

An instructor's perspective by Judy Skeats

As an instructor, I'm sometimes asked 'why do a women's clinic?'

Many people are not sure why we have women's clinics and ski days. They may be interested in the idea but not sure of the advantages. Here are some:

Different attitudes and conditioning:

- Men's sense of self is defined by their ability to achieve results. Women experience fulfilment through sharing and relating. Our conditioning is not competition-oriented.
- Little girls are protected "be careful, darling" whereas boys are *expected* to be fine. This conditioning starts very early and can be the root of some of our fears. (See *You Just Don't Understand* by Deborah Tannen)
- Control and 'doing it right' is important to women. Men tend to risk more, women are generally more safety-conscious. Research has shown that motherhood tones down risk-taking. If you are injured, who looks after the children?

Real support:

Who are you skiing for? Were you pushed into it?

- Women tend to be more supportive and give less destructive criticism than men.
- Most women's courses emphasize the support/caring aspect, helping each other feel good and encouraging each other.
- Women can record achievements each day. But what they *feel* is often the main achievement. An absence of fear can be worth far more than a technical accomplishment for some.

Biomechanics:

- Women's bodies are constructed differently from men's. In women's clinics, people usually learn more about their Q angle, their lower centre of mass, their different shaped calf muscles and feet etc *but also what that means for their skiing and ski equipment.*

I teach on Women's Clinics at Steamboat Springs, Colorado. So as an instructor, what do I get out of it?

- Well, it gives me a sense of camaraderie too. I make friends. (Hey, I'm an instructor, but I'm still a woman and human – I like making friends!)
- The support that women typically give each other in an all-female setting helps them achieve more, so it makes my job easier. In these lessons, even more than others, we create partnerships so that each individual feels that their skiing takes off.
- I can empathise. Like my clients, I have had my share of skiing failures, fears and frustrations - I know what it feels like.
- We share the laughter. The feel of the classes is different because we share – we talk about family and health issues along the way. It's not the main focus but people feel comfortable enough to let that happen.

All this is not about being anti-men. Absolutely not. Just as in any other lessons, I am committed to safety, fun and learning. I want to listen to what my clients want and help them attain their goals. But I appreciate that this special setting has been valuable to me in my life, as a recipient and now as an instructor, and I know that it can be beneficial to other women too.

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