**“The whole trip I basically had to hide”: A Goffmanian analysis of Erin Parisi and negotiating the gendered mountaineering space**

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The aim of this chapter is to critically analyse Erin Parisi’s experiences as she attempts to become the first transgender person to summit the seven highest mountains on each continent through her ground-breaking TranSending7 project. Multiple, semi-structured Zoom interviews were conducted with Erin, exploring topic areas such as her experiences of mountaineering both before and after her transition, the role of gender when climbing, alongside the development of the TranSending7 project and changing the trans\* narrative. All interview transcripts were subject to a *reflexive* thematic analysis process and were interpreted through a Goffmanian framework, drawing upon the concepts of impression management, stigma, and gender displays. Two themes were developed: (1) Going stealth: Defensive practices and maintaining invisibility; and (2) Becoming a speaker: The gendered mountaineering space. The findings suggest that Erin engaged in performances when negotiating her identity within mountaineering spaces across the globe. Indeed, Erin’s performances revolved around managing aspects of her biography which could potentially ‘spoil’ her identity in various social situations, often resulting in a need to remain stealth1 to conceal her trans\* status. With mountaineering being presented as a gendered space plagued with hegemonic masculinity, Erin’s experiences highlight how both herself and others performed gender displays to manage the perceptions of audience members within social situations. However, Erin’s story is one of progression, as she moved to a position of voluntary disclosure, rising above the need to hide and remain stealth, unintentionally becoming a role model for other trans\* individuals. It is hoped this chapter will further highlight the challenges and issues associated with the gendered mountaineering space, with Erin’s example encouraging individuals to critically reflect upon their experiences of negotiating this landscape.

**Introduction: Who is Erin Parisi?**

Erin Parisi has been involved in outdoor and adventurous sports (e.g., climbing, hiking, snowsports, mountain biking) for most of her adult life and is attempting to become the first trans\* person to ascend the Seven Summits (see https://www.transending7.org/). To date, Erin has climbed: Elbrus (Europe); Kosciuszko (mainland Australia); Aconcagua (South America); Kilimanjaro (Africa); and Vinson Massif (Antarctica). She intends to complete the final two summits, Denali (North America) and Everest (Asia), over the next few years. Erin presents herself as having always been in ‘transition’ but commenced her physical and medical transition at 38 years old (she is now in her mid-40s). Erin uses the pronouns she/her/hers.

**Outdoor and adventurous sports: A gendered space?**

Within outdoor spaces, participation in adventure activities is shaped by masculine ideals (Frohlick, 2005), exhibiting a range of gender inequalities which represent strong ideals of hegemonic masculinity (Warren, 2016). Research indicates additional risks exist for women and girls around misogyny and sexual harassment when participating in such activities (Davies et al., 2019). Mountain climbing has long been dominated by men due to persisting stereotypes of femininity as weakness, which challenges the proposed characteristics required to succeed in outdoor sports (Davis, 2007). Furthermore, Wigglesworth (2021) highlights the exclusive nature of many climbing routes which often have misogynistic, racist, homophobic, transphobic or ableist names.

Activities such as mountaineering are traditionally positioned as gendered pursuits, with women (as both leaders and participants) needing to work hard to ‘earn the right to climb’ within this social context (Kennedy & Russell, 2021; Rogers & Rose, 2019; Russell et al., 2022; Tulle, 2022; Warren, 2016). Indeed, research by Bell et al. (2018) has demonstrated how outdoor spaces, such as within mountaineering, are gendered through normalised expectations regarding perceived competency, strength, safety, and knowledge of equipment. Nonetheless, while we are beginning to understand some of the issues that women face in accessing and participating in outdoor activities, such as mountaineering, little is known about how those with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and sexually and gender diverse (LGBTQ+) identities come to experience these spaces, and the challenges they must negotiate within this ‘troubling terrain’ (Bell et al., 2018).

**Trans\* experiences in mountaineering and outdoor adventure**

The term trans\* has been adopted within this chapter as a way of representing the broad range of experiences and the diversity of gender identities within this community (Tompkins, 2014). The asterisk opens the term up to a wider range of meanings and is intentionally ambiguous to reflect this multiplicity (Catalano, 2015). While we focus on Erin’s story and acknowledge that her experiences are situated within the gender binary, the term trans\* encompasses any individual who identifies differently to the sex assigned at birth and the asterisk could be viewed as a “textual disruption”, encouraging readers to reflect upon this diversity (Nicolazzo, 2021, p. 532). We also wanted to avoid often-conflated experiences of trans\* individuals within broader lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) communities (Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2011), by focusing solely on Erin’s story.

Trans\* identities challenge the ‘naturalness’ of the gender binary and disrupt the notion of a fixed and innate gender identity (McPhail, 2004). Therefore, many of the gendered practices and assumptions that are embedded within outdoor and adventure settings can also impact on the experiences of those who identify within the trans\* umbrella. Mitten (2012) argues that both trans\* identifying and gender non-conforming young people would benefit from attending mainstream camps, as the camps themselves are inclusive spaces and provide opportunities to explore identity and the outdoor space safely. While the argument is powerful and hopeful for inclusion of gender and sexual diversity within a wider community as a key aspect of social justice forms of education, others report greater challenges. Warren et al. (2018) highlight barriers to transgender and gender variant outdoor leaders’ participation due to sleeping and bathroom arrangements that typically align with heteronormative assumptions that reinforce the gender binary. Trans\* participants’ can be forced to avoid or carefully navigate these settings to reduce the risk of gender expression harassment. While those with gender-conforming expressions may be able to go stealth and hide their trans\* status in order to gain access to these spaces, the same cannot be said of non-conforming expressions, highlighting an additional tension for these individuals. Accounts from transgender and non-binary climbers demonstrate additional hostilities faced by this group; constant misgendering, concerns over being outed in unsafe spaces, and a lack of inclusive opportunities to compete (Ellison, 2019; Schneider, 2020). Kennedy and Russell (2021) suggest that a disruption of hegemonic masculinity within outdoor education is required to create “conditions for more diverse gender performances” (p. 1). While the focus in Kennedy and Russell’s work is outdoor education, we would argue that this context is reflective of mountaineering and outdoor adventure more broadly.

Consequently, as part of a wider research project (see Russell et al., 2022), this chapter critically analyses Erin Parisi’s experiences of the gendered mountaineering space, interpreting her story using Erving Goffman’s (1959, 1963, 1979) concepts of impression management, stigma, and gender displays. While existing research has drawn upon Goffmanian concepts to interpret trans\* experiences within diverse social contexts (e.g., Johnston, 2016; Wight, 2011), limited scholarly work has applied this theoretical lens to explore trans\* identities within mountaineering and outdoor spaces. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully delve into Goffman’s dramaturgical approach to understanding social life, his concepts focus on a theatrical-based analogy, explaining how stigmatised individuals engage in staged performances to manage the impressions of others within social situations (the audience). Thus, the utility of a Goffmanian approach lays with its ability to understand how and why individuals (e.g., Erin) might engage in both gender displays and transgender performativity (Wight, 2011), to manage the impressions of others within outdoor spaces (e.g., mountaineering).

**Methodology**

***Procedure and data collection***

Following a series of email exchanges and online meetings discussing the logistics of the collaboration, Erin agreed to take part in the research, with the broad aim of the project focusing on presenting Erin’s experiences, perceptions, and journey to date, to help challenge and change the trans\* narrative (see Russell et al., 2022).

After obtaining institutional ethical approval, over a one-month period three semi-structured interviews using the videoconferencing system Zoom were conducted by the second author, lasting in total 265 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded via Zoom, before being transcribed verbatim. While Zoom interviews were a necessity due to the geographical distance between Erin and the research team, the online nature offered several benefits. For example, ease and flexibility of scheduling, greater participant control, ease of data capture, in addition to providing a more comfortable and empowering experience for Erin (see Archibald et al., 2019; Oliffe et al., 2021). At the end of the third and final interview, Erin began to touch upon the notion of rapport and trust which had been developed throughout the interview process.

I think in those few calls we have built some rapport and, you know, I've never granted anyone the amount of time that you've gotten... again I trust you... I hope it comes out as a helpful thing when it gets read. (Interview 3)

Topic areas discussed within the interviews were initiated by the second author, but also led primarily by Erin and the experiences she wanted to share. Thus, while an interview guide was developed, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the conversations to digress. Nonetheless, topics such as Erin’s experiences of mountaineering both before and after her transition, the role of gender when climbing, alongside the development of the TranSending7 project and changing the trans\* narrative were addressed across the three interviews.

***Data analysis***

Interview transcripts were subject to a *reflexive* thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2022), where the research team engaged with the iterative stages of: dataset familiarisation; data coding; initial theme generation; theme development and review; theme refining, defining and naming; and eventually writing up. Having read and re-read all transcripts through a process of immersion, codes were assigned to meaningful data extracts related to the project’s aims, at both a semantic and latent level. The research team engaged in collaborative coding to “enhance understanding, interpretation and reflexivity, rather than to reach a consensus” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 8), with each member acting as a critical friend (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

The analytical process of coding and initial theme generation involved an *abductive* orientation to data, where coding incorporated an inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) approach, enabling the dataset to function as the starting point for meaning, while using existing theoretical concepts (e.g., Goffman) as a lens to interpret the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Having developed and reviewed candidate themes, these were refined to ensure a coherent narrative was present, before weaving together analytical commentary and data extracts within the writing process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Prior to data analysis, all interview transcripts were shared with Erin as a form of member reflection to generate initial commentary (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

**Results and discussion**

As a result of the *reflexive* thematic analysis process, two themes were developed: (1) Going stealth: Defensive practices and maintaining invisibility; and (2) Becoming a speaker: The gendered mountaineering space. Within this section, data extracts from the interviews conducted with Erin are supplemented with analytical commentary informed by Goffman’s (1959, 1963, 1979) theorisation on impression management, stigma, and gender displays. We use the term ‘trans’ in the data extracts to denote Erin’s true voice, as opposed to the research informed use of trans\*. We refer to Erin’s experiences before and after ‘transition’ to relate to her pre- and post- *medical* transition.

**Going stealth: Defensive practices and maintaining invisibility**

Erin highlighted social situations where she needed to remain invisible and engage with “the arts of impression management… through which the individual exerts strategic control” over others’ impressions (Goffman, 1963, p. 155). Erin outlined situations where she adopted defensive and protective practices to safeguard the impression she portrayed to others (Goffman, 1959), while maintaining stealth. In the extract below, Erin explains how she engaged with *dramaturgical discipline*, e.g., controlling emotions and feelings within a performance, when she was exposed to transphobia and stigma within mountaineering spaces before her transition.

I was in those spaces I heard what people were saying, you know, I know what my climbing friends think about trans people I know what my climbing friends think about gay men… When you're in my space as a trans person who's not manifested yet. You're seeing it, you're seeing all that homophobia, all of that sexism, and all of that transphobia kind of around you and saying, God, I better keep hiding because this is how the world will receive me... as soon as I came out all those people, they said we weren't sexist we weren't homophobic, we weren’t transphobic… I was there I heard it... they just didn't know I was there. (Interview 1)

Individuals who adopt *dramaturgical discipline* can suppress emotions “in order to give the appearance of sticking to the affective line, the expressive status quo” (Goffman, 1959, p. 211), to maintain an alignment between virtual and actual identity. However, Erin also engaged in *dramaturgical circumspection*, referring to the process of preparing for likely contingencies and challenges when encountering a new audience (Goffman, 1959). In this instance, prior to climbing Mount Elbrus, Erin needed to be aware of how she presented herself and stressed the need to remain ‘hidden’ due to the social and cultural environment in Russia.

If you're LGBT… go there but hide, don't be known. Don't put yourself out, no public displays of affection. And then the last piece of information I had was I knew that the rainbow flag is considered anti-family propaganda in Russia, so the display of the rainbow colours in the public forum is against the law in Russia... it's a little bit scary, so yeah, I went in kind of with the idea that I was going to kind of keep my head down… and like my eyes up. So, just keep a lookout and be safe but, you know, kind of keep a low profile too... I wouldn't expose myself or my group to any danger, and, you know, so that meant that the whole trip I basically had to hide. (Interview 3)

The emphasis Erin placed on keeping her ‘head down, eyes up’ and maintaining a ‘lookout’ epitomises the practice of *dramaturgical circumspection* to maintain a performance*,* where Erin needed to constantly be “alive to the social situation as a scanner of possibilities” (Goffman, 1963, p. 110), to safeguard her own personal and group’s safety in Russia. For Goffman (1959), the disclosure of secrets and ‘destructive information’ which are hidden may disrupt performances when in front of an audience. Thus, Erin reiterated the need to keep a low profile.

My ability to keep myself safe and possibly the group safe really depends on me being low key... It's got to be unknown until I get on that plane and land in a different airport. You know, outside of this, outside of Russia. So, you know, I tried as much as I could, but I also couldn't make a big deal out of it. (Interview 3)

When talking more generally, Erin further described the need to engage in *dramaturgical circumspection*, specifically when calculating risk and planning ahead of any climb, knowing when to switch between front (with an audience) and back (in private) regions (Goffman, 1959).

That's the risk that I can kind of quantify and calculate and figure out, you know, from base camp to the top of the mountain and, I can work on all of those things but it's going from my house to base camp, that, you know, I can't calculate the risk I can't quantify what will happen between those two places so, yeah… I can kind of fly a little bit under the radar and get to places... through stealth. (Interview 3)

Visibility and the presentation of ‘destructive information’ will have varying levels of consequences for individuals. Goffman (1963) explained how people are in a constant struggle to manage information which forms their identity, needing to strategically decide whether “to display or not display; to tell or not to tell” (p. 57). Therefore, an individual’s ability to manage their identity is influenced by the presence of others, and whether ‘others’ are aware of such ‘destructive’ information (Goffman, 1963). When climbing Mount Elbrus, Erin encountered this situation.

I did it [climbed Elbrus] with a group and I did it with a friend, and, you know, this is somebody who was my boss at my office… you know, somebody that I had contact with, I think, you know, before transitioning so, you know, he knew my whole history… I felt a little bit exposed... And he made some comment like ‘yeah I haven't fully digested where you're at in life’… You know, he was certainly kind of the weak link, as far as I think, you know, letting my information out because the importance of being silent and not being seen. But he didn't and, you know, he misgendered me a few times on the trip because, you know, that's just the way some people are. (Interview 3)

While Goffman (1959, p. 216) argued that “with those whom one does not know, careful performances are required”, an individual’s ability to manage their identity is influenced by the presence of others who are also known (Goffman, 1963). Erin highlighted the challenges associated with managing known-about-ness and encountering situations where others do know her identity. In the example above, Erin relied upon her boss’s tact and ability to demonstrate the defensive practice of *dramaturgical loyalty*, where those in the know must not “betray the secrets of the team when between performances” (Goffman, 1959, p. 207). While Erin’s boss misgendered her on the Elbrus trip, it would seem she was still able to manage her identity.

Interviewer: Did you ever get a sense that anybody else within the team that you were climbing with was reading you in a different way?

Erin: I didn't know for sure; I just didn't know. I had no idea if they were or they weren't but, you know, there's no way to kind of test those waters either so you just keep quiet. Keep kind of doing what you're doing. (Interview 3).

Despite these challenges, Erin’s successful engagement with impression management strategies enabled her to remain safe in what might be considered a forbidden place, where unpleasant eventualities had the potential to arise (Goffman, 1963). Erin further outlined how she constantly needed to put on a front to “define the situation for those who observe the performance” (Goffman, 1959, p. 32).

It's a hostile environment and it's intimidation so you kind of at every turn, as far as what your emotions are how you're kind of carrying on, you know, if you're part of the, you know, the LGBT+ community, you're having to maybe change your behaviours just a little bit and always kind of be cognizant of what you should do, or what you shouldn't do in order just to enjoy what's around you, and it's a constraint that, you know… there's a greater population that can go there without having to think... you're kind of having to individually weigh up and change your behaviours at every kind of point. (Interview 3)

When managing identities, Goffman (1963) indicated that individuals may find themselves in forbidden (stigmas must be hidden), civil (stigmas accepted), or back (individuals at ease) places. While the cultural and political context of Russia (Mount Elbrus) or Tanzania (Mount Kilimanjaro) can be considered a forbidden place, Erin discussed how more civil places (e.g., North America or Australia) also require the need for impression management techniques to overcome everyday tasks.

A lot of people don't have that, you know, they don't just have the fear that I have, you know... I have that backstop where if everything else kind of falls apart or I get myself into trouble some other way, by, you know, getting pulled over, or something. I might not face the same abuse that somebody that's from a different state in the United States faces, or somebody from a different country. (Interview 1)

I still worry when I run into strangers because the consequences are so bad so, you know, here in the United States, low consequences but you know there’s a great chance I'll be outed in my day-to-day life because I come into contact with people that, you know, know people that know people that know me, or just directly know me. It's just a different risk equation. (Interview 3)

Managing visibility and the presentation of information to others will have varying levels of consequences for individuals (Goffman, 1963). For Erin, needing to stay stealth and maintain a greater sense of sensitivity results in a “great psychological price, a very high level of anxiety” (Goffman, 1963, p. 109), which impacts upon routine day-to-day social encounters.

**Becoming a speaker: The gendered mountaineering space**

Mountaineering is traditionally recognised as a gendered pursuit, which encompasses strong elements of hegemonic masculinity, with women working hard to legitimise their place in this social context (Kennedy & Russell, 2021; Rogers & Rose, 2019; Tulle, 2022; Warren, 2016). For Goffman (1979), the expression of gender can be considered a social construction, where individuals perform ‘gender displays’, adopting behaviours, gestures, and postures to conform to social norms regarding what gender ‘should’ look like. Pre-transition, Erin outlined how she engaged in gender displays to ‘fake’ and conform to gender stereotypes, while covering her true identity.

I don’t think a lot of them [other climbers] thought much about it. I think I looked a lot like them and fit in. I faked it pretty well, I was, you know, if I went on an old guy's trip, you know, I think that they kind of let loose and just, you know, kind of viewed it like that. I think if I went on a mix trip, it was the same thing I kind of interacted from that very gendered space… everything is gendered. (Interview 1)

In this instance, Erin “perceived an expectation to enact prescribed masculine, competitive behaviors” to align with her gender display (Rogers & Rose, 2019, p. 46). Recent research has demonstrated how outdoor spaces are gendered through expectations regarding competency, strength, safety, and knowledge of equipment (Bell et al., 2018; Russell et al., 2022). Moreover, the naming and classification of mountains and their routes has strong hypermasculine underpinnings (Tulle, 2022; Wigglesworth, 2021), which was identified by Erin.

The names of routes are completely ridiculous and the way that they're named is very indicative of the kind of talk that I think goes on... the routes are very indicative of what was on their mind. And, you know, everybody kind of denies it that, you know, like, I mean everybody knows locker room talk exists, but then when you confront it... then it doesn’t exist or it’s not a problem. (Interview 1)

In addition to negotiating locker room talk, Erin further described how the mountain space is gendered through the assignment and enactment of group dynamics, team roles, and decision-making processes within climbs.

It could be as overt as kind of how you break up kind of bathroom kind of stuff right or, you know... even like your car rides and how you get places or how you get into a group. You know… there's like the dynamics of it as well and that's kind of the hardest part of it, the communication and kind of the decision making and all those parts of it, you know, like when a group starts to form and you start seeing like, the decision making and the personality of the team come together... it even looks a little bit more gendered. (Interview 1)

Erin discussed her experiences of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro both pre- and post-transition, outlining the misogyny, sexism, and gender bias she was exposed to as a woman when negotiating group planning and discussions, where her leadership qualities were seemingly devalued (Kennedy & Russell, 2021; Rogers & Rose, 2019; Tulle, 2022). Specifically, Erin’s experiences align with Goffman’s (1979) *function ranking* representation of gender, where women have a passive role of being ‘instructed to’, rather than an active role of leading and instructing others.

I'm starting to realise like I'm definitely being treated differently this time than last time it was unfolding more emergently… I couldn't even stand with the guys when they're negotiating and working it [the climb] out. So, you know, I would just be put in the car for like, you know, before they would take me everywhere... I'm gonna have a meeting with this person but, you know, they've got like a little cafe or like table or whatever, just like hang out and like we'd be at a table, drinking Cokes together, and I was not involved in the conversation because they’re speaking Swahili, but I was still there, I wasn't even invited in, like, I would be left in the other room or left in the car… I was kind of always snipped off... I wasn't allowed to assert myself in that way and that had never happened before. (Interview 2)

In line with recent research exploring gender in outdoor spaces (Kennedy & Russell, 2021; Rogers & Rose, 2019; Tulle, 2022), Erin’s experiences demonstrate how mountaineering can be described as a ‘troubling’ terrain for women (Bell et al., 2018). In the third interview, Erin further elaborated upon the misogyny and sexism she encountered pre-transition, alongside the ‘locker room mentality’ which is detrimental to women’s equality within outdoor spaces.

People don't know what it's like... a lot of times you want to be empathetic to somebody else's plight, but I don't think it's always possible. I would hope that in the groups that I've been with when there were women present that the behaviour was mostly, I think, respectful, or, you know, striving towards trying to be equal. I can say that I've been in climbing circles and I've said it before where I think it's just as detrimental to, kind of, you know, women's equality is what’s being said when women aren't around. The country club mentality or the locker room mentality, or, you know, when you get into these spaces that men feel safe enough to open their mouths and, you know, I think a lot of men don't understand... they vocalise something that they don't necessarily feel, to feel as though they're part of the group... I think that the sexism felt was more vocally present when women weren't present. That being said, it doesn't matter, it's equally damaging whether somebody is there to hear it or not. (Interview 3)

From Erin's recollections, it is clear that within mountaineering, some men also engage in impression management techniques through their expressions given and given off, e.g., outwardly displaying an attitude of misogyny and sexism to conform to contextual norms, with acts of gender performativity resulting in a collective representation within mountaineering groups (Goffman, 1959, 1979). As such, the danger for Erin was always beyond the physical and technical challenges associated with climbing the mountain. Instead, possessing an “aliveness to the contingencies of acceptance and disclosure” (Goffman, 1963, p. 136) and managing interpersonal interactions to avoid negative consequences posed greater concern.

Interviewer: So, does that mean that on the mountain, it's... easier to hide in that, in that sense then, on the journey between home and the mountain base, the base camp?

Erin: I don't know if it's easier to hide or not, but you're exposed to a whole lot fewer people… So, you know, I mean in Aconcagua [Argentina] I was out there for 20 days or 18 days with the same people, you know, Elbrus was 10 days or something. So, it's hard to say… I said, the whole goal is that, you know, the challenges we face in the mountain should be the ultimate kind of egalitarian system but because it's, it's how steep it is, it's what my technical knowledge is, it's how well I trained, it's how well I know the gear and the weather conditions but yeah… you don't know as a traveller why you'll get singled out, but if you do get singled out, you know, what are the consequences? So, you know, as a female traveller I face different risks than I did as a male traveller. (Interview 3)

Engaging in impression management techniques and *dramatic realisation* requires a significant amount of energy and strain for any individual, who must consciously manage their mannerisms, activities, and perceptions to convince an audience of their performance (Goffman, 1959). Hence, to manage her identity within mountaineering spaces, Erin had to “learn about the structure of interaction in order to learn about the lines along which they [she] must reconstitute their conduct” (Goffman, 1963, p. 127). However, over time, Erin had reached a stage where she felt “above passing... after labouriously learning how to conceal, then, the individual may go on to unlearn this concealment” (Goffman, 1963, p. 125). Erin transitioned to a stage of voluntary disclosure, exemplified through displaying the trans\* flag when reaching the summit of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

So yeah, I got to the top and again I kind of said well, it depends how many people are there. It depends on who's looking, and how I feel and everything and I got to the top... I busted out that banner and just flew it up there and got several pictures taken and figured if anybody finds out what I did, then that's fine. I’ve got 24 hours to get off this mountain and then everybody can kind of go their own separate direction and hopefully I can go my own separate direction. (Interview 2)

In this instance, displaying the trans\* flag as a voluntary ‘symbol’ conveys information about Erin’s identity (Goffman, 1963). This movement towards a state of voluntary disclosure transforms Erin’s interactions within social situations, as she becomes “an individual with information to manage to that of an individual with uneasy social situations to manage” (Goffman, 1963, p. 123). Indeed, while Erin recognised throughout the interviews that there are certain situations impression management strategies might be required, Erin discussed the importance of visibility.

I think it’s important to be visible. You know it’s important to be, you know, be proud no matter where you are in your transition or whether you are at the point, you’re happy even if it doesn’t look like what someone else thinks it should look like. (Interview 2)

I remember the times when I felt so alone, and I couldn't find other people who were like me. And I couldn't find positive stories and I couldn't find any sort of reassurance and positivity that… things were going to be okay. You know that I could be myself, and do the things I loved that I could do those two things... I feel like, you know, I've been successful in kind of seeding that story into enough places that, you know, the person that finds themselves in that situation where they're really just looking for positive experience and a positive role model and I don't actually, I hate the word role model and I don't like to use it. But just a positive story of what can be accomplished, even in taking this risk of being your true self. (Interview 3)

The extracts above demonstrate that Erin has embarked into what Goffman (1963) suggests is a ‘moral career’, referring to a phase of adjustment, transition, and state of grace. Goffman (1963) used the phrase ‘moral career’ to describe specific patterns of learning and changes in an individual’s perception of self, alongside the adjustment to social environments within a person’s life trajectory. Thus, this state of adjustment means Erin feels she no longer needs to remain stealth within certain contexts, despite this never being an intention.

Because, you know, ultimately, I didn't really ever want to be visible... you know, I'm now kind of doing something that makes me very visible and, you know, most of the time I kind of want to just go out, hike on the trail, or just go climb or just work on things, you know, don't involve fundraising and speaking with people about, you know, why we need to change the narrative and all of those things. So, I guess I feel good about, you know, what we've done. I think that it's working. (Interview 3)

According to Goffman (1963, p. 45), stigmatised individuals tend to have “similar learning experiences regarding their plight, and similar changes in concept of self – a similar ‘moral career’”. While never aiming to become a role model or ‘speaker’ (Goffman, 1963), Erin’s journey provides inspiration and aspiration for other trans\* individuals within mountaineering and beyond, presenting a positive narrative which is visible and attainable to others.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has drawn upon Goffman’s (1959, 1963, 1979) concepts associated with impression management, stigma, and gender displays to interpret and analyse Erin’s experiences as a trans\* mountaineer. Combining Goffman’s concepts as opposed to applying them in isolation has helped demonstrate how gender is part of a socially scripted performance within mountaineering, emphasising the ways in which “identity management relies on a presupposed socialization process in which persons develop identity patterns in reaction to the signs and symbols they receive, either overtly or subtly, from others” (Whelan, 2021, p, 49).

Goffman’s dramaturgical approach and seminal writings on impression management come alive within the data as Erin engaged in performances when negotiating her identity within mountaineering spaces across the globe. Indeed, Erin’s performances revolved around managing aspects of her biography which could potentially ‘spoil’ her identity in various social situations (Goffman, 1959, 1963), often resulting in a need to remain stealth. With mountaineering being presented as a gendered space plagued with hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Kennedy & Russell, 2021; Tulle, 2022), Erin’s experiences highlight how both herself and others performed gender displays to manage the perceptions of others. However, Erin’s story is one of progression, as she moved to a position of voluntary disclosure, rising above the need to hide and unintentionally becoming a role model for other trans\* individuals.

Rogers and Rose (2019, p. 47) have recently argued that “Further research needs to be conducted with both marginalized and underrepresented populations” within outdoor and adventurous activities, while Tulle (2022, p. 18) suggests “the culture of women’s mountaineering can be enriched by unearthing silenced voices, encouraging more diverse women in the UK and elsewhere to add to these voices”. We argue that highlighting Erin’s perceptions, experiences, and journey to date within this book chapter and elsewhere (see Russell et al., 2022) have begun to address these calls, by continuing to bring trans\* experiences into our understanding of gender within sport and the outdoors (Ferguson & Russell, 2021). We believe Erin’s account has the potential to “broaden horizons and inspire” (Kennedy & Russell, 2021, p. 167), offering a firsthand account of the issues associated with exclusion, hegemonic masculinity, and gender within mountaineering, to portray an alternative narrative and offer a glance of progression.

Erin’s story has the potential for several forms of generalisability within qualitative research (Smith, 2018). For example, naturalistic (e.g., Erin’s journey resonates with readers’ experiences), transferability (e.g., to other outdoor and sporting contexts), and finally analytical (e.g., application of Goffman’s theory). However, while Erin’s story may act as a catalyst for change, more research is evidently needed to support existing studies (e.g., Avner et al., 2021; Doran et al., 2018). In building upon the sentiments of Tulle (2022), future research projects might consider the use of ethnographic methods to enable researchers to walk (climb) with participants to help “understand their embodied relationship to mountain spaces and access their sensibility” (p. 7). Interviews and encounters within mountain spaces will allow perspectives and experiences to be understood within broader social, cultural, and historical contexts.

**Notes**

1. Stealth refers to Erin deliberately concealing her trans\* status.

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**Index**

biography, 1, 16

Erin Parisi, 1, 2, 4, 17, 19

Erving Goffman, 4

dramaturgical, 4, 7, 8, 9, 16

Goffmanian, 1, 4, 5

gender binary, 2

gender displays, 1, 4, 7, 11, 16

function ranking, 12

gender inequalities, 3

gendered, 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 16, 19

hegemonic masculinity, 1, 3, 11, 16, 17

impression management, 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 14, 16

back, 8, 10

dramaturgical circumspection, 8

dramaturgical discipline, 7

dramaturgical loyalty, 9

front, 8, 10

performance, 7, 8, 10, 14, 16, 18

mountaineering, 1, 4, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19

outdoor spaces, 3, 4, 11, 13

stealth, 1, 7, 9, 11, 15, 16

stigma, 1, 4, 7, 16, 18

moral career, 15

visibility, 11, 14

voluntary disclosure, 1, 14, 16

thematic analysis, 1, 6, 7

trans\*, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19

transition, 1, 2, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 15