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Volunteering masculinities in search and rescue work: Is there "a place for girls on the team"?

Sarah-Louise Weller[1] | Caroline A Clarke[2] | Andrew D Brown[3]

[1]Faculty of Business and Law, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK

[2]The Open University Business School, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

[3]School of Management, University of Bath, Bath, UK

Correspondence
Sarah-Louise Weller, Faculty of Business and Law, University of the West of England, Bristol, BS16 1LE, UK.
Email: sarah3.weller@uwe.ac.uk

Abstract

This article explores performative enactments of gender at work in a UK-based Search and Rescue voluntary organization, *QuakeRescue*. Based on ethnographic research, we analyze how gender is performatively constituted in this male-dominated setting, focusing in particular on how hegemonic masculinity is enacted through bodies, physicality, and technical competence. Our findings show how performative acts, predicated on essentialist understandings of superior masculine bodies, constructed femininity as limited, deficient, and Other, legitimizing the assigning of mundane, routine tasks to women volunteers. By endorsing women's presence, albeit as low-status team members, there was sufficient recognition to ensure that sedimented practices of "doing gender" at *QuakeRescue* remained largely unquestioned. We conclude that hegemonic masculinity predicated on bodily practices in male-dominated workspaces is oppressive in its effects, and until this is recognized and acknowledged, transformative potential is limited.

KEYWORDS
bodies, ethnography, masculinities, performativity, volunteering

1 | INTRODUCTION

In my post-assessment feedback interview, Billy repeatedly told me 'there is a place for girls on the team'. Silently, I seethed and resisted the urge to correct his infantilising of women by disabusing him

of the notion that I'm a 'girl'; I'm 10 years his senior with two adult offspring. In an attempt to convince me further, he told me how one woman had gone on a mission and had been 'fantastic' in a co-ordination role, from which I surmised that she had been relegated to behind-the-scenes tasks, rather than having a more central part within the team making live rescues (Diary entry: 9 May 2016).

In this study, we explore the seemingly benign question of whether women have a place "on the team" in voluntary rescue organizations, by examining how gender is performed within *QuakeRescue*. Based on a 2-year ethnographic study, we analyze how (gendered) bodies and practices are both performative and grounded in historical assemblages. We deploy the concept of 'hegemonic masculinities' as both the medium and outcome of wider power relations, for they can be defined only through the negation of the Other. Within specific contexts for example, the male-dominated workplace, they are performative, insofar as their superordinate status constitutes them as the "One," while simultaneously constructing multiple (gendered) Others; usually women and "various subordinated masculinities" (Messerschmidt, 2019, p. 87). Since all social categories and processes of "subjection" demand "subordination" (Butler, 1988, p. 20), hegemonic masculinities perpetuate and sustain unequal gender relations (Connell, 1995).

Hence, our research question: "how (are) masculinities and femininities constituted, reproduced and performed in a male-dominated voluntary/search and rescue (SAR) setting?" is apposite. We argue the use of techniques such as accentuating physical size, strength, and technical competence in *QuakeRescue* were oppressive in their effects, rendering bodies deficient in any, or all of these criteria Other. Such assumptions illustrate how the feminine is essential to the amplification of dominant masculinities; one cannot exist without the other, for each is *part of* the other.

We begin with a review of the literature, commencing with a focus on gender, hegemonic masculinities and performativity, and moving subsequently to studies of risky occupations and volunteering, before outlining our methods and context for our study. Next, we draw on empirical data from 48 interviews and ethnographic field-work, to show how gender stereotypes were performed, reinforced and reconstituted by both men and women *QuakeRescue* volunteers. We conclude that unless hegemonic masculinity predicated on "superior" bodily practices ceases to be privileged, rewarded and aspirational in male-dominated workspaces, it will remain oppressive in its effects, and its transformative potential limited.

2 | THE ORGANIZATION OF GENDER

We view gender as a series of ongoing performative practices bound-up with, but not fully bound by, meanings associated with masculinity and femininity, naturalized, and neutralized over time. In conceptualizing gender as performative, we agree that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or eco-nomic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society" (de Beauvoir, 1997, p. 295). This focus on the performative necessarily precludes all essentialist gender explanations frequently deployed as justification for maintaining unequal power relations. These rationalizations are predicated on the naturalization of specific attributes of both men and women, or the pervasive "biological(ly) determinist discourses centered on the female body" (Crofts & Coffey, 2017, p. 513).

In modern Western society, Gatens suggests "Man is the model and it is his body that is taken for the human body" (1996, p.24), in an unending recursive process of mutual (mis)recognition, where Other bodies are viewed as deficient (Treanor & Marlow, 2019), or deviant from the idealized standard. Such mechanisms are entangled within a context and history of unequal relations, where power is exercised through hierarchies of "difference" and normative per-spectives, which endorse socially prescribed standards regarding how men and women "ought" to behave. Precisely, how these divisions function *in practice* is often ignored, perhaps, because men usually benefit from notions of what is deemed "suitable behavior in one sex" while being "sanctioned in the other" (Baigent, 2001, p. 24). One example is the tendency to regard masculinity in terms of *activity* as opposed to *passivity* associated with femininity.

Gendered performative theories are antiessentialist, advocating fluidity, expressed through "configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action" that may vary "according to gender relations in a particular social setting" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836). Crucially, performative practices include a temporal dimension, and are amenable to both negotiation and challenges "at the individual, organizational, cultural, and societal levels" (Mac an Ghaill, 1996, pp. 2–4).

2.1 | At work

Our focus is how masculinities are performed in working lives and organizational practices, and their real effects and material consequences, not only for how work is organized, but also experienced. In this sense, hegemonic masculinity may be understood better as a verb, requiring continual (in)action that sustains women's subservience to men through alterity, complicity, and marginalization, rather than as a noun prescribing, "role expectations or an identity" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Hegemonic masculine "norms" tend to celebrate courage, competition, aggression, self-mastery, physical toughness, and personal resilience (Knights, 2015), a set of narrow criteria that sustains a "cultural legacy of subordinate status" (O'Grady, 2004, p. 91), facilitating womens' assignment to mundane tasks. This is best described as "fit work," involving activities that are "considered more suited to women" (Treanor, 2016, p. 407). This means of allocating labour illustrates one genealogical "mechanism(s) by which women (have and) are devalued" (Shildrick, 2015), because labeling jobs as "women friendly" necessarily depends on others being labeled "unfriendly." These small, but repeated acts confirm how bodily practices are enacted within "(a) relationship to the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence" (Butler, 2006, p. 524).

In an effort to reframe gender as a "public issue" rather than a "private problem" (Mills, 2000), Acker introduced the term "gendered organization" (1992), illuminating how work is not predicated on neutral values, but frequently performed to "perpetuate advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control" (p. 249). Relatedly, specific meanings, patterns, and practices are *always already* embedded within the structure and history of (gendered) organizations (Pullen, Rhodes, & Thanem, 2017), affording possibilities even in contemporary times, to demonstrate "masculine prowess" (Kondo, 1990, p. 259). Arenas dominated by one gender are examples, where the effects are felt by the Other who can only ever hope to achieve "token status." These include men working in traditionally feminized (caring) roles such as nurses, cabin crew, or hairdressers, who must negotiate their "subordinate" masculine subjectivities in relation to superordinate masculinities and heteronormative discursive practices (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Butler's heterosexual matrix (1990) is informative in this regard, since it suggests that specific behaviors associated with ideal relationships are (implicitly) considered acceptable, or "culturally intelligible" at a particular moment in time.

Dominant forms of masculinity are often considered desirable, even aspirational, in (working) arenas where men represent the "One," who may "attain himself only through that reality which he is not" (de Beauvoir, 1997, p. 171). The heterogeneous Other facilitates the One, by creating a distance between femininity and homosexuality (Gond, Cabantous, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016), which threatens heterosexual masculinity. Relatedly, patriarchy is a complex apparatus, comprising multiple techniques, often demonstrated through "competitiveness, command-control behaviors, and achievement" (Miller, 2004, p. 104). Despite few men meeting the standards of the masculine ideal, most remain "complicit in sustaining the hegemonic model" (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985, p. 92), and associated "patriarchy dividend" (Connell, 1995)—the social or professional capital afforded to men through unearned relational privilege. Homosociality or "mateship" (Pease, 2014) enables another form of dominance through strong "social bonds between persons of the same sex" (Hammaren & Johansson, 2014, p. 1), "reified—here to stay, rather than dynamic and processual" (Ainsworth, Batty, & Burchielli, 2014, p. 38). For example, despite an ongoing performative process, the phrase "boys will be boys" implies permanence, and therefore forecloses possibilities for resistance and reconfiguration (Hearn, 2004). Performative patterns consisting of micro acts

"of repetition and recitation" (Riach, Rumens, & Tyler, 2014) ensure that femininity remains within this "accommodating subordinate relationship" (Messerschmidt, 2019, p. 86). Crucially, *all* organizational members sustain hegemonic masculinity, whether by perpetrating/reproducing specific practices, or being silent about their effects in sedimenting inequalities, and rendering them difficult to shift.

3 | VOLUNTEERING BODIES

In this paper, we place a particular focus on bodies, not simply as an inversion of the hierarchical Cartesian mind-body dualism, but rather as a means of collapsing this binary and recognizing how they are two sides of the same coin (Knights, 2015). Performativity is one means of focusing attention on the body and "the process of subjection" at work (Hodgson, 2005, p. 57), yet it remains an "under researched area in studies of organizations" (Coupland, 2015, p. 15). One contribution of our study is to show masculinities and femininities "in action"; how they are constituted, reproduced and performed through the body in a male-dominated voluntary organization.

While some studies have previously focused on the physical performance of gender in a variety of male-dominated "risky" occupations, and dangerous work (e.g., Haas, 1974), often undertaken by working class men, including forestry and mining (Johansson & Ringblom, 2017), firefighters (Pacholok, 2009), soldiers (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009), and the police (Prokos & Padavic, 2002), few have examined voluntary work. Sports studies have been helpful in demonstrating how masculinity requires an audience in order to recognize winners as "real men," while ignoring the necessity of losers (Eby, 2007, p. 602). This illustrates how subordinated versions of masculinities perform a vital purpose in juxtaposing and amplifying fantasies of hegemonic masculinities (Messerschmidt, 2019).

Voluntary work, has traditionally been seen as the province of women, partly because of assumptions that they will more readily undertake unpaid work than men (Little, 1997). Gendered stereotypes persist, with women undertaking the majority of personal service and caring activities, partly because "the social construction of masculinity" may "decrease men's likelihood to volunteer" in what is deemed to be "women's work" (Fyall & Gazley, 2015, p. 291). Conversely, because public recognition (another audience) is important for male volunteers (Eagly, 1987, p. 47), they are more willing to participate in "heroic helping" and other "risk-taking" pursuits (Wymer, 2011). Permanent disaster or "high-stakes volunteers" undertake risky activities, requiring extensive training and long-term commitment, and are characterized by people's approach to volunteering as a "job" (Lois, 1999; McNamee & Peterson, 2016, p. 11). "Extreme" or "thick" volunteering (O'Toole & Grey, 2016) may facilitate further recognition for individuals as a "badge of honor" for undertaking what is known as "edgework," an activity that may result in death or serious injury (Lyng, 1990). There is, however, a lack of empirical studies on how gender influences choice and level of volunteering, or why participation varies by gender, and this paper seeks to contribute to calls for more contextual and detailed analyses (Studer & von Schnurbein, 2012). Very few studies focus on rescue organizations as sites of gendered performative work, instead the disaster literature tends to emphasize experiential accounts of women as passive victims of crisis or catastrophe.

Voluntary SAR work takes place within a gendered organization; inherently male-dominated, involving physically demanding tasks that require muscular strength, endurance and aerobic capacity (Silk, Lenton, Savage, & Aisbett, 2018). Within such settings, "girls" are frequently subjected to paternalistic overprotection and a range of discriminatory behaviors from exclusion to blatant hostility (Beatson & McLennan, 2005, pp. 21–22), and frequently constituted as less capable. To be considered competent, women must often outperform male counterparts, which may prevent them from requesting additional support for fear of rendering their gender visible (Woodfield, 2016). Furthermore, women SAR volunteers must utilize equipment and clothing not designed for their bodies, whilst routinely enduring numerous "obstacles," for example "practical affordances that are denied to them in public spaces" (Butler, 2006, p. 98) such as appropriate toilet facilities (Beatson & McLennan, 2005).

One consequence is that women volunteers may frequently experience inconvenience and feelings of shame, for as Butler makes clear the body "speaks" without necessarily uttering, despite how "the act that one performs is,

in a sense, an act that's been going on before one arrived on the scene" (Butler, 2006, p. 526). A level playing field would provide women with suitable tools and aids, but rather than surfacing a more nuanced critique concerning why material objects are calibrated to default male settings, there is a tendency to reinforce differences. For example, participants in the fire service confined talk of gender to "perceived differences between men and women in physical strength" or the lack of women within the service (Harrison, 2015, p. 215), thereby colluding with contradictory discourses that situated women as problematic due to both their presence and absence (Grip, Engström, Krekula, & Karlsson, 2016). Crucially, these practices are performative, rather than predetermined, since inequalities depend not only on "a set of structures and conditions which delimit the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society" (Young, 1980, p. 140), but also on how men, and women "live by" these mores in any given situation.

4 | RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 | Context

Founded in 1996, *QuakeRescue* was a voluntary humanitarian charity that provided global SAR services in the event of earthquake and other sudden natural disasters. The International Response Team (IRT) and the Community Resilience Teams (CRT) offered a 365 days, 24h emergency response to floods in the United Kingdom as well as SAR missions to disasters worldwide. Service was provided by 110 volunteers of whom 75 identified as men and 35 as women, aged between 21 and 64. These people were drawn from a variety of occupational backgrounds, but notable were large cadres with military and emergency service backgrounds. The selection process for IRT members was rigorous and competitive, with an additional 2-years' training provided by *QuakeRescue* to "get the badge" for those who were chosen to become members.

4.2 | Data collection

In August 2013, the charity's Board of Trustees granted the primary researcher unrestricted access to the organization, and for several months she made a series of visits to *QuakeRescue*, chatting to members and observing events. After passing initial selection, to become a full member of the IRT, the first author became a "protagonist in the social drama at hand" (Wacquant, 2015, p. 6), joining a cohort of 20 individuals (16 men and 4 women) on a 2-year training programme (one weekend per month).

During this programme, candidates (including the first author) navigated a variety of preparatory tasks and rescue scenarios to demonstrate they could perform as disaster mission volunteers. As part of her "enactive ethnography," which required the researcher to "dive into the stream of action …by performing the phenomenon" (Wacquant, 2015, p. 6), she undertook activities within construction sites, derelict buildings, and training in forests that involved frequent assaults to the body, for example, performing under extreme weather conditions, deprived of sleep and food. Arguably, such tests were designed not only to mimic rescue missions, but also for individuals to perform a form of masculinity as proof of fortitude, by mastering bodily discomfort and pain (Pease, 2014).

In April 2016, 12 trainees (11 men and the primary researcher), passed the final five-day assessment and were "signed off" as ready for international deployment. Training, eating, sleeping, and socializing with members of *QuakeRescue* for more than 2 years provided plentiful opportunities to "capture the nuances and meanings of each participant's life from the participant's point of view" (Janesick, 2000, p. 384). Additional forms of ethnographic data were also collected during fund-raising activities, Annual General Meetings, and email exchanges with other volunteers. At convenient moments snippets of conversations, anecdotes, and observations were written down as "scratch notes" (Lofland & Lofland, 2006), and later developed into extensive field records.

In addition, 48 semi-structured interviews with self-selecting *QuakeRescue* members were conducted in response to an all-member email. Our sample comprised 37 men and 11 women, a mix of new recruits and long-servers. Interviews ranged from 30 to 90 min duration, and were (audio) recorded in volunteer's homes, cafes, and training sites between July 2014 and June 2015. These interviews were fully transcribed, and supported by a range of other documents, including press releases, website pages, minutes of meetings, policy documents, operational records, and photographs from international deployments.

4.3 | Data analysis

Data analysis, with the aim of generating "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) through iterative processes of evaluating and assimilating theory and empirical data, was an emergent, multistaged process. It was important for us not to marginalize or ignore the embodied nature of the research, by privileging dominant, rational, and masculine ways of constituting what counts as "data." Instead, we sought to serve-up experiences of gender-in-action by using a more visceral flesh-and-blood perspective (Wacquant, 2015). To this end, the primary researcher made initial interpretations of the data more-or-less as they were collected, examining her "own involvement in the framing of the interaction, and using (her) eyes as well as … ears" to "kick-start…analysis" (Silverman, 2000, p. 128).

Second, the first author produced a series of vignettes, that is, vivid portrayals, "… of an event of everyday life, in which the sights and sounds of what was being said and done are described …in real time" (Erickson, 1986, p. 149). Writing vignettes was a means of enhancing researcher reflexivity, and a vehicle that enabled "a reflexive dialogue" (Humphreys, 2005, p. 852) between co-authors, as well as a continuing reminder that the researcher is part of, rather than apart from, analysis.

Third, all interview data were subject to thematic analysis. While the primary researcher coded all the data, five randomly chosen transcripts, were also coded by the co-authors, sparking further reflection and debate. As codes were developed, modified, and collapsed into each other and discarded, key themes, for example, centered on issues of "masculinities," "strength/competence," "fragilities," "weakness," "flesh," "corporeal," "lack," and "femininities" emerged. Fourth, in a second cycle of analysis, surviving codes were linked together to develop major themes, explore relationships and link the data to theory. Lengthy written accounts based on these analyzes were produced by the primary researcher and further refined through discussions with other members of the research team.

5 | FINDINGS

In this section, we analyze issues of masculinity with reference to the primary researcher's experiences (Mac an Ghaill, 1996), including interviews, within *QuakeRescue*. While the focus of the gender and masculinity literature is often on the political consequences of aligning men "against" women (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994), our study includes how performing masculinities can set men against themselves, as well as other men and women. Our key argument is that the enactment of distinctive and idealized hyper-masculine practices, based on, for example, strength, stamina, and technical competence became central to participants' desire to be recognized as credible SAR team members, while simultaneously Othering those constructed as deficient.

5.1 | Propping and shoring masculinities

In SAR, propping and shoring involves the use of a timber support structure (improvized by SAR workers), when tunneling into a collapsed building. We deploy these terms metaphorically to highlight how members' masculinities were supported and propped-up by bodily practices involving physicality, prowess and strength, to prevent their

sense of themselves as competent men from collapsing. Pease (2014) claims that contemporary masculinities are associated with risk taking and danger to life, and *QuakeRescue* members had plentiful opportunities to perform "their manhood and their toughness" (p. 62). However, the actions of those in *QuakeRescue* often appeared steeped in hyper-masculine patterns and practices of competition, rather than engagement:

> ...the way we operate really, the work hard play hard ... they're playing drunken games...but that really bonds you, (Luke).

The first author witnessed masculinized "locker room" practices "back-stage" after training sessions, and at social events where "boisterous male sociability" (Ainsworth et al., 2014) and drinking competitions were the norm, encouraged by senior team members, whose frequent cries of "I'll drink to that" required everyone to "down" their drinks. Juvenile games and competitive tests of physicality formed an integral part of these events, such as stuffing as many cheese puffs in one's mouth as possible and squeezing through the gaps of the legs of a kitchen chair. Using the covert masculine discourse of "what happens in QuakeRescue stays in QuakeRescue" (Fieldnotes: May 9–10, 2014) these embedded homosocial practices marginalized the majority of women and some men, making it difficult for them to fit in to this pre-existing and dominant masculine frame (Pacholok, 2009). Idealized "Alpha male" physicality was not only "culturally intelligible" in this homosocial and heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990, p. 9), but an explicit source of superiority. For example, a Director proudly told visitors that one male volunteer had twice featured as a "topless model" in the annual Firefighters calendar (Fieldnote: Jan 11, 2014).

For some members, displays of physicality were much vaunted, highly prized, and the source of aspiration:

> you don't want to make it sound like you're sort of a cross between David Hasselhoff and Superman, because I'm clearly not, although it all depends who I'm talking to...(Kyle).

Bodily acts were inextricably entangled with heroic fantasies of future rescue attempts and bound-up with gendered constructions that privileged masculine domination (Baigent, 2001) over weaker, passive and submissive (feminine) Others:

> ...if someone was flooded and 'damsel in distress' you could get in that water, with the gear on, and go and save that damsel (Harry)

While "damsel" appears to denote chivalry, it is simultaneously chauvinistic and patronizing. Dependency and unequal power relations are sustained through the elevation of "essentialized" masculine identities over those associated with femininity (Cooper, 1995).

Some members went to great lengths to secure this image of masculinity, demonstrating stoicism by mastering corporeal pain and displaying limited emotions (Pease, 2014, p. 9). For example, Billy described how, despite conducting a prolonged rescue from a collapsed building in searing heat during an earthquake, these disembodied and performative acts "triumphed":

> I was nearly sick, dripping with sweat, probably dehydrated anyway, and super-hot, I thought 'I can't just stop and vomit', the crowd has opened up to let me get through and I'm walking like a zombie, thinking 'just try and look normal' (Billy).

Talk of resilience, control and not displaying weakness was linked to specific masculine accomplishments, which privileged specific matters of the body, while ignoring others. These were reported as especially important in recruitment processes:

> [New recruits must be] physically capable, they've got to have stamina (Reggie).

> … let's find people that can actually swing a sledgehammer not just think about it (Owen).

Stereotypically masculine ideals of demonstrating competence as search-and-rescuers were shored up through equipment, kit, and other material artefacts, which served as props in performative accomplishments:

> …you get to play with some big toys… (Reggie).

This juvenile statement helps to locate *QuakeRescue* members within a particular set of gendered norms. These masculinities were simultaneously associated with both strength and immaturity, constituting grown men as players in a game:

> …the crux of your thesis is going to, be 'all the boys haven't grown up (laughs) (Ryan).

While hyper-masculine performances can clearly be productive in specific contexts, the primacy given to strength as the most prestigious attribute was often experienced as problematic (Young, 1980) for other (male) members, who suffered from a sense of their own inadequate bodies:

> …you've seen the size of the guys there… I was pretty intimidated by everyone and all I really had to offer was adminny type things (Gabriel).

> Some people might do this because they like being 'Action Men'. I'm about as far removed from Action Man as you can get (Theo).

A Butlerian reading would observe how women's bodies, and those men's bodies not resembling "Action Man" were marginalized, falling outside of dominant norms and rendered culturally unintelligible (1990). Relatedly, signs of difference and vulnerability fueled a sense of shame, like this male volunteer who spoke of an unwillingness to display fear while working at height:

> I was up there and I was like…. I can't just jump off the top here… but I was pretty close to tears when I was up there…. and I was also with two very competent people…who are experienced at this climbing malarkey which in one way was great, but in another way, it would have been nice if someone else was shitting it (Jordan).

In the next section, we demonstrate how femininities and masculinities cannot be disentangled, for in (gendered) performances and practices, each depends on the other for their existence.

5.2 | Breaking and breaching: femininities (in) action

During SAR, to gain entry into a collapsed building it may be necessary to make a forced entry through a wall, floor or door, to allow access for search, or casualty extraction. Breaking and breaching involves chipping away at obstacles or using heavy-duty equipment to cut through blockages. We use this metaphor to analyze tensions and challenges experienced by women volunteers, in how they were physically constituted in relational terms with Others (men). Such comparisons have a long history in devaluing women (Shildrick, 2015), where a "lack" of maleness is presumed to be a limitation, associated with weakness, fragility and inferiority. Importantly, we show

how women reproduce, reinforce and perform these stereotypical practices in action, either by accepting particular forms of mundane labour for example, "fit work" (Treanor, 2016), or by attempting to mimic masculine practices.

Women reported how dominant forms of masculinity concerning the body served to emphasize difference through a multitude of normalized practices. For example, their masculine apparel was inappropriate, cumbersome and caused practical difficulties, not least by forcing them to undress to go to the toilet, often in locations with no facilities or privacy.

5.3 | Fragile and embarrassing bodies

In striving to prove themselves as competent rescuers, women members were sometimes just "as active as their male counterparts in … testing themselves" (Baigent, 2001, p. 28) performatively:

> I was disappointed in myself that I couldn't keep up with like the guys in my team and then you find out that they do like these 100k marathons every other week, and you're like 'why put me with them? Put me with weak people!' (Rose).

Judging herself against ultra-marathon runners, this woman acknowledged how achieving (physical) parity with many of her male counterparts was self-defeating. Young (1980, p.146) notes how women tend to underestimate the "capacity" and "potential of their own bodies," but Rose chooses to focus on relational strength and speed as part of a quantifiable discourse related to her limitations and inferiority. Moreover, her request to be put "with weak people," exemplifies what Butler calls a "performative" statement, which once uttered "exercise(s) a binding power" (1990, p. 225). For women, and some men, insecurities and doubt were pervasive effects of masculinities *at work* (Knights, 2015) in *QuakeRescue*:

> Whether I'd actually see myself ever doing it in a deployed situation, I don't know… you know the guys are stronger… so I know physically, there are more capable people than me (Daisy).

Another example in the next vignette evidences the difficulties of disentangling the self, or achieving any distance from gendered (material) power relations:

> This task involves the demolition of an unstable wall, using the disc cutter. This tool has a pull-cord starter that requires a sharp, quick movement to start the motor. Try as I might I can't pull the cord upwards hard and fast enough to get it to start…I begin to get flustered and irritated with myself for not being able to do it. The instructor stops me and asks my "safety buddy" to start it instead, with the advice "don't knacker yourself out before you start." My safety buddy starts it almost immediately… the cutter is passed back to me to start making an incision at shoulder height in the concrete wall. It's a heavy and powerful piece of kit requiring considerable effort to hold it steady at arm's length. Such is its ferocity that my buddy has to support my back with his weight to stop me falling backwards. We take turns cutting but despite several more attempts I fail to start the machine. I'm totally frustrated and feel like the "weakest link" on the team (Field note: 13th September 2015).

Here, we see how the researcher's performative statements constitute her as fragile, inferior, and needing help; to be rescued, even? However, although gendered practices are both performative and fluid, we must avoid dismissing the biological entirely, for women may experience problems and issues at work that are different in comparison to men. Corporeal matters, combined with gendered social mores, surface issues that are related to potentially leaky bodies:

I can hold my pee for a really long time (laughs). I couldn't go in that forest, it was awful. The second weekend they built me a toilet, and I just couldn't, I couldn't bring myself.... Apparently I'm going to have to get over that (laughs) (Rose).

In designing training activities suited to men's bodies, in combination with contemporary social norms concerning what is acceptable for men (peeing in public) as opposed to women (Baigent, 2001), Rose reports feelings of shame relating to "difference." Diverse needs are constructed as inconvenient, and she is quickly invited to "get over it," by correcting and disciplining herself through willpower. The potency of these exhortations signal that if she is to succeed, she must take control of her bodily functions and suppress her own emotions:

I don't think I ever wanted to cry so much in my life, I wish I did cry. (Rose).

While the practice of suppressing emotion in hegemonic masculine arenas is well documented (Pease, 2014), other concerns were never voiced, for fear of exposing the womanly body as even more "problematic," or potentially unreliable:

You'd worry about things like what happens if I've got my period when I'm out doing this and what am I going to do about that, just silly things like that (Jade).

Jade dismisses her concerns as "silly," perhaps because organizational practices suppress any space for their discussion. Instead, women are encouraged to simply "work through" menstruation, "repressing and ignoring their bodies and feelings so they can maintain a façade of the male-body norm at work" (Sayers & Jones, 2015, p. 99). Young (1980) equates these oppressive practices with a shame that "compels women" not only "to conceal their menstrual events," but also any misalignment between practical affordances required, and those provided, in order "to accommodate (their) social and physical needs" (p. 98).

5.4 | Incompetence and fit work

Given the pervasive gendered and hypermasculine norms in action within *QuakeRescue*, it might be easy to overlook how "hyper-femininity" also informed the conditions of possibility that enabled specific performative acts to be reproduced. As Gond et al. (2016) note, devaluing practices associated with masculinities *and* femininities become internalized, perpetuating unequal power relations (that) "co-constitute the realities they ostensibly describe" (p. 448, our emphasis). Here, Jade and Rose demonstrate:

...there's no two ways about it, there are things that you are either just a bit dipsy about because you don't know how these things work, I've not had much contact with two-stroke engines and disc cutters and all the rest of it. And you do or say stupid things and they (the men) laugh (Jade).

I'd never gone camping before... I wouldn't ever sleep outside because I'm scared of bugs and things, and I would never eat rabbit, because I don't really like meat, ...it was just lots of stuff thrown at me that I just had to do (Rose).

These participants participated in their own subjugation by constructing themselves as "dipsy," "scared," and fragile. Since we are always in a process of "becoming" woman/man through performative acts, we can interpret how Jade's own subordination is reflected back to her through the male gaze of laughter, and confirmed through

her own understanding of what it means to be a woman. When frequently repeated, such citations (Butler, 1988) encourage women to self-demote, enacting practices that are a form of gendered labour:

> I bake good cakes (Jessica).

This view, reproduced by other women volunteers, shows how they are easily inserted into "enactments of various kinds (that) constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Gendered labour associated with care and nourishment is both performative and reproductive:

> *…some members that I'd never met, they were instantly "oh you're the cake lady"…I don't really mind. …I think it was my mum's idea, she was just like "why don't you take in some cakes?" (Rose).*

The qualifier "I really don't mind," is an explicitly performative utterance that reinforces and subjugates Rose, as acquiescent, inferior and inadequate. Such performances are potent, primarily because they sustain "divisions of labour that (re)produce segregation effects" (Treanor & Marlow, 2019, p. 12), while simultaneously constituting mundane and routine (domestic) practices as women's work:

> …it's where I can be of best use. You know, if it's the case that I can drive the boat or do the cooking and make sure there's food (Daisy).

What emerges are discursive bodily practices that sediments, naturalizes and reifies the competence of the man in relation to its Other; the essentialized and deficient woman who performs gender according to binary positions as determined by heterosexual relations (Butler, 1990).

> We all definitely had quite specific roles. I'm not the one with a sledgehammer and I'm quite happy with that, you could see different people's strengths, and … so yeah we all kind of **naturally** had roles that we were comfortable in (Jessica).

5.5 | Troubling gender?

Here we consider how the researcher began to incorporate and embody masculine practices during the initial stages of fieldwork. We demonstrate how easily gender stereotypes and ideas of "fit work" (Treanor, 2016) become integrated into self-deprecating narratives, reproducing discourses of both limitation and fragility, especially in relation to the masculine demands of *QuakeRescue*, to "be strong." As the primary researcher noted:

> Although often overlooked, the researcher is not without a body. In my case I am a relatively petite[1], quietly spoken woman, in contrast to the majority of the team, who were, from my perspective, physically imposing Alpha males. A persistent anxiety revolved around the level of my performance despite the fact that I was completing all the training tasks alongside other team members, many of whom were ex-military and current emergency services personnel. I feared that as a 'civilian' I was not considered a serious participant by some of the other trainees (Fieldnote: August 7, 2015).

The researcher drew from essentialist ideas of her body rooted in biological difference (Crofts & Coffey, 2017), constituting herself as Other in light of her deficiencies. Her attachment to strength and mass as qualities traditionally associated with masculine bodies, is indicative of her enacting, and naturalizing, hegemonic masculinity. In

coveting the masculine body, she does not interrogate, but takes for granted, its superiority in relation to her own feminine body and thus performatively constitutes herself as Other. To perform the female gender "appropriately," so as not to pose any threat to masculinities, is to show oneself as "weak, futile, passive, and docile" (de Beauvoir, 1997, p. 402). Her own field notes reveal her inclination to perform oppositional gender practices, by minimizing her difference and "correcting" her lack of masculinity:

> I worked on my perceived shortcomings in an attempt to present myself as a competent and credible SAR trainee. For example, I completed an indoor climbing course to overcome my fear of heights ... worked out regularly at the gym to improve my stamina, strength and fitness. I also attempted to blend in... was careful not to wear any make-up, jewellery or nail varnish. I deliberately didn't admit to being physically fatigued, never asking to slowdown the pace of a 'yomp'[2] or swap sides on the stretcher carries when my arm muscles were burning (Fieldnote: December 2, 2016).

Other studies have shown that women evaluate themselves as weak comparing themselves with ideals of physical strength men set for themselves, and others (Lois, 1999). The men did not contradict the researcher's confessional, but instead suggested more suitable work:

> I was reassured that there were "enough big blokes who can smash holes in things" and that my size would allow me to fit through small holes and into voids when others could not, therefore potentially reducing the time taken to reach a trapped casualty. (Fieldnote: May 9, 2014).

This reassurance not only served (patronizingly) to highlight the researcher's "lack," but was also reminiscent of Billy's advice (see the opening quote of this paper) about occupying a "fantastic co-ordination role" as a place in the team, reinforcing how women were only "fit" for tasks such as "co-ordination," while more challenging physical roles were the territory of men. Young (1980) argues that discourses of fragility are sustained partly through internalization, then externalized by women, who "often do not perceive themselves as capable" (p. 142). However, gender *in action* was by no means totalizing, for some men were concerned about its performative effects and sought to "undo" its hegemony. Such challenge and resistance is crucial, and has potential precisely because performance of masculinity rests on an appreciative audience (Eby, 2007). The erosion of this appreciation is demonstrated by Max who confided that he struggled with Sam's lack of boundaries, "sense of entitlement, privilege, and non-pc-ness," and a style of humour that was both "funny and sometimes offensive or really inappropriate" (Fieldnote: May 10, 2016).

Our findings suggest attempts by some of the men to challenge the hierarchical dominance of hypermasculinity, by drawing on difference and diversity, rather than deference, or deficiency:

> I don't aspire to be super muscly and one of my strengths in this team is that I'm small and wiry because it means I can get into all the little spaces, and actually people like (names of volunteers) really can't get into some spaces (laughs) ... my strength is not being like that, which is really valuable to me (Max).

This is reminiscent of the first author's account of petiteness, and an ability to reach areas accessible only to the more diminutive, but it is merely an inversion, rather than the collapse of, performatively constituted selves as predicated on hierarchical difference. Having dismissed being "super muscly" as a quality, Max replaces it with being "wiry," a potentially "valuable" property that he uses to elevate himself over the Other.

The lack of women on the team was seldom challenged and on the rare occasions that this topic was raised, it was swiftly dismissed as a problem of shortage, as it was "difficult to find women of the right calibre" (Fieldnote: October 22, 2016). Similarly, women's participation in training events was explicitly labeled a hindrance, and a seemingly legitimate matter for complaint by some of the men:

Isaac loudly apologised to Ryan "I'm afraid we've got the girls on our team". Atypically, this view was challenged, as Ryan responded: "The girls are awesome" (Fieldnote: May 9, 2015).

6 | DISCUSSION

This paper has focused on how masculinities and femininities are constituted, reproduced and performed in a male-dominated setting. Based on our empirical study of a (voluntary) SAR organization, we have examined the concepts of masculinity and femininity and 'the logics by which inequalities are sustained' (Crofts & Coffey, 2017, p. 504). We have argued that the particularities of *QuakeRescue*, notably in relation to biologically essentialized gender relations, must be seen in the context of wider and deeply entrenched power relations, and broader gendered inequalities. Historical, traditional, and patriarchal ways of organizing were also found to be relevant, for they created the conditions of possibility for sustaining repeated performative acts of "doing gender" (Butler, 1990). In attempting to articulate their hegemonic masculine practices, participants drew from discourses of both masculinities and femininities, legitimizing inequalities through performative endorsements and embodiments of notional male superiority. The performance of gendered identities is always an act of power, and in contemporary Western society physical strength is often unquestioningly valorized. At *QuakeRescue*, preoccupation with the male body had consequences, not least because of the pressure to display masculinities through competence, physical strength and a lack of fear (Knights, 2015).

As de Beauvoir notes, physical strength (and relatedly, "weakness") have no inherent meaning outside of the specific contexts in which they are used, because "muscular energy cannot be the basis for domination" in any arena where violence is forbidden, rather it is the socio-political and "moral reference points" that come to "define the notion of weakness" (1997, p. 69). As such, only masculine practices related to conquest, control and mastery require the full force of the body to be used in order to benefit from the patriarchal "dividends" (Baigent, 2001, p. 25) that are withheld from the Other. While *QuakeRescue* functioned to save others, their dominant discourses suggest that this can only be achieved through hypermasculine bodies used forcefully, for example, for breaking and breaching. Relatedly, material objects such as (power) tools associated with SAR work were "gendered male" as they required excessive strength to operate, as historically did the scythe, the weight of which disadvantaged previous generations of women. In our case, aesthetic differences were made visible, through inappropriately oversized uniforms that took the male body as default (Gatens, 1996), as well as a lack of appropriate facilities to accommodate women's physical needs (Grip et al., 2016).

In *QuakeRescue*, women often employed masculine discursive practices, and performed 'gender' such that they participated in their own subordination, perpetuating and sustaining the very practices that disadvantaged them (Treanor & Marlow, 2019). Our analysis identified ways in which women volunteers performed actions that were self-deprecating, self-exclusionary, and labeled deficient by other members: "I'm afraid we've got the girls on our team." Butler's heterosexual matrix can be used as a framework to understand meanings around sex and gender, that are bounded by political structures concerning what is acceptable in terms of being a man, that is, not being a woman, and our case is an explicit example of how hegemonic masculinities depend on their elevation over femininities, to maintain artificial gender binaries (Knights, 2015).

It is through seemingly insignificant performative "acts of repetition and recitation (that) gender choices and practices become ritualized, the effects of which make (them) appear natural" (Riach et al., 2014, p. 1681), and difficult to challenge. This may in part explain why the primary researcher saw little resistance or troubling of gendered performative acts in *QuakeRescue* that supported claims of superior (hyper) masculine selves. These ideals were propped up through hegemonic, homosocial and organizational practices of "mateship" (Pease, 2014), incorporating performative actions associated with a type of volunteering characterized by heroism (Wymer, 2011), toughness, resilience (Woodfield, 2016), strength, aggression and emotional discipline (Baigent, 2001).

However pervasive hegemonic and competitive masculinity was in *QuakeRescue*, it was neither totalizing nor completely unchallenged. These cracks and lacuane were most evident in our data section "troubling gender," where subordinate male members articulated a reflexive awareness of how they too were viewed as sub-standard, or culturally unintelligible (Butler, 1990). Indeed, they also acknowledged their own "inferiority" by referencing both the size and shape of their bodies, a lack which they saw as prohibiting them achieving the same recognition, or appreciative audience accorded to others. Nevertheless, rather than attempting to dismantle this form of male dominance (Knights, 2015), their strategy was to both collude with, and resist this dominant ideal, by claiming that smaller bodies were *more* appropriate for the different forms of work involved in rescue missions.

In *QuakeRescue*, the prevailing mechanisms which perpetuated notions of men's superiority largely related to physical strength (e.g., "superhuman" or "iron men"), together with references to performative (Alpha-male) acts of rescuing the Other. These hyper-masculine linguistic construals and demonstrations of physical might and stamina, as well as mental forms of resilience, were articulations of potent gendered power relations (Acker, 1992). Performances of masculinity were both rewarded and underpinned by notions of "naturalized" dominance and cultural intelligibility that advantaged many of the men. This was further evidenced by how other forms of labour consisting of routine and mundane activities such as administration, driving, baking cakes, preparing food, and "bodying" (performing the part of a docile, passive and damaged casualty who needs rescuing), were most often assigned to the "culturally unintelligible" (Butler, 1990). Such performative "occasions" concerning the distribution of labour sustained the feminine Other, who "takes herself up as fragile" (Young, 1980, p. 153) within a deeply ingrained "cultural legacy of subordinate status" (O'Grady, 2004, p. 91).

While it has been argued that utterances and actions are merely "citations" (Butler, 1988) from previous performances, that have been "institutionalized through repetition" (Hodgson, 2005, p. 55), one of their effects is to recursively constitute the Other as one who must be "reduced to a pale image of its own difference" (Knights, 2015, p. 13). Difference in *QuakeRescue* simply meant the degree of deviation from hegemonic masculine norms. Not all performances are the same however, or their outcome guaranteed, for there is always space to act otherwise, and these subversive or "oppositional practices" (Hodgson, 2005) have potential to become transformative, through their own repetition and sedimented practices. *QuakeRescue* was no exception in this regard, and some ways of enacting masculinities and femininities attempted to disrupt and subvert norms. However, these were largely confined to women "doing masculinity," endeavouring to "prove" their own strength and resilience, which only serves to sustain hegemonic masculinities. Perhaps the most promising performative technique is the withdrawal of an appreciative audience, and the reward of recognition, that are deemed so valuable to male volunteers (Eagly, 1987). Although Max articulated his frustration by considering "how to deconstruct the patriarchy," on a less optimistic note he admitted that the limited performative repertoires on offer at *QuakeRescue* provided him with "no fucking idea(s)" for achieving this.

7 | CONCLUSION

Our study shows that in *QuakeRescue* there *is a place for girls on the team*. However, for women, and men who do not measure up (both metaphorically and physically), to prevailing masculine norms, the position they occupy is a subordinate one. Despite years of training, those rendered Other were never likely to be deployed in an active role on international rescue missions. Butler's theory (1998) concerning heterosexual relations, shows specific performative acts are encouraged, which simply reproduce stereotypical (working) practices; those deemed 'fit' for feminine workers (Treanor, 2016). The near-absence of long-term women volunteers in *QuakeRescue* (the first author being one exception), illustrates how "becoming woman" or "doing gender" (Butler, 2006; de Beauvoir, 1997) meant being subordinate to male colleagues. The dominant discursive resources at *QuakeRescue* provided the conditions of possibility for their reproduction, with the women being as complicit as men in this respect, for as Young states "the more a girl assumes her status as feminine, the more she takes herself to be fragile and immobile" (1980, p.153).

Since femininity is often perceived as threatening to, rather than part of what constitutes masculinity, the domination and denigration of the subordinate Other through performative acts is vital.

In recognizing that gender does not pre-exist the discursive citations and material practices which bring into being masculinity or femininity, the only way out of this impasse is to recognize the pressures on us all to perform, and organize in ways that are illusory, for the effects of hegemonic masculinity are not conducive to securing competence, even at the expense of the Other, but rather they can be destructive in pushing us to continually perform ever harder (Knights, 2015). To drive ourselves towards a false promise of proving our own competence once and for all, is not only an impossibility, but one that closes down alternatives for how embodied selves can facilitate a more collective, engaged, and connective community. Such an arena would require all forms of difference to be viewed as non-threatening, where physical strength could be decoupled from its unitarist and dominant position, and viewed as just one quality of the many on offer.

Although *QuakeRescue* purported to be concerned with recruiting "more girls," embracing the idea of different shaped bodies to explore "smaller" spaces, and refining their collective aim of caring for the Other in need of rescue, in practice they encouraged superordinate and hegemonic masculinities. By endorsing women's presence, there was sufficient recognition to ensure that sedimented practices of "doing gender" at *QuakeRescue* remained largely unquestioned. We see these relations as performative, insofar as they are constitutive of a violent competitive hierarchy entrenched within this voluntary organization, which is also reflective of wider societies. These have real effects, for they restrict the potential for enacting masculinities and femininities differently, and more importantly, curtail any transformative possibilities that might ensue as a result.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

ORCID

Sarah-Louise Weller 🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8038-4950
Caroline A Clarke 🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5737-2946

ENDNOTES

[1] Height 5′3″, weight 48 kgs.
[2] Royal Marines slang describing a long-distance march carrying full kit.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Sarah-Louise Weller is a Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management at the University of the West of England. She was awarded a PhD from the University of Bath in 2017. Her research interests center on identity, narratives, gender, volunteers, and ethnographic methods.

Caroline Clarke is a Senior Lecturer in Organization Studies at the Open University Business School. She has a variety of research interests located within Organization Studies, with a particular emphasis on identity, anxiety, insecurity, gender, and power. Caroline's research includes a focus on academics in business schools, first-opinion veterinary surgeons, and more recently, post humanism and critical animal studies. Her most recent work is around zoonotic disease and the organization of anthropocentricism, and why pandemics will not be eradicated unless we change our practices.

Andrew D. Brown is Professor of Organization Studies at the University of Bath. He has previously held faculty positions at the universities of Manchester, Nottingham, Cambridge and Warwick. His primary research interests center on issues of identity, especially as they relate to sense-making, narrative, and power. His work has been published in journals including Academy of Management Review, Organization Studies, Journal of Management Studies, and Human Relations. He currently serves on the editorial boards of Organization Studies, Journal of Management Studies, and Organization, and he is an Associate Editor for Human Relations.