specifically white men, working to increase diversity overall.

### *Gaps in the literature*

After reviewing the literature, I began to realize that most, if not all, of the articles available, were negative and showcased lack of diversity within the rock climbing and outdoor industries. The articles focused on the lack of diversity for many rock climbing communities, but not many pieces were available to discuss the initiatives and programs started by women, queer folks, black, indigenous and other marginalized rock climbers. The bulk of attention in the articles I analyzed focused on the negatives of the whiteness and maleness of climbing, rather than the work that racialized and marginalized individuals are doing to become more recognized in the climbing community. Including more of this work in the current literature would increase the diversity and inclusion in rock climbing, and bring awareness to what needs to be improved with the community. I believe that the lack of attention to the work that marginalized climbers are doing in the sector is a testament to the control that the white patriarchy still holds, and anything that is looked at outside of white and male is regarded as unimportant. I believe to round out current literature, including case studies, program overviews and research about current initiatives that are written by the feminist, queer, female, black and indigenous climbers can begin challenging the societal quo of what climbing has looked like historically.

### *Did my question change? Why? What happened?*

My topic question did change throughout this literature review. Originally, my research question was *EDI & The Outdoors: How has the rock climbing community become more or less equitable, diverse or inclusive?* This research topic was related to what I had intended to look into, but I realized that the question had framed my research in a positive outlook, and might

have been pointing to how misogyny, racism, sexism and exclusivity has changed, but when reviewing articles from, it became clear that there hasn't been a large paramount shift in the culture and community of rock climbing.

Within my review, I had originally designed all the groups to be individual, offering a section for each of the topics; the historical climbing community, Black outdoor enthusiasts, Indigenous outdoor enthusiasts, gender representation, queerness in the outdoors and feminism. While writing these sections, I was finding that the topics ended up being quite similar in their points, so to re-enforce certain ideas and patterns, I began to combine these ideas into the same categories. As stated within this paper, the experiences of racialized and marginalized individuals can not be captured under one umbrella term, as there have been different issues, impacts and racist barriers created for both the Black & Indigenous communities. These plights are unique and complicated for each community, and my aim was to not undermine or take away the weight felt by many racialized individuals, but to showcase the intersectionality between these communities within the outdoor industry and the climbing realm, many of these intersections undoubtedly overlapping.

I saw the same situation within my sections for gender, feminism and queerness in the rock climbing community as well. There were large overlapping ideologies that offered similar critiques, so these sections were combined to allow for the reinforcement of these ideas, as opposed to just leaving them separated. Combining these sections proved to be a benefit to the paper, as it became important to showcase intersectionality for these minority groups in rock climbing. The flow of the paper improved with the combining of similar topics. I had assumptions when I began this narrative literature review that, although not incorrect, just didn't

allow for the best formatting of the paper to provide the reader the outlook I was aiming for, which was ultimately the intersectionality of marginalized groups.

## **Recommendations**

*What recommendations would I have for the rock climbing community in the future?*

I believe that there is a clear need for programs and initiatives to support marginalized communities and individuals in the rock climbing community. Within my job as a climbing supervisor, I have seen the inclusion of individuals in climbing, including queer, female, and racialized individuals, and I am truly passionate about everybody feeling welcome in my climbing wall. No matter your race, ethnicity, beliefs, experiences, social income class and whatever else the world might use to define you as a person, you are welcome to participate. I work to embrace inclusion in my climbing wall, but there are evident barriers that exist socially that hinders participation in climbing. The sport of climbing is exclusive in its nature, and it ostracizes communities that society (which is really, us) deems as undeserving from participation, whether this is a conscious motive or not.

Recently, I have seen new groups or initiatives emerging, such as women only hiking groups, and black and indigenous outdoor initiatives, and the presence of groups like these show that the outdoors, as well as the sports you enjoy in these areas are for everybody. These groups pull people who might not ever step foot in a climbing space, such as someone with low income, or someone who works full time almost 7 days a week, or anyone else who might not fit the ideal rock climber to come out and enjoy the sport, and this is integral. But with these, the next step might be to step out of individualized groupings, such as women only, or black outdoor enthusiasts, and begin to integrate these communities in a way that would bring intersectionality to rock climbing. There is safety in recreating with people who think similarly to you, I have

seen this, but continuing individually might keep inclusion from truly happening. Individualizing communities to enjoy a sport separately might be the same issue that led to white men dominating sport communities. Beginning with these groups- for example, a women's only hiking group- brings people into rock climbing and introduces them to a sport that they have not yet been comfortable participating in before. This introduction is integral and important. But then after, bringing these women (or Black, Queer or Indigenous climbers) into the areas that are often dominated by white men will begin to deteriorate the social stereotypes, barriers and stigmas that have been built. My recommendation is to take your women, Black, Indigenous, queer, feminist group into the climbing wall or outdoor crag and begin to disturb the mentalities and barriers that say that these spaces are coded as white and male. Breaking down barriers and interrupting the 'usual flow' of things is what is needed to drive social change and progress.

*What initiatives, programs, and policies are needed to help drive this cultural shift?*

I urge rock climbing supervisors, gym owners, frequent climbing wall users, and enthusiasts of all kinds to begin to think about what your gym usually looks like, and to analyze the gaps that exist. Do you have any black climbers come use your gym space? Why or why not? Are women or queer folk representing half your wall population, and what is keeping them from climbing in your area? Do you have supports available for queer individuals who are wanting to utilize these spaces, either quiet supports (such as pride flags or stickers) or out loud supports, like queer climbing nights? How do you acknowledge the land you use while you are outside? Do you work to dominate the land that you are climbing on, do you work to 'conquer your climb'? Or do you work with the land you are on, appreciating the rock formations, the plant life, the ecosystem that allows you to enjoy the sport you love in an area that pushes and challenges you? What are you analyzing in your climbing community and how do you make space for

people to push these social barriers? Recent implementations of EDI policies in recreation centers like the YMCA has shown that corporations are beginning to recognize the intersectionality that exists within their workplace, sector and organizations. Workplaces are beginning to address the gaps in their inclusivity, and are changing simple things such as adding preferred names on employee forms, language in websites and promotions, and participating in organized events such as BLM marches and pride parades. Although this policy change could be seen as minimal to some, to others the inclusion that is created by adjustments like this can change the world. On International Women's day this year, for a work event, I recently wrote to the CEO that the participation of marginalized communities in rock climbing can be the difference between life and death for some people, and if the deliberate act of inclusion saved even one person's life, isn't that enough to inspire more change?

Another area to analyze is to look at the ways in which you perpetuate racist, sexist and misogynistic naming systems in your community. Are we continuing to utilize the route names such as the ones found on the Panty Wall, even though we know that it continues to create an exclusive atmosphere against women? There are multitudes of ways that individuals continue supporting societal issues, and the destruction of the internalized racism, sexism, homophobia, intolerance and hate needs to be recognized within ourselves. A question I often ask myself is “in what ways do I perpetuate hateful ideologies in my own mind, whether intentional or not, and what do I need to do to change?”. Fortunately, even one person changing their internal perspective can create a small ripple of change, but contrastingly, societal change (again- society is all of us) requires change within a majority. It begins internally, and assessing the ways in which the spaces we occupy support these societal biases is integral to beginning these changes.

## **Conclusion**

*How can this really be summarized?*

The articles that I utilized for this literature review are for the most part in agreement in regards equity, diversity and inclusivity in the rock climbing industry. These articles selected have included areas such as queerness, feminism, gender, black & indigenous climbers and the historical introductions of rock climbing in the world, and have agreed that there is a massive lack of inclusivity in the indoor and outdoor rock climbing sector, and within the outdoor sector in general. As stated throughout this review, this does not mean that there is no diversity or inclusion, because there is. There is an increasing number of marginalized and racialized individuals participating in both indoor and outdoor rock climbing, and more and more of these individuals are beginning to become recognized for their success and participation, and this is incredible, but it is not yet enough. If we set the bar to ground level, of course we will see some significant progress, but expecting the minimum from ourselves is not helpful nor effective. More women are being recognized for their success, but the recognition of 1 woman against 100 men is not progress. Black climbers are being introduced to the outdoor industry, but yet prices of gear skyrocket every year, often to unaffordable heights. Indigenous individuals are being recognized as a community of leaders and connectors to the land, ecosystems and activities in the outdoors, but white people are still working to conquer and own the land for their benefit. A ground level expectation for our society is not prosperous, or even helpful, and more needs to be done to change these perspectives. In the realm of rock climbing, it begins with the influencers, the athletes, the newbies, the oldies, and everything in between. Responsibility falls on the climbing gyms, the owners, the employees, the supervisors, the managers and the participants to live in a way that has equity, diversity and inclusion at the forefront. It is the role of the entire

rock climbing community to recognize the ways in which the climbing community has missed the mark, and work to make change, either great or small, for every climber.



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