

# PSIA



# AASI

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## WOMEN BELONG ON THE MOUNTAIN INVESTING IN WOMEN IN THE SNOWSPORTS INDUSTRY



WOMEN'S INITIATIVE TASK FORCE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT 2020

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## ABOUT THE SURVEY

In January 2020, PSIA-AASI partnered with Colorado-based research firm RRC Associates to send a 23-question survey to the association's 9,200+ female members. The first comprehensive survey specifically designed to examine women's experiences within PSIA-AASI and the greater snowsports industry, it received a 45% response rate and, in addition to specific data points, included 5,372 open comments from respondents.

Upon assessing the survey data and conducting a series of in-person focus groups to gather more input, PSIA-AASI's Women's Initiative Task Force (WIT) identified six key findings that provide an opportunity to inform and share recommendations with stakeholders within and outside the association. This report presents those key findings.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

### **PSIA-AASI Women's Initiative Task Force**

What, why, who ..... 4

### **Purpose of the Survey and Key Findings**

Questions raised and insights gained from data ..... 5-7

### **Description of Stakeholders**

Groups that can influence change ..... 8

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

### **The Big Picture: Culture and Belonging**

Overview of systemic issues affecting underrepresentation of women in our organization ..... 9

### **The Pipeline**

Understanding the pathway to high levels of certification and beyond..... 10-12

### **Professional Development: Participation (Parts 1 & 2), Certification, and Traits of Trainers**

The challenges to professional growth..... 13-17

### **Mentorship**

The value of mentorship in supporting personal and professional growth..... 18-19

### **Gear Factors**

Gear limitations and the roadblocks to skill development..... 20-21

### **Implicit Bias**

Awareness of the issues that hinder success at high levels ..... 22-24

## CONCLUSION

### **Turning Commitment into Action**

Using data to drive results ..... 25-26

### **The Path to Equality**

Being aware and accountable..... 27

### **Links to Survey Data**

RRC Associates data ..... 28

### **Report Resources**

Sources of more information..... 29



PSIA-AASI established the Women's Initiative Task Force (WIT) in 2018 to advise the association's operational leaders on the needs of women in the organization, provide a voice, and advocate on their behalf. Baseline data collected over the years indicates that women traditionally make up only 30% of the total PSIA-AASI membership. Likewise, female members are underrepresented in both leadership and higher levels of certification. The WIT designed a survey to collect current data that would inform and guide its mission to increase the number of women in leadership roles throughout PSIA-AASI.

**Members of the Women's Initiative Task Force are:**

Jeffra Clough (chair) • Heidi Ettlinger • Karen Haringa • Carol Levine  
Maggie Loring • Leigh Pierini • Kirstie Rosenfield

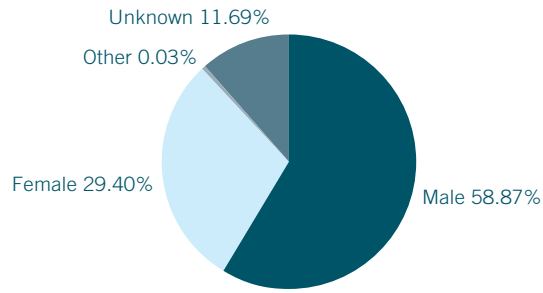


It's clear to most of us in the snowsports industry that the ratio of men to women has stayed the same for a very long time. Note that, in PSIA-AASI, men make up 62% of the current membership while women consist of about 30%. (Not all members choose to indicate a binary gender in their member profile, hence a total less than 100%.) Similarly, the percentage of women who achieve certification beyond Level I dramatically declines relative to men (see page 6).

**After reviewing baseline data, the WIT wanted to learn:**

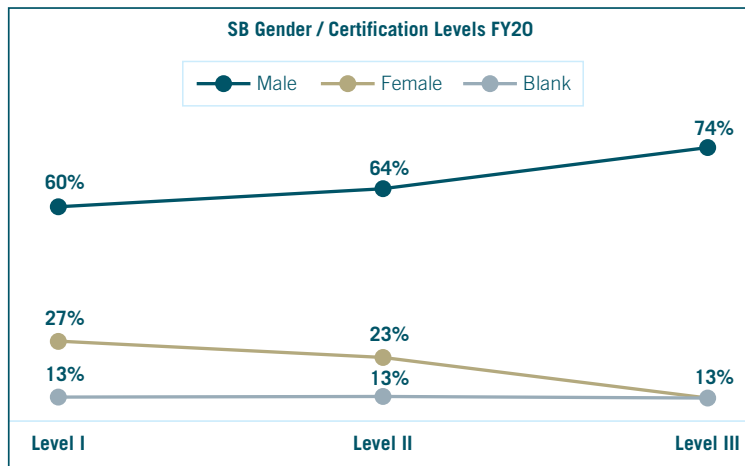
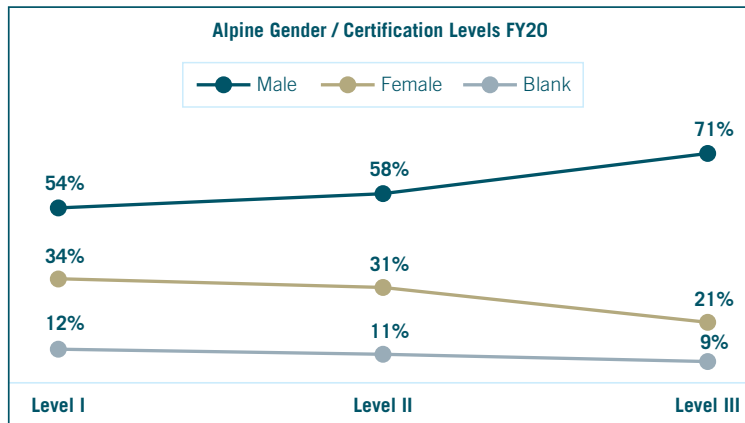
- What factors affect women's motivation to stay in the snowsports industry?
- What challenges do women face with professional development?
- What factors determine women's participation in training?
- Do women use mentors or find them helpful?





**PSIA Membership by Gender FY20 – All Members**

Please note that while the “All Members” total includes members whose primary discipline may be cross country, telemark, or adaptive, for simplicity’s sake the charts below narrow the focus to PSIA-AASI’s two main discipline groups by member total: alpine and snowboard.





Key areas were established based upon responses to each of the 23 survey questions, along with the associated open comments. These areas make up the **Six Key Findings**.

- 1) **The Big Picture - Culture and Belonging**
- 2) **The Pipeline**
- 3) **Professional Development: Participation (Parts 1 & 2), Certification, Traits of Trainers**
- 4) **Mentorship**
- 5) **Gear Factors**
- 6) **Implicit Bias**

While the content of this report is important for all readers, specific stakeholders are identified in order to customize recommendations for how each can help enhance and create professional pathways for women. These groups include:

- **National Leadership**, which oversees programming, partnerships, training, and policies nation-wide, and showcases the highest levels of achievement by providing inspiring education and opportunities.
- **Divisional Leadership**, which connects directly with membership through planning events and encourages professional development through training clinics, exams, and hiring clinics.
- **Member Schools**, which impact members through recruitment, professional development, and training.
- **Industry Partners**, who have significant influence on our membership on an overarching support and inclusion level as well as on a more technical level, particularly regarding the development of gear.





In 2020, belonging is not a given. Developing a culture that addresses women's needs will help facilitate growth in the representation of women at all levels of our organization. Fifty years of cultural fights for gender equality have not yet brought equity in our sport.

Some 85% of the women responding to the survey rated the opportunity for skill improvement as their "why" for staying engaged, yet 28% told us they lacked access to training, and 50% feel that the barriers of cost and travel are too high to overcome.

To facilitate belonging, it is essential for women to occupy more of the spaces at the top of the skill pool. Creating pathways toward more Level IIIs, more trainers, and more managers will inspire and shape the future.



"Development of community is extremely important to me. Having that sense of belonging."

"The Women's Initiative Task Force has a worthy goal... It starts with individual ski areas hiring more women, encouraging women, and making women feel welcome in the ski industry."

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a pipeline as, “A course of individual advancement or development, especially to fill organizational needs.” In examining survey results with this in mind, the WIT found that many women feel PSIA-AASI falls short as a pipeline for women’s professional development.

**OVERALL FACTORS THAT POSITIVELY EFFECT MOTIVATIONS TO STAY**

Opportunities for skill improvement	85%
Having a positive impact on my students	83%
Benefits (ski passes, discounts, gear, etc.)	73%
Social connections with other instructors	71%
Having a say in the types of lessons that I teach	63%

**What We’ve Learned:**

Survey comments convey that, despite their love for snowsports and teaching, many women encounter motivational roadblocks inhibiting their progress from good to great. Women often choose a more profitable path before achieving the highest levels of certification. In short, women leave before they achieve. Individual perspectives and experiences, of course, do differ. Survey responses indicate that whereas some women feel supported, others do not. (See page 11 for survey response details.)





## WHY WOMEN STAY

- Success fostered by encouragement and inclusion.
- Access to resources and direction for personal development.
- Job benefits extended to families to make work more affordable.
- Meaningful relationships with encouraging role models.
- Opportunities to teach a variety of lesson types and levels.
- Support from the school and resort for training.

## WHY WOMEN LEAVE

- Loss of confidence due to cultural bias and lack of recognition.
- Perceived or real exclusion from resources and opportunities.
- Lack of family benefits make costs prohibitive.
- Lack of connection and encouragement from peers and managers.
- Feeling limited to providing children or beginner lessons due to gender, age, or experience.
- Lack of school/resort support for cost of professional growth and earning power.

**STAKEHOLDER PIPELINE RECOMMENDATIONS**

NATIONAL	DIVISIONS
Increase women-specific events; target those seeking the highest levels of snowsports performance and influential leadership opportunities.	Bring inspirational women to headline divisional events.
Provide more resources on how to host women’s clinics.	Honor women pioneers; feature them at events.
Develop training in implicit gender bias for examiners and trainers.	Train examiners and clinicians to support the specific needs of women.
Develop educational resources about the importance of appropriate gear for women.	Provide options for childcare and/or lessons at events.
Feature more photos of women in marketing and promotional materials and increase promotions and scholarships.	Provide scholarships for those with promise and financial need; nominated by trainers and/or directors.

SCHOOLS	INDUSTRY
Provide more online and virtual training.	Increase research and development for women-specific products that support the needs of all skill levels.
Offer mentoring programs and training.	Support/hire more women as gear reps, developers, etc.
Create scholarships and financial support for women.	Increase representation of diversity (women, minorities, etc.) in ads and promotional materials.
Invite/train/encourage women to seek leadership roles.	Provide education about why women’s gear is important and needs to be available for all skill levels.
Hire inspiring trainers to provide support and variety since the number of women trainers tends to be limited.	Make it cool to be on women-specific gear.



Survey results related to professional development led us to further examine factors that affect participation and factors that affect professional growth.

## Participation (Part 1)

Through specific survey questions, women rated their main challenges of participating in professional events in terms of: Cost, Travel, Family, Location, Time, Schedule

### MAIN CHALLENGES OF PARTICIPATION

Cost of participating in professional development opportunities	53%
Travel required to attend professional development opportunities	50%
Balancing attendance with other employment	43%
Finding time for professional development	37%
Balancing attendance with family commitments	22%
Maintaining / improving my fitness	14%



#### Travel & Location

“I’m a single mom with 2 boys. Traveling 2 hours each way means I leave them alone and trust them to get to and from schools.”

#### Schedule

“Always being booked with limited time to free ski and develop.”

“Need more trainings on weekends and not just weekdays.”

#### Cost

“I’m a new instructor. Starting pay is pretty low. I received a scholarship to pay for some of my training, but if I had to pay for them all myself it would literally take months to just pay off the cost of the training for each cert in terms of the pay increase.”

## Participation (Part 2)

In addition to rating obvious challenges, there were a significant number of open comments describing how other barriers impact professional growth.

### Communication/Organization

“Lack of communication with the division. Lack of organization and drive. Events get canceled constantly due to lack of ‘interest’.”

### Limited Topics

“Lack of interesting clinics. More indoor clinics, please.”

“Lack of relevant information given at the clinics. If I make the effort to travel to a clinic, I want real and useful information, not just the attitude that I’m there only for the education credit.”

### Bias/Lack of Encouragement

“As I have gotten older... the environment often feels unwelcoming and overwhelming.”

“I feel marginalized as a female snowboarder.”

“Some of the divisional leaders... show bias toward the women in the group.”

“Lack of motivation to deal.”

“Lack of diversity and motivation from the top: Why should I keep doing this? Snowboarders are also treated like second-class citizens. Alpine rules the world over here and the division treats us like that.”



Certification is a key component of PSIA-AASI’s system for professional development, but survey data and comments indicate many women feel they are not on a level playing field with male colleagues.

## Pathway to Certification

Women experience many challenges in terms of professional growth and development, with survey respondents calling out such things as:

- Inconsistency between divisions that impacts the clarity of communication.
- Frustration that the standards and/or divisional requirements change frequently -- which impacts preparation and success.
- Even when certification requirements are clearly spelled out, some women still felt that the actual process of the exam was not clear, or that it was not clear why they did not pass.
- Issues with subjectivity and lack of feedback from examiners. Some comments revealed concerns about gender bias; expressing the belief that it is harder for women to pass and that the standards are designed for male bodies and strength.
- Some divisions have more of a problem than others (evident in comments as well as in data scores).
- Divisions lack options beyond Level III.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION AND CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL	DIVISIONS	SCHOOLS
Provide access to bias training through the PSIA-AASI Learning Management System (eLearning courses).	Provide clear, concise, and consistent communication regarding the pathway to certification, events, and requirements.	Identify women with potential and offer financial support and mentorships.
Offer digital access to training on women-specific needs (physical and psychological).	Identify and support women with leadership potential and offer support both financially and through mentorships.	Track participation and achievements of women.
Develop partnerships with other educational and leadership organizations that would allow further professional development opportunities for members.	Improve communication/outreach so women at smaller schools have better access to training.	Look for – and address – inequity and find ways to support improvement.
	Provide more online and off-season events. Perhaps these can be led by a more diverse group.	Create goals and provide incentives for trainers who actively help achieve these goals.
		Provide childcare and/or children’s lessons for participants.

Trainers at all levels play a critical role in connecting members with the organization. In addition, the trainer has a tremendous impact on the growth of each member through face-to-face interactions. In the hundreds of comments shared about trainers, there were common themes of make-or-break experiences targeting skill development, motivation, and self-esteem. Survey data also offered insight into how women rank the most positive and negative traits of trainers with whom they've worked.

### **POSITIVE TRAITS**

Relevant and specific feedback	74%
Encouragement; positive attention	64%
Knowledge of sport and skills required	62%
Fun	58%
Communication style	54%
Teaching style	52%

### **NEGATIVE TRAITS**

Lack of actionable feedback	46%
Lack of connection	38%
Lack of empathy	33%
Inconsistent evaluation of students	29%
Teaching style	29%





### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAITS OF TRAINERS

NATIONAL	DIVISIONS	SCHOOLS
Provide access to bias training through the PSIA-AASI Learning Management System (eLearning courses).	Hold trainers accountable to provide specific, relevant, actionable feedback.	Bring inspirational women to lead training at individual schools.
Continue to focus on the importance of people skills and improvement/development of these skills.	Offer women-specific events at the divisional level and bring in inspirational women. Provide for all levels and experience.	Provide more teaching skills and people skills training. Ensure these skills are valued as much as to technical training.
Offer more e-learning and other resources on developing people skills and leadership and management skills.	Offer trainers and examiners in-depth training on people skills.	Track participation and achievements of women. Look for inequity and find ways to support improvement. Create goals and provide incentives for trainers who help achieve these goals.

“Genuinely listening to what we need.”

“The ego of a trainer is either a win or a miss!”

“Flexibility to adapt to students’ desires without their ego running the event.”



In any professional setting, mentors provide valuable guidance to those they “take under their wing.” In assessing survey results, the WIT found that women want to have mentors yet struggle to find them.

- 41% of women in the survey reported they do not have a mentor and want one.
- An overwhelming number of comments from the survey specifically requested a mentorship program.

BENEFITS DERIVED FROM MENTORS	OVERALL RANKING
Expertise	85%
Feedback	80%
General support	74%
Inspiration, goals, motivation	70%

Based on a report from [BuiltIn.com](https://www.builtin.com), strengthening mentoring programs improves communication, encourages development, enhances retention, and ensures resiliency. Specifically,

- In order to achieve upper-level positions, it is highly beneficial for individuals to have a mentor supporting them throughout their career. Companies that have mentorship programs are found to boost promotion and retention rates for women by 15 to 38%.
- 67% of women view mentorship as a highly important factor contributing to their career advancement, yet only 10% of women actually have a mentor during their career.
- Women, however, aren’t exactly helping younger generations progress – only 54% of women consider being a mentor. The time commitment alone dissuades 3 out of 4 women from mentoring a younger colleague. The second most common reason women don’t mentor is because they don’t believe they have subject-matter expertise. But at the same time, 71% of women say they would become a formal mentor if someone asked them.

**Note:** The above statistics are drawn from a supporting resource from BuiltIn.com, titled “What Is Gender Bias in the Workplace”? You can read it at [tiny.cc/GenderBiasAtWork](https://tiny.cc/GenderBiasAtWork). These stats are not part of the PSIA-AASI Women’s Survey Report findings.

**STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS ON MENTORSHIP**

NATIONAL	DIVISIONS	SCHOOLS
Develop a formal mentorship program.	Provide information about mentoring at exams and events.	Promote mentorship at all levels of staff.
Develop a usable template for a mentorship program toolbox.	Encourage schools to use mentorship; provide templates, training, and outreach for small schools.	Encourage larger schools to work with smaller schools to provide mentorship opportunities.
Disseminate mentorship survey information to all task forces.	Develop a mentor training/support program.	Invest in and/or develop a web-based mentorship program.
	Reach out to those who fail exams. Provide information and resources on finding a mentor.	
	Develop and provide training on differences between mentor skills and coaching skills.	



“It would be great if a mentor community were developed.”

“Finding the right mentor seems based on luck.”

“We need a mentoring system when instructors fail certification.”



Women find it difficult and costly to acquire gear tailored to gender and performance and noted a lack of gear-specific training.

Responses to survey questions covering gear (hard and soft goods) encompassed everything from functionality to the impact it had on proficiency, self-esteem, and professional success.

Some 65.5% of the women strongly agreed that access to good gear is important to success in teaching snowsports.

### **Gear Challenges:**

- 62% said that financial constraints were the biggest issue
- 54% reported a lack of training/knowledge in their gear selection
- 39% commented that there were no bootfitters or knowledgeable experts at their area
- 37% commented that gear was not available in their size

### RECOMMENDATIONS ON GEAR

NATIONAL	DIVISIONS
Work with Official Suppliers to provide access to pro forms for more women-specific gear.	Provide the opportunity for women-specific equipment demos at women’s events.
Let sponsors know how often women are requested in lessons. If suppliers want their product on the hill in front of the general public, get it to the female instructors.	Encourage suppliers to bring women-specific and performance gear in women’s sizes.
Encourage Official Suppliers to develop more high-performance gear for women, and in smaller sizes.	Add courses specifically for women on gear selection and how to demo equipment.
	Add both indoor and outdoor courses on stance, alignment, and boot fitting.

SCHOOLS	INDUSTRY
Encourage mentors who can help with gear selection.	Understand that women want equipment that performs well first; aesthetics are great too, but that’s secondary.
Consider financial support/scholarships for equipment and professional fitting.	Make sure that equipment reps and shop techs are trained to give guidance regarding women-specific gear that will allow them to be the best they can be.
Plan early-season demo days to provide guidance on equipment selection.	Address implicit bias in the industry. Women should be able to buy equipment from a knowledgeable rep who respects them and doesn’t make assumptions based on gender.
Ask suppliers to bring women-specific gear and, especially, smaller sizes in high-performance gear.	

“Lack of equipment on the market in my size (very small) related to my skiing performance (very high). Pants are too big; they don’t make performance boots in a 22.5; skis I would rock as an expert skier aren’t manufactured short enough.”

“It makes me sad that even now, as a Level III-certified coach with 28 years of teaching experience, bootfitters and shop guys will talk to my husband, literally right over my head, rather than ask me what I need. And, I once rented skis while out West after an airline lost mine and had to argue with the rental guy about whether the ski I asked for was appropriate for a woman. INSANE!!”

Implicit bias occurs when one individual unconsciously attributes certain attitudes and stereotypes to another person or group of people. These ascribed behaviors affect how the individual understands and engages with others.

## Implicit Bias – Part 1

A December 2020 report on “Women in the Workplace” – from management consulting company McKinsey & Company – summarized the effects of implicit bias with the following observations:

- 42% of women experience gender discrimination at work.
- Half of men believe women are well represented at their company, despite the fact that 90% of senior leaders are men.
- Men view unconscious bias as the number one barrier women face in their careers.
- 54% of women with a young child don’t work because they need to care for their child.
- 53% of stay-at-home moms say having flexible working hours is an important factor in accepting a job opportunity.



### Implicit Bias – Part 2

Of the 5,372 open comments across every section of the survey (National/Divisional Training, Educational Events, Certification Pathway, Gear, Professional Development, Mentorship) there were specific, undeniable descriptions of implicit bias. One respondent stated, “Women frequently reported that they must work harder and prove themselves more than men to get the same recognition. This is especially true within the lead roles, including other invisible barriers to inclusion and comfort that are holding women back, rather than overt sexism alone.”

“I have noticed several times this year that male instructors and supervisors I did not know would automatically assume I have a lower skill level/skiing proficiency and offer tips. Did not see this happen with other men.”

“Men are seen as having more potential than women, so they are given more opportunities. It’s not a conscious thing. Those doling out certification pins and leading training or education staff tryout opportunities don’t consciously desire to give men an advantage. Instead, it’s an unconscious reaction to a lifetime of being around a uniform culture and seeing mostly men in leadership roles, in examiner positions and staff trainer coats.”

“I think there’s a bias toward part-timers, female riders, and non-white riders. At times, it’s perceived that you’re not as good as everyone else. Especially when ‘you’re only a Level I.’”

These observations support the position that many major avenues to women’s success in the association and snowsports industry are strongly impacted by implicit bias. In addition, the survey results included several comments from women who felt they had been overlooked, held back, or held in low regard by other women. (In a January 2020 article in *Forbes*, titled “Why Women Don’t Always Support Other Women,” author and business school professor Dr. Shawn Andrews offers insight on why this occurs. You can read the article at [tiny.cc/SupportOfWomen](https://tiny.cc/SupportOfWomen).)

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON IMPLICIT BIAS

### FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Provide opportunities for women to share experiences to build empowerment and coping strategies for persistence.

Reach out to encourage women.  
Be a mentor. Share your story.

Enlist the broader association (not just women) to help change the culture via training, awareness, and tracking participation.

Divisions and schools must engage in management training that helps identify and change practices that promote bias.

Train on people skills. Train to become aware of unconscious bias.





In assessing and interpreting the trove of data and insights that the women’s survey and focus groups provided, one comment stood out for how well it captured the importance of providing a voice for women and advocating on their behalf:

“I am so glad this task force is collecting data on women in snowsports! There is a very noticeable gap of female instructors, many [fewer] leaders. I began working at a new mountain this year, and at the new-hire orientation there were 5 women out of a room of 40 new instructors. It was so disheartening. We need to **find a way for women to support women through networks, mentorship, and radical leadership.**

We can’t pat ourselves on the back each time there is a new female CEO in the industry, **we need systemic change** in policy, culture, and vision that meets women where they are at. We need **flexible work schedules**, room to fail, and a **liveable income**. Due to systemic oppression, women and minorities are much less likely to be able to afford [to stay] given the **cost of gear and transportation**. Further, professional women have the added anxiety of working in a physical role through **pregnancy and arranging childcare** while at alpine worksites. There is a way, though, and I believe collecting data is an excellent start. Thank you!”





## Conclusion: Turning Commitment into Action

What the Women's Initiative Task Force has learned from the survey is that, in order to really BELONG, women seek action on these key findings:

- **The Big Picture: Culture & Belonging**
  - **Acceptance and celebration** of their differences, both physical and psychological.
- **The Pipeline**
  - **Opportunities** that match their **aspirations**.
  - **Pathways to contribute** in their areas of strength and interest, including confirmation that these **contributions are valued**.
- **Professional Development**
  - **Training that offers more flexibility** for juggling family and work-related responsibilities.
- **Traits of Trainers**
  - **Applicable and actionable feedback** that helps women learn and grow.
- **Mentorship**
  - More **role models** – more women – in inspirational places.
  - Improved **mentorship**.
- **Gear Factors**
  - Better education, training, and access to **gear** that helps women achieve their goals.
- **Implicit Bias**
  - Additional support to **balance inequities**.

While it's no secret that women are underrepresented within the membership totals, higher certification levels, and leadership positions within PSIA-AASI, there is a path to equity and equality.

# MESSAGE TO MEMBERS

With awareness comes accountability. Even if all the recommendations are acted upon, the membership has to engage in order for change to occur.

All members can help to create more and better pathways for women by recognizing implicit bias and addressing it within their own snowsports schools. Women and men can become mentors, push for more child/family-friendly options, and launch or get behind efforts to help women choose careers within the industry. We can all play a role in encouraging this much-needed change.

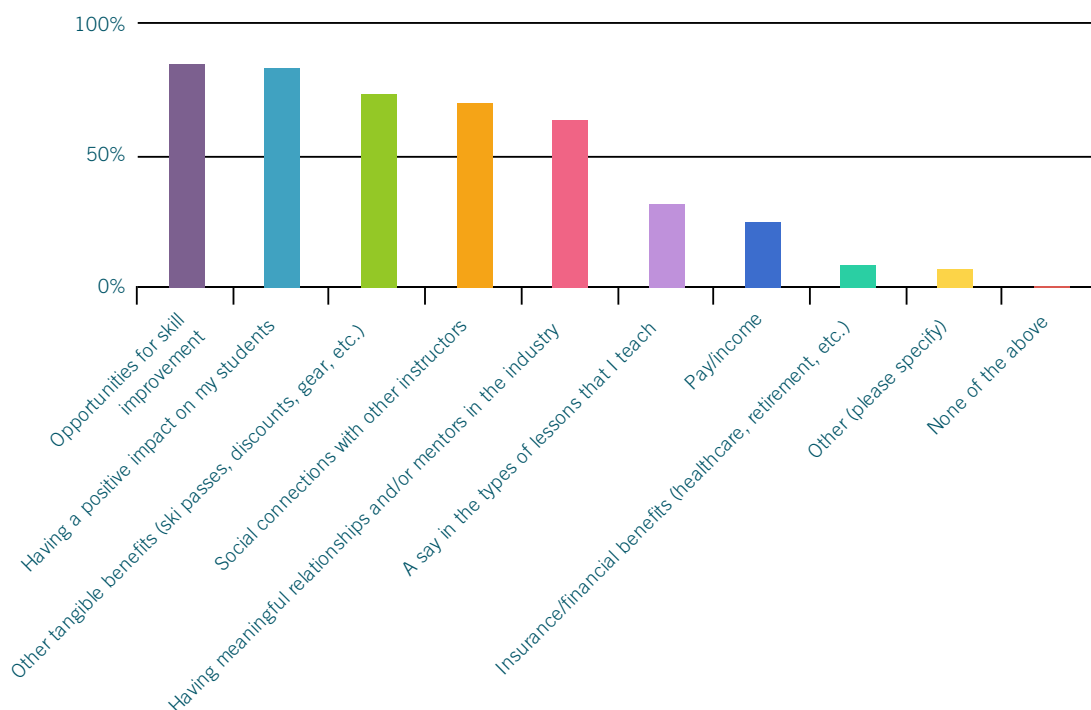
## *The Women on Top of the Mountain Didn't Fall There*

*—edited from Vince Lombardi*



## PSIA-AASI WOMEN'S INITIATIVE TASKFORCE SURVEY

What factors positively affect your motivation and desire to stay in the snowsports industry?  
(Select all that apply)



If you'd like to see specific data collected by RRC Associates, please use the following links.

Overall WIT Survey Results: Visit [tiny.cc/WITSurveyOverall](https://tiny.cc/WITSurveyOverall)

WIT Survey Results by Age: Visit [tiny.cc/WITSurveyAge](https://tiny.cc/WITSurveyAge)

WIT Survey Results by Division: Visit [tiny.cc/WITSurveyDivision](https://tiny.cc/WITSurveyDivision)

WIT Survey Results by Work Status/Leadership Interest: Visit [tiny.cc/WITSurveyInterest](https://tiny.cc/WITSurveyInterest)



If you want a deeper dive into resources the Women’s Initiative Task Force used to create this report, please read the following:

Andrews, Shawna. January 2020. “Why Women Don’t Always Support Other Women.” Forbes. Access at [tiny.cc/SupportOfWomen](https://tiny.cc/SupportOfWomen)

McKinsey & Company. 2020. “Women in the Workplace 2020.” Access at [tiny.cc/WomenInWorkplace](https://tiny.cc/WomenInWorkplace)

Reiners, Bailey. October 2019; updated January 2021. “What Is Gender Bias in the Workplace?” BuiltIn.com. Access at [tiny.cc/GenderBiasAtWork](https://tiny.cc/GenderBiasAtWork)

Tate, Derek. July 2020. “Why Do So Few Women Become Educators and Examiners of Snowsport Instructors?” Parallel Dreams Coaching Academy, United Kingdom. Access at [tiny.cc/WhyNotExaminers](https://tiny.cc/WhyNotExaminers)