

Sex differences in behaviour—has the thrill gone?

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Dr Kate Cross

Men have become less willing to engage in physically challenging activities over the past 35 years, according to a new study by the University of St Andrews.

The findings, by a team led by Dr Kate Cross of the University's School

of Psychology and Neuroscience, support the argument that some [sex differences](#) in behaviour have declined in response to recent cultural changes.

The meta-analysis of studies on sensation-seeking, is published in the journal *Scientific Reports* today and also involved co-authors Dr De-Laine Cyrenne and Dr Gillian Brown.

Sensation-seeking is a [personality trait](#) reflecting the desire to pursue novel or intense experiences, even if risks are involved, and is measured using questionnaires, such as the Sensation Seeking Scale, version V (SSS-V).

In the late 1970s, men answering the SSS-V were more likely than women to say that they would like to try parachuting, scuba diving or [mountaineering](#). However, over the past decades, men's thrill and adventure-seeking scores on this same questionnaire have declined, and average male scores are now more similar to average female scores.

Dr Cross said: "The decline in the sex difference in thrill and adventure-seeking scores could reflect declines in average [fitness levels](#), which might have reduced people's interest in physically challenging activities. Alternatively, the questions were designed in the 1970s so could now be out-of-date."

Skiing, for instance, may no longer be viewed as a novel or intense activity.

The study also showed that sex differences in other measures have not changed across time. For example, men consistently report higher average scores than women for disliking dull or repetitive activities, and for enjoying challenging [social situations](#).

These stable sex differences could reflect sex differences in predispositions that favour novelty-seeking in men, in combination with [social factors](#) that continue to value greater risk-taking in men than in women.

More information: [dx.doi.org/10.1038/srep02486](https://doi.org/10.1038/srep02486)

Provided by University of St Andrews

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