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Rock Climbers Defying Gravity and Gender Expectations

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology

by

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ABSTRACT

Rock Climbers Defying Gravity and Gender Expectations

by

Kegan M. Allee

This research seeks to explore a specific way that bodies may be redefined as feminine and strong. Much of the literature on gender analyzes the ways in which individuals are confined by gender expectations. Climbing is a venue that celebrates skills traditionally associated with femininity such as flexibility, but because it is assumed to require a lot of upper-body strength, it is not sport typed as feminine. This creates an ideal environment to combine qualities traditionally associated with both femininity and masculinity, and as individuals excel in climbing they discipline their bodies to cultivate both sets of characteristics. Developing both embodied masculine and feminine traits may blur embodied gender traits, and place less emphasis on binary categorizations. This is why climbing offers important opportunities to redefine our knowing bodies with respect to our gender. This research is based on thirty semi-structured interviews coded to produce grounded theory. I also conducted content analysis on thirty-eight issues of two popular climbing magazines, and utilized two years of participant observation to generate the theoretical analysis. The media analysis revealed less emphasis on normative

femininity than other types of media, but women are still not represented equally in numbers of photographs, the number of female authors published, or the difficulty of the climbs. The women I interviewed described feeling both physically and socially stronger in their everyday lives, and also more empowered suggesting that climbing has a spill-over effect whereby women come to see themselves as more capable in their everyday lives. Ultimately, I suggest that activities such as rock climbing which allow women to develop holistic, strong, synchronized bodies helps them resist the dominant cultural messages associated with fragmented and weak femininity.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In 1993 Lynn Hill became the first person to ever free climb¹ the Nose of Yosemite's El Capitan in four days, accomplishing what many of the world's best climbers had believed for decades to be physically impossible. There were a few key sections, or pitches, of the climb that had never been free climbed before and previous successful completions of the Nose had only been done aid climbing.² Specifically the Great Roof and the Changing Corners were notoriously difficult pitches. The Great Roof has a hairline crack that most climbers could not even fit their fingers into, and the Changing Corners had a reputation for being "reachy" with the few available holds being spread far apart. The following year Hill repeated this extraordinary feat, but this time she did it in one day. Hill had already been considered one of the best female rock climbers in the world with *Climbing* editor-in-chief Matt Samet has calling her "the grand dame of rock climbing (Samet 2010, 12)," but freeing the Nose led many people to consider her to be one of the best climbers the world has ever seen. Although women have continued to make amazing

¹ Free climb (or freeing): climbing without the use of any gear to help you ascend the rock. The climber is still on belay though in case s/he falls. Freeing may be done on lead or on top rope.

² Aid climbing (or aiding): forward progress is made by standing on or pulling oneself up with pieces of gear. Typical gear includes: aiders, hooks, camming devices, nuts, wall hammers, daisy chains, hauling pulleys, copper heads, pitons, and more.

climbing accomplishments since 1994, the story of Lynn Hill freeing the Nose is *the* quintessential story of gender equality in the world of rock climbing.

Freeing the Nose, among many other incredible accomplishments, *was* spectacular for Hill and for other female climbers, but what was it about *this* particular achievement that has led many to believe that climbing is a more egalitarian sport. Climbing has historically been a male dominated activity, drawing primarily from middle to upper-middle class, educated men (Ortner 1999), but it is no longer “sport typed” (Crawley et al 2008) as being appropriate only for men. Judith Lorber (1993) argues that sport is an arena in which we construct gender identities and that participation in sports tends to boost one’s gender accomplishment. That is, sports that are considered masculine tend to cultivate aggression, strength, power, and violence; whereas feminine sports emphasize grace, beauty, poise, and sexuality. Climbing is an interesting sport because the more accomplished a climber becomes the more s/he must develop strength and grace, power and poise. One could argue that Hill’s triumph on the Nose is considered the exemplar of gender equality because it required all of these skills, and indeed that is how she explains her experience. In an interview for greatoutdoors.com Hill says

That climb was bigger than me, and that was how I was able to do it. It does stand out as one of the highlights of my career, if you want to put it in those terms...I was so focused on doing it perfectly, not slipping a jam, going with the flow, trying to dose my energy, that I was really in a different space. At the Great Roof and the Changing Corners pitch, and even the last pitch, I needed to have the energy when I needed it, and it's powerful (peterp 2004).

Unfortunately, many have used Hill's success on the Nose as the exemplar of gender equality because she was able to accomplish something no man had. That is, for some "equality" is only ascertained when women outperform their male peers. Still others have a difficult time accepting her success and seek explanations as to why she was able to do it when so many men before her had not.

Rachel Dilley's study of nine female climbers found that both male and female climbers alike assume that male climbers have a physiological advantage. This raises a number of problems for female climbers. Women who accomplish great climbing feats are often accused of cheating in some way (for example, using an "unfair" technique such as heel-hooking or having prior knowledge of the climb that gives them an "unfair" advantage). In a related vein, women's physiology has also been used to explain a "natural" advantage that extraordinary female climbers possess. Dilley argues that Hill's success has been attributed too much to her tiny fingers rather than her astounding climbing abilities. "Focusing on Lynn's fingers has distracted those within the climbing world from more fully acknowledging her skill, ability, strength, perseverance, dedication and commitment to climbing" (Dilley 2007: 13-14). Dilley is referring to the way in which people have explained Hill's success by suggesting that she was able to get through the crux of the Great Roof's hairline crack *only* because she has small fingers. In many ways, female climbers face a double-bind: if they do not excel at

climbing, it is because they are physiologically weaker, but if they do succeed, they must have cheated. Are these attitudes changing though?

Climbing used to be considered appropriate only for men, and although these attitudes have shifted significantly, there are still people who criticize mothers more than fathers for pursuing a risky goal. I wonder if Hill freeing the Nose can be considered an exemplar of gender equality because of her ability to dissolve the gender binary of “masculine” and “feminine” characteristics and instead utilize all of these traits towards the goal of perfection.³

I remember very clearly the first time I heard somebody describe the way in which I climbed a particular route as “feminine.” I was a student supervisor at the Adventure Climbing Center, an indoor climbing wall at the University of California Santa Barbara Recreation Center, and many patrons would speak with me when I was working or climbing. I had just come off of a route I was trying to complete when Kai said that he liked the way I had been climbing and that it was a very feminine style of climbing. At first, I did not know if he meant the actual way in which I was climbing or if by extension, my own gender identity was somehow being expressed through this climbing route. When I asked him what he meant he described to me the differences between a “masculine climbing style” and a “feminine climbing style”

³ Here is how Hill describes “perfection”: “One thing I learned on that climb is that nobody is perfect. You can shoot for perfection and accept a good effort, and that's pretty much what The Nose was all about: Shoot for the best you can possibly imagine, and then be content with hard won success. Sure, it would have been nice to go from the bottom to the top without falling, but I feel good about what I did.” (peterp 2004).

and then proceeded to demonstrate these differences by climbing the same route I had just been climbing in a completely different manner. I was skeptical that our different styles could be attributed to our different gender identities, but my curiosity was piqued. Gender had become salient to me in the Adventure Climbing Center.

This research is the product of my own biography and the intersection of my two greatest passions. I started working at the Adventure Climbing Center (ACC) in the summer of 2007 as a way to earn a supplemental income while in graduate school and as way to devote more time to an activity that greatly reduced my stress as a student. I had always loved outdoor activities and through the ACC and UCSB Adventure Programs, I found a community of people who shared my passion for athletic challenges and nature. I sought instructional courses on anchor building, lead climbing, and self-rescue. Eventually, I took certification courses offered through the Professional Climbing Instructors Association and Wilderness Medical Associates with the goal of becoming a climbing instructor and guide. I was pursuing these skills with the same fervor as I pursue my scholastic interest in gender and sexuality studies.

The more I noticed gender in climbing and spoke with people about my observations the more I wanted to merge these two areas of my life. My greatest interest academically by far has been a postmodern feminist goal of deconstructing rigid gender restrictions, and expanding our gender norms. In this vein, theorists such as Foucault, Bartky, Bordo, Butler, Fenstermaker, West, Zimmerman, and Young have heavily influenced me, but all of these authors warn us of focusing only on

juridical notions of power. For Foucault power is “everywhere and nowhere,” it is capillary, and most importantly, it is embodied. Academically I have been trying to imagine how we can create different ways of disciplining our bodies, not with a goal of eradicating the “docile body,” but rather of redirecting its purpose. Instead of a “feminine body” having the social meaning of frail, dependent, incompetent, pretty, and sexual I wanted to find a way in which the feminine body could be directed to signify independence, strength, assertiveness, and proficiency. The more I thought about gender and climbing the more I began to wonder if climbing provided such an opportunity. Although this research is the product of the intersections of my greatest passions, rarely do these worlds overlap otherwise. One of my first difficulties in this study was that both the climbing community and academics have their own jargon that has made it difficult at times to bridge these two worlds. What follows is a brief overview of climbing and of the theoretical frames I am employing in order to better speak across these divides. I will conclude the chapter with a discussion of my research methods and an outline of the following chapters.

A Brief History of Climbing

Mountaineering refers to a broad category of activities that are used to ascend a mountain. In Europe, the preferred term is alpinism, and although many people had reached the summit of mountains throughout history, technical skills that developed into a sport began being utilized in the mid nineteenth century. The Alpine Club was founded in London in 1857 and combined with many first ascents in the Alps and a growing body of professional guides this marks the “Golden Age of Alpinism”

(1854-1865). In the United States, alpine climbing refers to a specific kind of climbing that involves rock, snow and ice. Alpine climbing is also used to refer to carrying all of the necessary gear, and is in contrast to an expedition style that relies on the development of base camps. Therefore, while many of the participants in this research have experience with alpine climbing, all of them are rock climbers.

Mountaineering has a complicated relationship with globalization. While alpinism began in Europe and was largely focused on ascending peaks in the Alps, the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India conducted by the East India Trading Company required far greater alpine skills than those possessed by the sports enthusiasts in Europe fifty years later (Cameron 1984). The English rulers of the East India Trading Company were well aware of the needs of accurate geographical knowledge to continue to build their empire. “The history of conquest and administration is therefore mingled with the history of surveys which constantly threw up voluminous scientific data about the country paving the way for further development in the respective field” (Roy 1986, 24). Colonel William Lambton was the Superintendent and began the survey in 1802 and George Everest took over this position after Lambton’s death in 1823. From 1830-1843, Colonel Sir Everest was the Surveyor General in India and a year before his death in 1866 he was honored by his successor Andrew Waugh by having the highest mountain on earth named after him.

The Great Trigonometrical Survey of India was and still is considered one of the most remarkable scientific achievements of its time, being responsible for

producing one of the first accurate measurements of a portion of an arc of longitude. This achievement came at an enormous human and monetary cost however. The East India Trading Company directed so much of its profits to the survey that it had to be brought under the Crown in 1857. In his historical account of the Himalayan Mountains Ian Cameron describes the human cost: “It will never be known how many dedicated surveyors- *khalasis* employed by the survey on a salary of no more than six rupees (about 60 British pence) a month- died of cold, starvation or exposure on some isolated peak” (Quoted in Ortner, 1990:27). This pattern of using native populations to assist in the exploration of the world’s highest peaks continues to this day, as do the deaths.

Technical climbing has become increasingly more difficult, and will likely continue in this direction. This is not to diminish the difficulty of mountaineering, but the level at which people can free climb or aid climb today is worlds apart from reaching the summit of Mount Blanc. Indeed, the goals themselves are vastly different. Many climbers would rather spend their time and energy working on shorter routes that require more technical precision and ability. Since the 1970s, there has been increasing specialization and fragmentation of styles of climbing. This leads to my second difficulty conducting the study, how to define the activity of climbing.

Climbing may be considered a sport, but many people consider it a way of life. In a broad sense, it seems obvious that climbing is a sport in that it requires strength, training, and specialized skill sets. There are climbing competitions and

many believe it should be included in the Olympics. There are classes and gyms where one can acquire coaching and practice particular movements. Yet, in many ways climbing differs from other sports in that there are no agreed upon rules to climbing, although there tend to be climbing ethics that are negotiated between individuals and in public forums. People debate what counts as an accomplishment: Did you use anything to assist your forward progress? Did you climb a route perfectly without practice or falls? Many people debate whether it is ethical to drill bolts into rock or do anything else that changes the rock structure such as leaving piton scars that widen natural cracks prematurely. These norms are socially constructed and as such tend to vary by time, place, and culture. For example, in the late 1970s French climbers developed what are now considered the first “sport climbing” routes- routes protected solely by bolts. Sport climbing challenged the traditional method of climbing (“trad climbing”) not only by relying on bolts, but by developing routes from the top down, hanging on gear, and practicing the necessary moves before completing the problem (Perkins 2005). Trad climbs are protected by gear that the leader (the first climber up the route on that attempt) places along the way. Many U.S. climbers eschewed these new methods of climbing until the mid-1980s when the tide changed and an appreciation for the convenience of climbs with greater technical difficulty started to grow. These debates revolve around what social responsibility climbers have to the environment and other people whose outdoor experiences may be negatively impacted by seeing the evidence of climbers in natural areas as well as character debates. Historically, boldness was a highly prized trait in

climbers, and new routes were the product of someone's vision and daring (Perkins). Today, much to the chagrin of traditional climbers, most new routes that are being established in the U.S. are sport routes that make it easier to push one's physical abilities while lessening the chance of a deadly fall.

Kiewa (2002) found that traditional climbers consider themselves to be "real climbers" because they try to resist the values of rationalized society in four symbolic ways. Unlike sport climbers or those who only climb on top rope, the trad climbers in her study (N 31, 14 women and 17 men) believe they are different because they exhibit an egalitarian attitude, they climb for the sake of climbing and ignore the difficulty grades, they possess a quiet demeanor in the climbing environment, and they refuse to use guidebooks preferring to take the time to learn for themselves. Kiewa argues that these symbolic gestures, which were intended to preserve the mystique of climbing from the constraints of modernity, have actually become a metanarrative. "In other words, the rules of climbing, originally designed to protect the activity from the encroachments of rationalized society, have mutated to become inflexible and oppressive" (Kiewa 2002: 156). Finally, regardless of the type of climbing (top rope, sport, or trad), climbers develop new skills and improve. These developments erode the magic of climbing that was there the first time you climbed up high and looked down. Robinson (2004) refers to this phenomenon as "mundane extremities." Climbers must always climb higher, do harder routes, and push themselves to feel that "altered experience of reality" again.

The negotiation with mundane extremities is the first major theme in the mountaineering literature. This theme suggests that climbing offers an alternative to modern day life. It is not uncommon for climbers to talk about the activity in a spiritual sense. According to professional climber Steph Davis, “An altered experience of reality is fundamental to a spiritual worldview. Perhaps that is what climbers glimpse- sometimes in the mountains, sometimes when reaching deep within to push past physical limits. Many of us have never felt that before, and we will give anything to get closer to it in the only way we know how” (Davis 2007: 85). Ortner found that many of the early mountaineers attempting Everest were willing to risk their lives to find the spirituality that was lacking in their everyday lives. Spirituality was not the only reason though that these men were willing to attempt a journey that claimed so many lives. Ortner identifies an interesting contradiction in the logic of these men who considered mountaineering a sharp contrast to their everyday ‘bourgeois’ existence, despite the fact that expeditions on Everest depend on such resources. Mountaineering represented an escape from the trapping of routinized, boring, and materialistic modern life because survival on Everest depended on being mentally sharp and physically tough (Ortner 1990: 37).

Lyng’s concept of edgework is used to describe why people willingly engage in high-risk activities such as motorcycle racing, movie stunt work, excessive drug use, sky diving, base jumping, rock climbing, etc. Any activity that involves a very clear threat mentally, physically, or even socially may be classified as edgework. What is important is being able to approach the edge, or the boundary, to test one’s

self. Edgeworkers believe that they possess innate qualities, as well as learned skills, that allow them to push their own limits. One of the best tests of these qualities is to put oneself in situations that seem virtually uncontrollable and be able to maintain the clarity and focus needed to survive. Edgeworkers are also trying to discover things about themselves that they believe they cannot discover in any other way. Lyng extends Foucault's analysis presented in *The History of Sexuality Volumes 2 and 3*, which is focused on the care of the self and provides a promising theory of resistance to the limitations imposed by disciplinary technologies. He states, "Because bodies can never be completely inscribed by power-knowledge arrangements, transgressing limits brings out corporeal potentials that have remained unrealized by existing disciplinary technologies. Thus, to explore limits or edges in this way is to take up 'an ethic of self'- a project of self-creation that draws in the indeterminacy of the body to identify new possibilities of being and doing" (2005 b: 43). Young (2005) argues that women do not think they are capable of physical feats and limit their own action accordingly. The concept of edgework may offer an explanation as to how to discover gender possibilities that have "remained unrealized by existing disciplinary technologies."

Building off Weber's observation that in modern societies individuals are disenchanted, Lyng finds that high-risk activities also provide participants with the mystical or magical qualities missing from their lives. In a world of increasing rationalization, high-risk activities make participants feel spontaneous (2005 b: 30-31). However, Ritzer warns us that recreation may provide a feeling of escape from

our everyday lives, but that we may not be able to trust that feeling. He warns us that, “Recreation has become yet another domain for rationalization. Not an escape from it” (Ritzer 1993: 23).

Climbing has been called “the most literary of all sports” (Barcott, 1996: 65) and to research her ethnographic study of Sherpas and mountaineers attempting to Climb Mt Everest, Sherry Ortner read hundreds of books and articles describing expeditions or the experiences of particular climbers (1999:14). The mountaineering memoir has morphed from an exploration narrative, to an adventure tale, and finally has become an introspective story about success against all-odds as a result of climbers reaching the summits. Barcott concludes that climbers are now doomed to revel in the danger they induce to overcome their modernity imposed ennui. His mistake is that he conflates geographical mystery with cultural. In her interview with greatoutdoors.com Lynn Hill explains why she wrote *Climbing Free*:

I don't know very many who have written about that period of free-climbing history, so it seemed important to offer my perspective, a unique perspective. And I wonder if a male writer would have presented that information differently. I think the book is important from that standpoint, because I am a woman, and there are not many female viewpoints on climbing, or the history of climbing, out there. I'm hopeful Steph Davis will write another book on climbing from the female perspective, but right now there's not a lot out there (peterp 2004).

Many climbers are still exploring the unknown, but what is unfamiliar may be internal or cultural. The countermodern discourse may still hold sway with many climbers seeking a sense of spirituality lacking in the modern world, but the modern quest of mastering nature and disciplining the self (Yeatman 1990) is still alluring to

many, as is the postmodern quest of locating the situated subject (Benhabib 1992). This project therefore stands “with one foot in modernity and the other in the lands beyond” (Harding 1990: 100).

Climbing is a sport that has become more open to women as social expectations of femininity have expanded. Steph Davis did write the book (2007) Hill mentions in the quote above, and there are an increasing number of books that reflect the growing participation of women and their achievements (Jordan, 2005; Hill and Child 2002; da Silva 1992). These climbers are doing more than “performing a parody of discovery” (Barcott, 1996:68). The natural world may have few mysteries left to share, but our social world has a great deal to discover about the capabilities of women as well as the ways in which women experience their social worlds. Sport is a microcosm for the larger social world and, as such, inequalities we observe in the realm of sports illuminate the gender order of the larger society.

Theoretical Background

In *Discipline and Punish* Michel Foucault outlines specific ways in which bodies are disciplined in the prisons, schools, monasteries, military institutions, and factories. At the beginning of the 18th century a shift occurred whereby those convicted of heinous crimes were no longer publicly executed in horrific ways, but instead were subjected to different sorts of bodily control. Foucault traces this evolution using a genealogical method and discovers that other institutions were organizing people in similar ways. He argues that at this period in time knowledge on how to discipline and an increase in power reinforced each other. “Discipline’

may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology” (Foucault 1995: 215). In detail, Foucault outlines three methods of disciplining individuals: in “The Art of Distributions”, he explores the control of space, in “The Control of Activity” the daily activities are examined in detail, and in the “The Organization of Geneses”, the organization of people and information in methodical ways is summarized. All of these methods are aimed at creating docile bodies: bodies that “may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (Foucault 1995:136).

Gender is a technology that is strikingly absent from Foucault’s analysis of docile bodies. However, using the concepts outlined above it is clear that gender is a type of discipline: gender organizes our use of space, it organizes individual and social activities, and it organizes people and information. Feminist theorists like Susan Bordo and Sandra Bartky have picked up Foucault’s project and explored the ways in which femininity is created. Foucault’s soldier is Bartky and Bordo’s (feminine) woman. In many ways though, their conclusions are echoed in many other feminist theorists of the body. For example, Iris Marion Young’s reflection on the socialization of girls also discusses specific techniques of creating feminine docile bodies. She explains in her essay “Throwing like a Girl” that there are particular ways in which girls participate in physical activities that produce behaviors that are recognizably feminine. She identifies two important characteristics of feminine

physical activity: not using one's entire body in the activity and not extending her reach to the desired goal (Young 2005: 33). Judith Butler's concept of performativity and Fenstermaker, West, and Zimmerman's concept of doing gender also tap into the idea that gender is the disciplinary product of repertoires of gendered movements.

The theoretical concepts of doing gender and performativity were produced in different academic disciplines, but there are important similarities that can be flushed out so that we can speak across these differences. Moloney and Fenstermaker have done the important work of contrasting these two concepts that consider gender to be a dynamic activity rather than an essential or inherent quality. One of the most striking differences between the two traditions is the language used to operationalize concepts. Butler is writing from a poststructuralist perspective and accordingly her work has heavily influenced disciplines in the humanities such as philosophy and literary criticism. West, Zimmerman, and Fenstermaker in contrast are writing from a sociological framework and have contributed a great deal to the social sciences.

Performativity refers to the on-going process in which an identity is created in the performance. Butler explains, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 1999, 33). A common misunderstanding of performativity is to assume that individuals possess a gender identity that they then perform. Instead, "the deed is everything" (Nietzsche, quoted in Butler 1999, 33).

Judith Butler describes gender performances as survival strategies. She explains, "Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within

contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished” (Butler 1997, 405). Failing to do our gender correctly can occur from our inability or refusal to manage any given situation so that the “outcome is seen and seeable in context as gender appropriate, or, as the case may be, gender inappropriate” (West and Zimmerman 2002, 12), and it can also occur when we engage in activities that are considered to discredit our sex categorization. A central question in this study is if female participation in the male dominated sport of rock climbing discredits their sex categorization; thereby meaning that when women climb they fail to do their gender correctly. Butler’s framing of gender performances as survival strategies is appealing because it highlights the agency of individuals within systems of power, and there is evidence that both Butler’s model of performativity and the doing gender model articulated by West, Zimmerman, and Fenstermaker recognize the importance of agency, resistance, and possibilities for social change. For Butler gender is the product of repetitive acts, and this is also where we find agency in Butler’s theory.

“Agency,” then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. (Emphasis in the original, Butler 1999, 185)

Similarly, West and Fenstermaker argue that individuals can resist restrictive gender norms, and that in doing so “the accountability of *particular* conduct to sex category may thereby be weakened” (emphasis in the original, West and Fenstermaker 2002, 53-54). However, individuals should still expect to be held accountable for failing to

manage their gender appropriately. The question still remains if female participation in rock climbing is considered a failure of gender. But even if women are held accountable for this failure both theoretical traditions suggest that it is only by risking a new variation of repetitive acts that a new gender norm becomes possible.

Foucault helps us understand what can occur when the meaning of a particular performance shifts. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3: The Care of the Self*, Foucault explores the historical shifts in sexual traditions beginning with classical Greek culture, into the Golden Age of Rome, and finally how these changes have informed Western society. One topic he investigates is the “love of boys” by adult men. What he demonstrates is that in Greek antiquity the love of boys was contrasted with the love for women, and especially the relationship a man may have in a marriage with his wife. Foucault demonstrates that the love of boys was important enough at one time to be found in philosophical debates as a valid relationship, in theater, and literature. I am most interested in how the love of boys underwent what he calls a “deproblematization” and a “philosophical disinvestment.”

All the texts plainly show that it was still common and still regarded as a natural thing. What seems to have changed is not the taste for boys, or the value judgment that was brought to bear on those who had this partiality, but the way in which one questioned oneself about it. An obsolescence not of the thing itself, but of the problem; a decline in the interest one took in it; a fading of the importance it was granted in philosophical and moral debate. (Foucault 1988, 189)

Unfortunately, Foucault died before he was able to delve into this point more thoroughly, but he left us with an idea of how gender regimes might change. It is not realistic or even desirable necessarily to aim to live in a world without gender.

Indeed, Bartky warns us that “any political project which aims to dismantle the

machinery that turns a female body into a feminine one may well be apprehended by a woman as something that threatens her with desexualization, if not outright annihilation (Bartky 1997, 146). The task at hand then is explore the ways in which we can still do gender but render obsolete some gender “problems,” such as female participation in the male dominated sport of rock climbing which discredits sex categorization.

Obsolescence of gender problems must come from the individual and the institutions, from the top down and from the bottom up. This is because power is multidirectional. “Power is not a commodity, a position, a prize, or a plot; it is the operation of the political technologies throughout the social body. The functioning of these political rituals of power is exactly what sets up the nonegalitarian, asymmetrical relations” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 185).

Like any other form of power, gender is always simultaneously oppressive and productive. The oppressive effects of gender have been well documented and are far too great to even begin to list here. Misogyny, sexism, and androcentrism organize the social worlds of women and men. What is important to note here though is that women have internalized these messages, and through self-surveillance limit themselves physically. “Women often do not perceive themselves as capable of lifting and carrying heavy things, pushing and shoving with significant force, pulling, squeezing, grasping, or twisting with force. When we attempt such tasks, we frequently fail to summon the full possibilities of our muscular coordination, position, poise, and bearing.” (Young 2005: 33). This is largely explained by the fact that

girls are socialized to think of themselves as fragile. Therefore, women tend to shy away from physical activities for fear of getting hurt, while “boys are taught that to endure pain is courageous, to survive pain is manly” (Sabo 1994: 86). Indeed, one of the most defining characteristics of emphasized femininity is the failure to use our full physical potential. Chapter three will delve into media representations of climbers, the self-surveillance of female climbers, while chapter four will explore the possibilities for expanding the meaning of femininity through an activity like rock climbing.

Sociologists of sport have documented the positive side effects of participating in sports such as increased confidence and self-esteem (Talbot 1988: 110-111), as well as the ways in which sports reproduce traditional gender norms. In the post Title IX era, girls have had a dramatic increase in opportunities to participate in sports and reap the rewards. However, there are still important ways in which women and girls are still not allowed into the traditional boys club. Messner’s work on gender and sports has made several significant contributions to our understanding of how women and girls are still marginalized (Messner 1989, 2007; Messner, Duncan and Jensen 1993; Messner, Duncan, and Wachs 1996; Messner, Dunbar, and Hunt 2000; Messner and Bozada-Deas 2009; Messner, Duncan, and Willms 2006). One way in which this occurs is by treating women and girls who are outstanding athletes as exceptions to the rule. Another way in which women are excluded from sports is in the media coverage. In a study of television network coverage of sports, Messner and his colleagues found that there was no significant change from 1989, to

1999, to 2004, and actually a decrease in 2009 (Messner and Cooky 2010). “Sports has tended to be one of the last institutional bastions of men’s traditional power and privilege. As women have stormed the playing fields by the millions, they have contested this patriarchal institution. But televised sports has continued to juxtapose images of powerful male bodies against sexualized images of women’s bodies in ways that affirm conventional notions of male superiority and female frailty” (Messner 2007: 165).

There have been several distinct stages to the evolution of feminist sports studies. The first phase was heavily influenced by liberal feminism and argued that unequal access to institutions largely explained women’s lower participation rates. Liberal feminism explains women’s lower participation in sports because of culture not biology, but fails to address difference between groups of women (Hargreaves 1994: 28-29). The second phase benefited from a larger corpus of feminist theory in general, and applied it to the field of sports studies. Finally, the third phase is characterized by the “postmodern age where post-structuralist and queer theory are used to theorize issues of gender and sport” (Robinson 2008: 27). Heywood and Dworkin (2003: 51-52) argue that a reciprocal relationship currently exists between female athletes and feminist theorists. On the one hand, feminists need female athletes to continue gaining access to institutions, thereby paving the way for more girls and women to have access in the future. While, on the other hand, athletes need feminism because inequalities do still exist that need to be articulated and framed by feminist theory.

The sociology of sports is useful for understanding some of the ways in which the lives of women and girls are organized to discourage physical activities. However, this body of literature is not sufficient for understanding rock climbing. Partly, this is because much of the sociology of sport is based on the study of team sports. Additionally, many rock climbers consider climbing to be a type of lifestyle, and this led me to the sociology of leisure, recreation, and work. I turned to literature that could help situate climbing within the totality of everyday life.

Constraints on women's leisure have been well documented by feminist sociologists of leisure (Hargreaves 1989; Little 2002; Shaw 1994, 2001) and three findings deserve particular attention. The first major finding is that traditional concepts of leisure are androcentric because they construct leisure as alternative to home life. According to Hargreaves (136) traditional theories of work and leisure assume a bifurcation of time between activities that often does not exist for women. These theories often romanticize the home as a space free from the drudgery of work, while presenting family time as leisure time in an unproblematic way. Traditional theories of leisure tend to either assume that taking care of the family is leisure time for women or simply fail to address a family at all, thereby assuming that all of the obligations of taking care of the family have been met at work. This kind of theorization only makes sense if you assume that working outside the home is the extent to which you take care of your family. That is, these theories are steeped in androcentric assumptions of work, family, and leisure.

That is not to say that family life makes leisure impossible for women, just more difficult. When Little (2002) studied 42 women she explored the negotiations women make to continue to participate in adventure activities. She found that women who had once been involved in adventure activities for leisure developed four strategies to once again bring leisure and or adventure back into their lives. Women prioritized their leisure time. Women compromised by altering the frequency of their recreational time. Some women got creative by doing activities that their children could also do or by doing less physically demanding tasks such as arts and crafts. Finally, some women anticipated a time in the future when they would be able to enjoy leisure and recreation again by planning a big trip they would take in the future.

The second group of findings drawn upon relate to women's lack of resources. Resources range from early childhood exposure to adventure activities that provide skill sets that can be utilized later in their adult life (socio-cultural), to a lack of opportunities or programs designed for women, to transportation to sites of leisure, and finally economic resources. Many adventure activities are highly technical and require special equipment. Because of the wage gap and the expectation that women will provide the majority of childcare, women do not have as much disposable income to be able to purchase these items.

Finally, the third major finding is that women limit their own leisure activities because of self-doubt and fear. One way in which this gets manifested is in the belief that high-risk adventures are masculine activities. Another major way in which fear affects women's leisure activities is the socialization they have received since

childhood that warns them to stay away from isolated areas or risk being attacked. Wesley and Gaarder (2004) surveyed 128 and conducted eight in-depth interviews with women who visited South Mountain Recreational area outside the City of Phoenix. They found that women were often nervous to be alone on the trails, but regretted losing the peace of solitude. Coping mechanisms reported in the open-ended survey indicated that women either choose to recreate with others, with their dogs; they tried to avoid particularly isolated trails or ones with tall brush; some women carried cell phones despite the fact that in many locations in the park there is no reception; and one woman carried mace. The women in Wesley and Gaarder's study struggled with feeling unsafe alone while desiring the benefits of solitude. Specifically, when women desire more visible protection by way of security guards they are also assenting to greater surveillance

Valentine's (1989) research reaffirms Wesley and Gaarder. She found that women perceived themselves to be most at risk in isolated places such as the woods, parks, canals, and large open spaces. The second most threatening locations to women were ones that limited women's escape such as alleys and subways. Wesley and Gaarder, Valentine, and Madriz all point out that girls are taught from a young age to avoid going out alone at night or in these "scary places" because if they do they will be blamed for whatever happens to them, yet the reality is that women are more likely to be assaulted in places that they expect to be safe by men they trust (Fisher, et al 2000). Professional climber Steph Davis understands this and in her book *High Infatuation* she explains that for her dying because of a climbing related

accident is acceptable, but dying because of human inflicted violence is not (Davis 2007:18). More research is needed to understand how women who engage in adventure activities that place them in the woods or other isolated locations cope with their fear or perhaps overcome it.

Research Methods and Chapter Outline

My analysis is based on grounded theory from multiple data sources. Specifically, I used participant observation, semi-structured interviews, documentary evidence, and content analysis of autobiographies and climbing magazines to triangulate the data. My status as a climber, student supervisor at the UCSB Adventure Climbing Center (ACC), the indoor rock wall in the Recreation Center, and as a climbing instructor for UCSB Adventure Programs permitted me to observe the world of indoor and outdoor rock climbing. This data was used to help me understand the responses of my participants, but was not done in a more formal ethnographic manner. Because it was my job to observe as much as possible the going-ons of the rock wall while I was on shift I had the opportunity to observe without impacting the climbing environment. This gave me an “insider” status.

My role at the ACC has also allowed me to become well integrated into the UCSB climbing community and to be included in informal gatherings of climbers outside of climbing sites. I used these personal connections I had already developed to conduct thirty, semi-structured interviews with rock climbers, interviewing twenty women and ten men. Previous research on gender and climbing had focused largely on men and masculinity, and I was interested in understanding how female climbers

do gender. However, I personally believe that because gender is the product of social interactions that men play a vital part not only in maintaining gender difference but in changing restrictive definitions of femininity. Moreover, I think we risk perpetuating our dangerous gender dichotomy if we as scholars assume that men and women are more different than alike. Therefore, in order to understand female climbers I decided it was important to interview men both about their own experiences and their understandings of female climbers.

I began by interviewing as many diverse climbers as I knew at the ACC, and I was able to obtain over half of my interviews in this way. My research parameters were simply that the participant had climbed both indoors and outside, but I wanted as many different perspectives as possible. I tried to diversify my sample along the lines of race, nationality, sexuality, parenting, climbing experience, and age. I began to notice that, while the male participants were a diverse group, despite my best efforts the female participants were, however, a homogenous group. All of the female participants had been climbing for four years or less, were heterosexual, in their twenties, and none had children. In contrast, there was a forty year age difference among the male participants, some were fathers, and they had a great diversity of experiences. I was only able to interview one gay man, but I was unable to locate a lesbian climber on my own. In discussing my project with the fifteenth participant, Teri, she generously offered to help me. She connected me with an online network of climbers through Twitter, and connected me to friends of hers who she knew would help diversify my participant pool. My research went bicoastal and I

interviewed women over the phone from as far away as Maryland, British Columbia, and Hawaii. Finally, I wanted to include the perspective of professional female climbers into this study, and was honored to interview Lynn Hill who not only spoke to me about her experiences in the world of professional climbing but also her experiences as a mother. As has already been discussed, Hill for a long time was *the* voice for female climbers, and I was lucky to be able to include her voice here among others.

After interviewing thirty climbers, I transcribed and coded all of the interviews. I then read through each interview multiple times and coded them for the emergent categories I discovered. These codes were used to produce the theoretical contributions explained in this dissertation. Using grounded theory allowed me to privilege the everyday knowledge of the climbers I was interviewing, and to generate theory from their collective voices (Sprague 2005; Presser 2005).

Finally, I conducted content analysis of two major climbing magazines in the United States, *Rock & Ice* and *Climbing*, to get a sense of the larger climbing community in the United States. Using a previous study of media representations of women and men in *Runner's World* (Hardin et al 2005), I coded for the number of pictures that showed women and men, whether they were active or passive in the picture, the difficulty of the route they are shown climbing, and whether they are presented in a heterosexy manner, that is in a sexually suggestive manner for the benefit of a presumed male viewer (Dworkin 2001). A complete list of findings can be found in Appendix B, C, and D.

This research aims to contribute to the sociological literature on gender by arguing that participation in an activity like rock climbing has the potential to blur or undermine binary gender categories. Most research on gender examines the ways in which social processes that create and maintain gender inequality. This research contributes to the sociological literature by demonstrating that women's participation in rock climbing challenges traditional gender behaviors, practices, and identities. I am specifically building off of Lyng's concept of edgework and Fenstermaker, West, and Zimmerman's concept of doing gender to frame my findings. Recall that edgeworkers are pursuing an ethic of self by pushing boundaries to discover new possibilities heretofore limited by existing gender technologies. The concept of doing gender is vital to this project because it allows us to first determine if participation in rock climbing necessarily poses a problem for femininity. The obsolescence of problems associated with an empowered and strong femininity can only be understood after we can place this form of femininity in relation to emphasized femininity. I begin my discussion of research findings with a chapter on the consequences of participation in chapter two. Here I delve into how the climbers describe their gendered behaviors, interactions between male and female climbers, and possibilities for empowerment for women. My third chapter focuses on media representations. Stemming from a Foucauldian belief that power is always oppressive and productive, I begin with the cultural representations of female and male climbers to explore the opportunities and restrictions available for female climbers when they look for images of other women climbers. Specifically, chapter

three asks what story about femininity is told by the images of female climbers. I also include in this chapter the ways in which the women and men I interviewed talked about media representations. I then transition to explore the ways in which climbing disciplines the body, focusing on the ways in which female climbers talk about how their views of their own bodies have shifted as they have climbed more often. In chapter four, I am particularly interested in how female climbers come to think about themselves as physically strong through participation in climbing and what it means to men and women to “climb like a girl.” I conclude with questions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Gender Relations in Climbing

I think in some ways the portrayal of gender is somewhat similar to portrayal of race. Nobody says this white male climber is doing this or the other, but it suddenly becomes an issue when you're female or when you're from a different ethnic background. It becomes comment worthy. So yeah, I do think there is a difference, yeah. –Nicola

Rock climbing is a male-dominated sport despite the aspiration of many men to “climb like a girl.” According to a *Rock & Ice* survey, 70 percent of regular climbers are male (*New York Times* May 21, 2010). This is for the most part easily identifiable to most climbers, but having percentages allows us to ascertain the extent to which the sport is skewed in gender participation. All but four of the climbers I interviewed said that they see more men climbing than women, although some said different types of climbing seem to have higher female participation. Interestingly, climbing gyms and alpine climbing are often cited as places where women are less likely to be seen, which means that participants felt that women are more likely to be seen outdoors at local crags. Michelle, Eileen, and Ken all raise an interesting point though about the generally small size of climbing groups outside and the ratio of women to men. Michelle said she definitely feels like a minority in climbing environments as a woman, but compared to her male-dominated professional environment it does not feel as noticeable. “Usually, it’s not so bad. I mean, I’m in physics, and there I definitely feel like a minority. In climbing there are often two or four people so you’re a minority of 25% as opposed to 10%.” For a woman who does not know much about climbing but who might be considering trying the sport, seeing

mostly men can be intimidating. Kristen explains that media images tend to only show extremely difficult climbs which make it more difficult for women to picture themselves participating in the sport.

I think as someone who has no idea exactly what it is, if they don't really know what to expect out of it...they look at it as something that's really difficult. Really hard. It's always stressful and strenuous and just takes a lot of strength. And it's like all this really tough stuff. When really, it can be extremely delicate. Really relaxed and really fun.

To be fair, some women are drawn to climbing precisely because it is a male-dominated sport. Rebecca has two sons and specifically wanted to participate in a sport that they would respect, and felt they would not respect something "girly." What is important to note here though is that she was negotiating what she would like as well as what she thought her sons would want, and this is different than a woman taking only her own interests into account.

Phillip who has been climbing for more than forty years said that female participation in climbing has changed quite a bit over time. He said he would hardly ever see all female teams, and the few women he did see were usually climbing with men. From his perspective, in the "early 90s, 1995, sometime in that area it seemed like there was a big surge of women climbers." Despite the fact that more women are entering the sport there are still pressures women face in their personal and work lives that may discourage them from remaining in the sport. Nicola believes that men make more time to prioritize the activities they enjoy, and that women are more likely

to shift their focus away from self-fulfilling activities towards home-making activities.

To be honest, I feel that for my age group, almost all sport activities are male-dominated because the use of leisure time for women in their late twenties or early thirties is not...I think men are more selfish in a good way, in terms of devoting themselves to the things that they enjoy and they just prepare to put time aside, whereas women's activities are shifted to come this way and make your own curtains, it will be lovely.

While women make personal decisions around whether they want to have a family and how they manage their time, it is impossible to overlook the gendered differences in expectations of parental involvement. Women are still expected to do the majority of the caretaking of children and are often held responsible for domestic chores more than male partners (England 1986; Hargreaves 1989; Shaw 1994, 2001; Little 2002; Hochschild 2003). Teri, on the other hand, points out disparities women face in work environments, particularly male-dominated fields. She has a sense that women have to work twice as hard to achieve the same objectives and that it often takes women longer to achieve professional success. Importantly, she understands that these work expectations impede upon women's personal, family, and leisure time. Teri is in the field of computer science and has felt pressure from female mentors in the field to follow in their footsteps and work twice as hard to achieve the same success as male peers. Although she has resisted this and found her own way to strike a balance between her work and leisure time, she reported that she has been informally sanctioned for these choices. She explains, "I have been accused previously of looking like I'm constantly on vacation, which I doubt anyone would dare hurl at a man. Because I show up and I'm happy and I talk about the things I did

on the weekend.” The pressures that women face at work and at home have been well documented along with the benefits athletes gain from participating in sports. Climbing can be an opportunity for women to feel an embodied sense of empowerment, but women must still find ways to resist the dominant expectations. Erica captures the great possibility of empowerment women can gain from climbing, and yet I wonder how many women struggle to be physically fulfilled as she describes.

I love that there are not many things that I can do that make me feel that great about myself and I guess as an individual and as a woman it is something that I can do on my own strength and that I can climb to the top of a thirty-five foot wall. I think that there are many things that can be frustrating to think that in our society a woman is not fully actualized or affirmed unless she is married or has a home or has children or just is socially acceptable that defines a woman. I think to be accomplished in that way physically is one facet of being fulfilled as a person.

The climbing community may be opening itself up to more female participation and leadership, but female climbers will still struggle with the gendered expectations from the larger culture.

The general sense among both female and male climbers is that the climbing community overall has a positive view of women’s participation in the sport. Several participants noted that the accomplishments of female climbers paved the way, leading Mary to believe “I don’t think people are surprised anymore to see a good female climber.” For Kai, he thinks that the competitiveness of male climbers who do not want to be surpassed by an excellent female climber is an individual characteristic, rather than a community sentiment. He says, “When you see the top climbers, the top female climbers are better than 95% of the male climbers, no

question. There is just no debate.” Andy and Nicola both think that generational differences play a part in how men view female climbers, and Nicola thinks that older men may not expect women to be involved in any sports. Andy acknowledges that not all “old-timers” are apprehensive about women’s participation because he has spoken to some who were involved in the “Alpine Club in the 1940s and they had a couple of women climbers who they just absolutely adored that were amazing.” Both Andy and Nicola agreed though that younger generations of climbers are very positive about women’s participation. Importantly, several participants did note that the ways in which female and male climbers are presented in climbing guidebooks gives them a sense of the ways in which the larger community views women’s climbing abilities. This further supports the arguments made in chapter three that the ways in which female climbers are presented in climbing media have larger ramifications for the ways in which they will be seen as athletes.

Social Dynamics

The social dynamic among climbers is very important for most of the individuals I interviewed. A number of factors related to the sport make this necessarily a more social activity than others. Ken mentions how climbing is completely different from lifting even though he can do both in the gym because he will have conversations more while climbing both with his partner and others nearby. Michelle points out that you often spend a lot of time in the car driving to remote climbing locations and you are likely to become friends on the drive. Teri really enjoys the dyadic intimacy of climbing with a partner and dislikes the more crowded

social atmosphere bouldering often fosters. Overwhelmingly, people mentioned the need to trust your climbing partner and how this often either stems from friendship or encourages one. Phillip and Doug often climb together in the gym and I observed many days where they seemed to talk more than they climbed, and they too joked about this priority. Hearing how they both respond to my question about whether they seek out social relationships with other climbers is very revealing. Doug says, “To me it is very important that I have a good rapport with my climbing partner, I mean not just for safety reasons, but for enjoyment reasons.” Phillip explains that the safety concerns actually encourage closeness among partners.

There is a comradery that becomes very important because we trust each other, with the rope and with our lives. We go very, very deep into intimate things and can talk about things that we can't talk about with anybody else. Maybe my wife I should share my very deepest secrets, but I also share my very deep secrets with my climbing partner friends.

This closeness that Phillip is describing is one that he maintains with several different climbing partners, including one with whom he has been climbing with for over forty years.

Climbers are often very supportive of other climbers as well. Many climbers will stop and watch someone on a route and offer words of encouragement when they are struggling and cheer when they accomplish something difficult. Support among climbing partners is very common and can be offered in the forms of encouragement to attempt a route, words of encouragement while on route, beta or advice offered if the climber is struggling, and positive statements when the climber comes off of a route regardless of whether they finished the route. Several of the individuals I

interviewed mentioned being particularly supportive to new climbers trying the sport for the first time and especially to new female climbers. Adrienne explains “When I see women climbing I’m always kind of rooting them on in my head, even though I don’t know them. Especially in the gym when I see girls that don’t climb much and they’re struggling on a 5.7 or something, ‘come on, you can do it!’” Adrienne is not alone in this sentiment, but it was only other women who explicitly expressed being more encouraging to one sex over another. None of the women saw it as wanting women to be better than men, but rather that women need more encouragement because they often come into the sport thinking they will not be capable of succeeding. Mary also describes wanting to encourage women specifically in order to increase the overall numbers of female climbers.

I like to see them there. Because a lot of times they are there with a group of guys, who are probably pulling too hard on things they don’t need to pull that hard on. Then they get discouraged, thinking ‘oh, I can’t pull that hard’ and I want to tell them ‘you don’t need to.’ So I like to let them know that there are alternate ways to do things.

In this quote, we can identify how important it is for new female climbers to have female role-models, like Mary, to teach them that they can climb the same problem differently if needed and still have success. Eileen also notes that women are more likely to approach her because she is often the only other woman around and they will seek out advice and support from her.

Although everyone I spoke to tries to be supportive of other climbers, women report feeling more encouraged by other women. Emily gets a sense from many men that they are more competitive about climbing. She says “I think some of it too is that I maybe feel more of a sense of nurture or comfort around women versus men,

who aren't being negative, but they don't provide that comfort or encouragement as much." Lizzy and Kristen both shared a similar perspective that they feel that climbing with other women is more lighthearted. For Lizzy, she feels that men are more committed to doing something once they have decided on trying it because if they do not accomplish the task they will feel disappointed in themselves and others will be disappointed in them as well. So for her, climbing with female partners is more fun because they do not feel pressured and therefore completely exhaust themselves. Kristen explains that when she climbs with other women they usually climb just as hard as when she climbs with men, but that the approach to the day is very different.

I usually end up laughing a lot more, carefree climbing when I climb with girlfriends that I climb with. And when I climb with the guys it's more about how much we can do in a day. It's good because it pushes me, but it's just very different climbing... With my girlfriends, there's always a sense that if it doesn't happen today, it doesn't happen today. Many women prefer to climb with other women because they can learn from each other ways to climb that work with their own bodies, as well as having more comfort and less pressure. For Simone, however, the drive that men bring to climbing may create more commitment in them as well, and she finds that men are often more reliable climbing partners at her meet-up groups. Whether women prefer to climb with women or men, in reality most women climb with men because the majority of climbers are men.

Climbing partnerships can be rewardingly close, but the intimacy can pose its own challenge for the pair. Teri explains that climbing partnerships have been compared to marriages at times, and we saw that in Phillip's quote earlier when he

was describing how his wife and climbing partners know his deepest secrets. This intimacy can pose challenges for any climbing dyad in the forms of sexual tension or jealousy from romantic partners. Both men and women, homosexual and heterosexual, can experience these challenges. Andy expressed sadness at losing a great climbing partner and good friend but acknowledged that she was looking for a man to have a romantic relationship with and he had been filling that role in a way. From his perspective she needed to distance herself from him to find what she wants. Lizzy tries to avoid any climbing partnership with men who might have a romantic interest in her because it makes things “messy.” She prefers to climb with men who she knows are in long-term, committed relationships, or with other women. Michelle also noted that her boyfriend would get jealous of her male climbing partners and she utilized a number of strategies to mitigate his concerns. She would talk about her climbing partners in a non-threatening manner with her boyfriend, for example by saying they are like her little brother, and she gives him advice on women. When one climbing partner started developing a crush on her and she started to feel awkward around him she told her boyfriend about it openly so that he knew how to interpret her awkwardness around the topic of her climbing partner. She eventually stopped climbing with him because it was not fun anymore. She now seeks out female climbing partners in part to curb her boyfriend’s jealousy and to meet new friends. Simone’s female partner of twelve years felt left out of that part of Simone’s life, and even though she had no desire to climb herself, she did not want Simone to spend her time climbing either. When I asked Simone if this made her climb less she shared a

different strategy for mitigating her partner's jealousy, she did not tell her that she would climb on her lunch breaks. Her climbing partner was a heterosexual woman in a relationship who posed no threat to Simone's romantic relationship, but because Simone did not want her partner to be jealous she found it easier to simply not share this part of her life. Of course, for many climbers the intimacy they experience with a climbing partner lends itself to a romantic relationship. Besides the trust that climbing partners must have with each other given the inherent risk involved in the sport, they also must often share small belay ledges, tents, and long days climbing. Many people describe climbing as a lifestyle more than a sport, and sharing the same passion for climbing can lead to rewarding life and climbing partnerships.

Some climbers find that they want to share the climbing experience with their children as well. Jeff, Rebecca, and Simone have all exposed their children to climbing, although like any activity not all of the kids possess the same enthusiasm for the sport as their parents. Everyone I interviewed thought it was positive to see families climbing together as long as it is pursued safely. Lynn gets asked often for advice on climbing during pregnancy and as a mother. She firmly believes women should listen to their bodies during pregnancy and let go of expectations they have for themselves as hardcore climbers. Like Lynn, most people agreed that it is possible for women to climb during the first few months of pregnancy, especially if they climb well within their abilities. There are several types of concerns related to whether it is safe to take kids to local crags. One is that toddlers will put almost anything in their mouth and as active and curious explorers, they may be difficult to contain while the

parents are belaying or climbing. Another obvious concern has to do with the possibility of rock fall from the cliff and the chance of the child being hit by a falling rock. Most respondents felt strongly that women should be able to continue climbing after they are mothers. An unexpected subject that came up in my interviews with Teri, Aleya, and Lynn has to do with parents who decide to stop climbing together or stop adventure activities entirely after they start their family. Aleya strongly disagreed with an article she read in *Climbing* in which the author, a climbing mother, said that she and her husband stopped climbing together after they had kids to lower the risk that they would both end up hurt or killed in a climbing accident. Teri had met a couple who had made a similar decision and she found it tragic that they lost the rewards of a climbing partnership. The article I imagine Aleya was referring to is titled “8 confessions of a Climbing Mom: An Insider’s Look at the Sometimes-Rocky Life of a Climbing Mother” by Susan E.B. Schwartz (2009). Her confessions are: “I no longer climb with my spouse, climbing as a mom is hard, you need a ‘system,’ maybe moms shouldn’t climb, I don’t believe climbing is safe, I hope my children won’t want to climb, for now, I don’t mind climbing less, and this article was incredibly hard to write.” Essentially, she says that she climbs less often and well below her ability, but that despite admitting to herself that climbing is inherently risky, she still feels it is worthwhile. “It’s all about how to balance our personal needs with those of our families- how to give so much that our children are nurtured, secure, and happy. But also how to leave something over, so our happiness isn’t sublimated to that of our children, leaving us brittle, awful parents” (Schwartz 2009,

76). She also collected seventy-five questionnaires and hour twelve hours of phone interviews with climbing parents to gain a broader perspective. One of her findings is that it is more difficult for women to be climbing mothers than it is for men to be climbing fathers because the women reported a lower tolerance for risk. This was one of the points Lynn raised after sharing a personal anecdote about a couple who had been very adventurous prior to having a family, but how the mother felt a biological need to lower their collective risk and together they radically altered their lifestyle. Lynn has continued to climb as a single mother, and continues to take calculated risks, but she does agree that women may be biologically predisposed to be more conservative because of their need to ensure the safety and well-being of their children. Interestingly, Schwartz's article inspired at least four parents to write letters to the editor, and perhaps more were submitted and never published. Bridget Moix, a new mother to a ten month old infant wrote an enthusiastic thank you letter to both Schwartz and *Climbing* because the article addressed many of the questions she had been struggling with in isolation (Moix 2009). Riko Arensmeier (2009), a father of three adult children, wrote to affirm that father's struggle with many of the same dilemmas as mothers. Lucia Hyde Robinson (2009), a mother to a two-year-old, wrote a dissent letter arguing that although climbing sessions are often shorter now, they are often more focused. She therefore feels she climbs harder now as a mother than she did before. One of the most helpful factors for motherhood-climbing success according to Robinson is geographical location. She feels that living in Boulder, CO allows many moms to easily access both outdoor crags and gyms.

Phoebe Quincy, a self-described “regular-joe mom” (2009) wrote another thank you letter to Schwartz that was printed in the same issue as Robinson’s dissent letter, and interestingly she said that she does not talk about her struggles balancing parenthood with climbing because she lives in Boulder and is “surrounded by über climbing moms.” Although there are differences in opinions being expressed, the unusually high number of letters in response and the sentiments expressed make it clear that this is an issue that is salient to many climbing parents.

The fear of children losing one or both of their parents is based on the recognition that many climbers do die every year in this sport. In the fall of 2009, the climbing world was rocked by the deaths of four well-known climbers, and both *Rock & Ice* and *Climbing* dedicated pages in multiple issues to the loss. In an article on the inherent risk involved in climbing, Conrad Anker explains the difference between climbing and other sports. “Climbing has a dark underside: ours is among the deadliest of sports. We place ourselves above those who chase balls around lines drawn on planks or in the grass, our arrogance born of the fact that death, part of the allure, is omnipresent” (Anker 2009). Anker knows all too well the cost of the arrogance he describes and has personally lost several friends, including his close friend and climbing partner Alex Lowe who left behind a wife and three young sons in 1999 in an avalanche on the Himalayan mountain Shishapangma which he miraculously survived. The year before six climbers died after reaching the summit of K2, the world’s second tallest peak, and one of them was Alison Hargreaves. Hargreaves left behind a husband and two young children, but posthumously faced

criticism for leaving behind two small children that rarely tarnishes the memory of her male peers.

In the weeks after her death climbers, columnists, and social scientists came out of the proverbial woodwork to opine about her ‘obsession’ with climbing K2, about her being ‘blinkerred’ by summit fever, about her ‘selfishness’ in choosing the mountain over motherhood... causing Alison to suffer in death the indignity of having her morals and her mental health questioned in a way never suffered by the men who died with her or by the fathers who have left children behind.

Twelve years later, Hargreaves’ death and the impact it had on her children was still newsworthy. Nicola, originally from the United Kingdom herself, explained that Hargreaves children were originally from the region where she lived and a local news company raising the issue of her “leaving” her children again. Nicola explained, “I was like it’s 2010 for Christ’s sake and you’re talking to their father who has clearly competently brought them up.” While any climbing parent may worry about the very real possibility of their death climbing, especially high-altitude climbing, climbing mothers must carry an additional burden of how they will be judged differently than their male peers if they suffer an untimely death.

Female Climbers Are Treated Differently

Female climbers are treated differently than their male peers in several ways. The judgment of climbing mothers reflects how our society expects women to be the primary caretakers of children. The next few paragraphs will explore more of the ways in which female climbers are treated differently, and importantly, it is not always badly. Theresa notes that when she and Jamilah are climbing together men in the gym are nicer than when she climbs with her husband. One way in which she

notices this friendliness is in men offering to belay for her, or manage the slack in her rope as she ascends the wall, when she is alone or with her female climbing partners. Men do not offer to belay for her when she is with a male partner. Kai explains “Usually it is in the nature of a more male dominated environment and you probably see a more welcoming attitude towards the female climber because it is rare, and we are always looking for good female climbers.” Mary and Carolina noted that men will kindly offer to carry more gear, although Mary understands this to be based on an assumption that she cannot carry the same weight.

Some experiences of women are not necessarily good or bad, but they are based on difference. Teri described walking into the gym when there are only men climbing and feeling silence as she walks by the men. Eileen feels that women get watched more “to see what they’re going to end up doing,” not necessarily in a bad way, but just to see what a woman is going to do. Lizzy has had the experience of being in a group of climbers and having people assume that the men in the group are the leaders. One way in which she has seen this play out is when a stranger wants to ask for advice and they will direct questions at male climbers and “they won’t ask as many questions of the women in the group, because they don’t necessarily expect them to be as experienced.” There is the reality that female climbers are still a minority, but at the same time, women have been achieving great success for several decades now. At what point will sexual difference cease to matter and what should we expect of women and men in the mean time?

Increasing number of women in the sport have certainly impacted the ways in which women are perceived within the community although they may not be seen as equally capable of achieving success. Debates have been on-going regarding the practice of tracking the first female ascent of a route, and the climbers I interviewed demonstrate the different opinions held in the larger community. In climbing different accomplishments are tracked. The *first ascent* is the first time anybody has ever completed a route. The *first free ascent* is the first time anybody has completed a route using only their body for upward progression, like when Lynn Hill freed the Nose on El Capitan described in the Introduction. The *first female ascent* is the first time a woman has completed a route previously completed by a man or men. The practice of tracking first female ascents is debated within the climbing community because some people feel it recognizes the accomplishments of female climbers while others feel it unnecessarily reinforces sexual difference. Most of the participants felt that it was good to keep track of the accomplishments of women. For female participants they often expressed that they could relate more to the accomplishments of female climbers, while male participants expressed that it reinforces the capabilities of women to succeed in climbing. Five participants felt that it was good to keep track now while women are still considered less capable of men, but that the practice would naturally fall away as people more often assume that women are equally likely to complete a route. Finally, four of the participants felt that tracking first female ascents assumes that the first ascent is by a man. They felt that the first ascent, regardless of the sex of the climber, should just be called a “first ascent.”

An article in *Rock & Ice*, “Sex Cells: Why the ‘First Female Ascent’ Matters,” argues in favor of continuing the practice. The author, Colette McInerney, shares that she too can relate more to the accomplishments of female climbers because she can imagine her own body possibly being able to accomplish something similar one day. She raises several important points and the first is that female climbers often feel they must accomplish even greater feats than male peers to be recognized for their accomplishment rather than their sexuality. Male climbers do not face the same pressure to sell their sexuality as female climbers may feel. Secondly, establishing new routes is difficult, time consuming, and expensive. Very few climbers, male or female, establish new routes. This means that the majority of routes are established by men, and have moves that inspire more men. McInerney asks “Have you ever been on a five-star route that is ‘scrunchy’? That is, of course, until women begin establishing lines that offer a different idea of what’s difficult, men will set the standards, and women will continue to climb within those limits.” Lynn Hill, a female climber who has done the first female ascent of several routes, thinks that marking the first female ascent is important as long as it is not overused. The first female ascent on routes that are powerful and require a lot of strength and big moves are important to Hill because this challenges the perception that women are not capable of doing big, powerful moves. She describes her first female ascent of “Midnight Lightning,” a boulder problem in Yosemite’s Camp Four that is rated a V8, as something she is proud of because it stood for twenty years before a woman was ever able to complete the problem.

So for me it was more of a success based on my size than anything else. And women tend to be smaller than men, but it was also the kind of climbing that is, you know you have to catch this lightning bolt hold with one arm bent, way out in space, you kind of lose your foothold for a second and it's very powerful. You have to be probably strong enough to do a one arm pull-up, not exactly that, but that kind of strength. So when I finally put it together it was one of those satisfying feelings that I was able to do something that at first I didn't think I would ever be able to do. I thought it was just out of my physical range because of the big move which was required.

Lynn describes pride in her accomplishment not only of one of the most famous bouldering problems in the world, but specifically because of her smaller size. She has definitely experienced success within male-defined standards of difficulty, that is accomplishing what she calls "big moves," and she has had success doing things in ways men have not been able to do. Recall Dilley's argument in the Introduction that female climbers who have great accomplishments are often accused of cheating because they accomplish the problem in a way that men do not. Lynn faced this criticism after she did the first (female) ascent of the Nose because her hands are much smaller than most men's. McInerney mentions the same problem in her article when describing Jody Hansen's first female ascent of "Rumble in the Jungle," a V12 boulder problem in Hueco Tanks, Texas. Hansen heard a passerby say that it was more like a "first fucked ascent, instead of female ascent," referring to the so-called 'tricked out' beta women use- a function of our different body, shoulder and hand size" (McInerney 2008, 25). Boulder problems, in particular, are often known for a specific sequence of moves to complete the problem. When women approach a problem differently they are sometimes accused of not truly doing the problem. In McInerney's view, it is important to continue acknowledging first female ascents

because they continue to inspire other female climbers and recognize the unique physical accomplishments of women. The bigger question is whether treating women differently with respect to their extraordinary accomplishments perpetuates other forms of sexual difference within the climbing community that are more destructive.

Another codified way in which women have been treated differently is with respect to the rating system of climbs. McInerney (2008) writes that in the 1970s there was a rating system in Yosemite known as the “Bev Scale” after climber Beverly Johnson, and this scale limited Johnson to only being capable of climbing 5.10 routes. Essentially, if Johnson could follow a pitch without falling the route would be rated a 5.10, even if it had previously been rated more difficult. This is more like a steel barricade on women’s climbing capabilities than a glass ceiling. I cannot imagine what this practice must have done to her psyche. I asked Lynn if she was familiar with this scale, and she had not heard of it per se, but was familiar with the practice of down-rating climbs after women successfully climb the route. She recalls how Bobbi Bensman experienced this on several occasions in the 1990s, two decades after the “Bev scale” was rating Yosemite climbs. In 1996 Bensman climbed a 5.14a route in Rifle, Colorado called “Slice of Life,” a route established in 1993, and the next day the route was down-rated to a 5.13d (O’Connor 2008). In Hueco Tank, Texas Bensman experienced similar down-rating on three boulder problems as well: “Serious Legends,” “Sex after Death,” and “The Egg” (Strong 2010). The down-rating of climbs is clearly sexist because when women are able to accomplish something that previously only men had been able to do, it is then that the climb is

considered easier than previously thought. That is, when women are able to interpret the route to suit their own strengths and body type they are sometimes punished by having the glory of their accomplishment taken away by the climbing community down-rating the climb.

Another common way in which women are treated differently in a negative manner is that their climbing skills are often underestimated. There is general agreement among all of the participants that women are often assumed to be less strong, less knowledgeable, and less capable climbers. Sometimes women note a surprised facial expression from male climbers when they are able to complete a route which leads them to believe that the observers did not think they would actually pull it off. Other times women and girls are directly encouraged into easier roles or routes. Mary recalls being asked by a male climber she did not know why the male climber she was with was not leading the route. She replied “I don’t know, why don’t you ask him?” and told me that she was offended by his question. Simone has had experiences where she will be actively encouraged by male climbers to start on an easier route, yet this only makes her want to climb the route that they are climbing. She has experienced this mostly with younger men in the gym who are new to climbing. They will often start by asking her how long she has been climbing, and after she tells them it has been over a decade she then tries to normalize the fact that they will be climbing different routes because of skill. However, the new male climbers will often assume that they will still be better than her despite the huge discrepancy in their climbing experience, and will get frustrated when they cannot

climb as well as her. I asked her how she knows they are frustrated and she said they give her lots of excuses for their climbing. Rebecca considers this a “massive issue” within the climbing community.

Generally speaking they assume two things can happen: they can either assume that I’m a mom-lady who isn’t very good or if they see me climb or I give them a piece of advice, they get extremely defensive and can be quite unpleasant. So yeah, running into the fact that I’m a middle-aged, falling old lady, amongst a bunch of testosterone guys, it can be extremely unpleasant.

She also relates these negative experiences of underestimation to mostly younger men in gyms where they are more concentrated than in an outdoor environment.

Although Rebecca is correct that in climbing gyms the groups of climbers are more concentrated and therefore negative interactions can seem amplified, outdoor climbing is often perceived to be more difficult and technical. Therefore when women are seen leading outdoors, especially traditionally protected routes, the surprise they encounter from men can be even greater than their ability to top-rope a gym climb. Lizzy explains that she really enjoys traditional climbing and that this was the kind of climbing that introduced her to the sport. She feels very comfortable leading traditional routes, but encounters disbelief when men see her after she has led something difficult. She says “If I’m ever on anything hard, then if guys are walking along the base of the cliff and they’re like ‘wow, you did that, really?’ and they ask me like five times and I’m like ‘yes.’” Michelle had an experience of actively being discouraged from attempting to lead a particular route by a group of men. She was working her way down a wall of 5.9s and when she got to the last one the men told

her she would not want to try that one because it was harder than the others. This discouragement really made her question whether she wanted to lead the route.

Well actually, at about the same time, I was sort of seriously considering it because he was really adamant, but at the same time another group of people came up, who were clearly, you know, this was their warm-up, clearly very good climbers, and they were like ‘oh, just do it!’ And I was like ‘okay, I will.’ So I did have encouragement as well as discouragement.

The women I interviewed who experienced underestimation felt good after they accomplished something that men seemed to think they would not be able to finish. They learn from their accomplishments what they are in fact capable of doing, they learn from other women’s accomplishments, and they learn from positive encouragement they receive from men and women. Jeff has two daughters and he has often seen them underestimated simply because they are girls. He believes that the way they are raised to believe they can accomplish anything has an enormous effect on their belief in themselves. He says, “My kids are raised to do whatever they want to do. Every once in a rare while there will be some boy who says ‘you can’t do that, you’re a girl.’ And they’re just kind of bewildered by it, and will just be like ‘well, I’m doing it.” It is too common for women and girls to be told that they cannot accomplish certain physical tasks, and this sort of positive reinforcement plays a vital role in their self-efficacy.

Women feel they receive more unsolicited and unwanted advice because they are women than male climbers receive. Many climbers express that they experience great joy from the problem-solving aspect of climbing. In fact, the enjoyment they receive from figuring out how to climb a route is one of reasons many people,

regardless of sex, enjoy the sport of climbing. When climbers receive unsolicited and unwanted advice, it robs them of the chance to figure the problem out for themselves. Many of the climbers I interviewed, both men and women, noted that female climbers receive this unsolicited beta more often than men. Simone even sees a correlation between femininity and receiving help from men because as a self-identified more masculine woman she has witnessed differences in the ways in which men will interact with her and her more feminine climbing friends. Women feel this as a personal insult and can get really “fired up about it.” Lizzy says “It’s just like unsolicited advice that is almost in every circumstance kind of underestimating my experience and my intelligence level.” Although climbers may have good intentions and want to be friendly, and even to encourage more women to succeed and therefore stay in the sport, their tactic of offering advice is often based on the assumption that the women will not be able to figure it out on their own and that they welcome male advice. This often leads women to feel that they are treated differently than male peers, and can exacerbate sexual differences.

The sexual objectification of female climbers is an expected way in which sexual difference would manifest within the climbing community. Phillip explains that overt objectification used to be much more common to the point of male climbers “bullying” women, but that men “now are a little more careful.” A couple of climbers noted that women set themselves up for this kind of objectification by climbing in sports bras or other tops that show a lot skin. In an article in *Climbing* titled “Welcome to the Jungle (Gym): Seven Tips for Warding off Plastic Predators,”

author and climber Kristen Bjornsen says that women should “dress for no-molest success.”

Wear actual clothing. That means no whale tail, ‘Juicy’ short-shorts, or sports bras that could double as pasties. Basically, the only visible jigs should be on the wall, and if you dyno, nothing should pop out. I know, I know: women should be able to show off their bodies- this is the age of female empowerment, blah, blah, blah...Ah, right, because when a girl stems while dressed like a Pussycat Doll, that’s just what guys are thinking: ‘Wow...she’s so empowered.’”

This is very similar to women being blamed for sexual harassment they face in work environments, the street harassment women often face, and even sexual assault.

Many climbers climb with little clothing on because of the heat, and male climbers are not subjected to the same kind of scrutiny as female climbers. Yet, this answer is too simplistic as well. To simply argue that women have a right to dress in whatever way is conducive to the activity and makes them be able to enjoy the activity without focusing on their clothing misses the ways in which our gendered clothing styles are internalized. Maybe women are dressing intentionally “sexy” when they go climbing, but perhaps they are doing so because when they look sexy they feel more confident as well. Lizzy admits to wearing a tank top and a cute sports bra to the gym sometimes, but she actually thinks that women may be doing it to show off to other women more than they are showing off for the benefit of men. Finally, three different women I interviewed- Aleya, Amy, and Michelle- feel that women do objectify male climbers too and that the sport lends itself to sexual admiration. In their opinion, climbing creates beautiful bodies, and people naturally enjoy looking at beautiful bodies. While this may be true, we cannot think of climbing bodies as existing in a social vacuum. The larger social dynamic of women’s bodies being objectified and

seen as always available to the male gaze will necessarily impact the ways in which individuals perceive sexual admiration.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the role of sexuality in shaping climbing culture and climbing relationships. In my content analysis of *Rock & Ice* and *Climbing* I noted a number of ways in which heterosexism manifests in climbing publications. First and foremost is the heterosexual assumption made in all the articles. The magazines do a good job of not assuming that in the partnership the women will always be weaker, but the assumption that the couples are always opposite-sexed is prevalent. Take for example the article “Love and Pockets: Or What Not to Say to Your Significant Climbing Other” by *Climbing* Editor-in-chief Matt Samet. He says “Things have changed since the old days- more women climb (a good change), and more couples spend time together at the cliffs.” Another way in which heterosexism appears, although in a more subtle vein, is by the identification of professional female climbers through their relationship to male climbers. For example, in a news brief about Tommy Caldwell’s accomplishment of doing a first free ascent of “Magic Mushroom” on El Capitan the report continues by noting “Caldwell returned with his wife, Beth Rodden, to lead every pitch free in 20 hours, 2 minutes.” Although Rodden is also a professional climber, here she is identified through her marriage to Caldwell, an example of what Shugart calls “vigilant heterosexuality” (2003). Fortunately, there is very little overt homophobia found within the publication or experienced by climbers I interviewed. The only example of homophobia I found in either magazine was in a letter to the editor. Finally,

neither Ken nor Simone has ever experienced any homophobia while climbing. They both feel that the climbing community is very accepting of their sexuality.

Although climbing is still a male-dominated sport, there are many indicators that the community is supportive of the growing female population. Although women still struggle to find leisure time to pursue their interests, the close nature of climbing relationships fosters an environment where very rewarding relationships can be produced. Some gendered partner differences may benefit the entire climbing community, and encourage more women to participate. There are significant ways in which women are still treated differently within the climbing community and by outsiders. Climbing mothers are chastised much more than climbing fathers when they die while pursuing their goals. Women experience more unsolicited and unwanted advice, have had their accomplishments down-rated, and are frequently underestimated. The community is still split on whether it is positive or negative to mark first female ascents. As Foucault would remind us, every practice produces liberating and oppressive outcomes. The fact that the community is still debating the role of female accomplishments is perhaps more telling than the debate itself. Finally, many people feel that climbing has the possibility of being a great equalizer among the sexes because each person approaches the rock with their own bodies: their own height, their own strength to weight ratio, their own disciplined body that is strong or flexible in varying degrees.

CHAPTER THREE

Cultural Representations of Climbers

If unacquainted with the individual, observers can glean clues from his conduct and appearance which allow them to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or, more important, to apply untested stereotypes to him.- Goffman (1959, 1)

As social beings, we process socially significant markers of identification such as social class status, age, ability, sexuality, gender identity, gender presentation, sex, posture, speech patterns, body gestures, and more whenever we interact with others, be it in person or in the media. As the opening quote by Goffman explains, we rely upon our experiences to inform our understanding of new situations and use these interpretations to form an impression of the individual. Goffman distinguishes between communication that an individual *gives* in the form of verbal expression and communication that is *given off* in the form of social performances. He defines a performance as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (1959, 15). Those who observe the performance are considered the audience and are active participants in the construction of a “working consensus,” or a mutually agreed upon understanding of the interaction. The dynamic process of meaning construction is important for both the actor and the audience because as actors we all have opportunities to try to control what we give off in an effort to control how others will understand us, but we also internalize at least some of the impressions we give off. These beliefs help us construct core identities that help us situate ourselves in the social world and give meaning to our interactions. In other words, these interactions form the foundation of

our social ontology.

For the purposes of this study, gender is the central performance under investigation. According to Goffman, “If gender be defined as the culturally established correlates of sex (whether in consequence of biology or learning), then gender display refers to conventionalized portrayals of these correlates” (quoted in West and Zimmerman 2002, 7). West and Zimmerman extend Goffman’s analysis by arguing that the concept “gender display” fails to capture the ways in which our audience will always seek to place us into sex categories regardless of our adherence to conventionalized performances of gender. We have the option to be read by others as masculine or feminine, but we do not have the choice to be read as “unmale” or “unfemale.” The sex categorization of individuals is omnirelevant, but the manner in which individuals fit their actions to any given situation to reflect gender is a situationally specific accomplishment. “And note, to ‘do’ gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*” (emphasis in original, West and Zimmerman 2002, 13). Since gender is not something an individual possess, but rather an interactional accomplishment, we are held accountable by the institutions in which social relationships are performed. It is through these interpersonal relationships within institutional contexts that gender as a disciplinary technology operates.

In the introduction, I stated that gender is a disciplinary technology and that women have internalized misogynistic, sexist, and androcentric messages. I also stated that women limit themselves physically through self-surveillance, but it is

necessary to explore the functioning of surveillance in order to understand how gender as power operates, and therefore how gender problems may become deproblematized. I will first explore the methods of surveillance detailed by Foucault, Bordo and Bartky before examining the role of the media more specifically in both restricting and extending our gender possibilities. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with the data obtained from content analysis of *Rock and Ice* and *Climbing* magazines.

Surveillance Strategies

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains in detail the many ways in which bodies are made to be useful or docile. In addition to “The Art of Distributions,” “The Control of Activity,” and “The Organization of Geneses” mentioned in the introduction Foucault dedicated a considerable amount of the book to panopticism. Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon was an architectural design for a prison in which the inmates’ cells were organized around a central guard watchtower, and have another window that allowed guards to see the confined person from the hallway on the opposite side of the cell. This made the prisoner viewable from the two ends of the room to the guards, but the prisoners could not see each other. The desired effect was to produce a feeling of always potentially being watched because the guards’ power, according to Bentham, was established by being visible and yet unverifiable. The omnipresent possibility of being watched induces prisoners to always act *as if* they are currently being watched. That is, the prisoners begin to engage in self-surveillance monitoring their own behavior in case they are held accountable.

Foucault explains, “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relations in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault 1995, 202-203). Importantly, Foucault distinguishes between the institution of the Panopticon and the effect of panopticism. He argues that Bentham’s design for the Panopticon was intended to discipline the inmates into ideal behavior within the institution of the prison, but that the disciplinary mechanisms have been “unlocked” to operate in the larger society. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a transformation in which these disciplinary mechanisms of surveillance and self-surveillance were extended into the larger social body, producing what Foucault calls a “disciplinary society” (Foucault 1995, 209).

Although Foucault did not discuss gender as a disciplinary technology, many feminist scholars have extended his theories to illuminate the ways in which gender functions as one of the mechanisms of our disciplinary society. This therefore means that as gendered beings we are constantly engaged in self-surveillance. When panopticism functions outside of a formal surveillance institution, as was the case with Bentham’s Panopticon, everyone takes on the roles of both guard and prisoner for themselves and others. That is, Foucault stipulates that taking on this dual role is the way in which we come to engage in self-surveillance, but in a disciplinary society, the guards we know are watching us are other members of society. We therefore monitor ourselves while simultaneously monitoring others. As the Butler

quote earlier reminds us, we are punished if we fail to do gender correctly, just as guards punish prisoners if they fail to do “prisoner” correctly. Two key feminist theorists, Susan Bordo and Sandra Bartky, elucidate how women learn to do “feminine woman” from a Foucauldian perspective

In “The Reproduction of Femininity” Bordo writes about three historically localized disorders that have been almost exclusively diagnosed in women, particularly white middle and upper-middle class women. By exploring hysteria, agoraphobia, and anorexia nervosa Bordo is asking how these disorders undergo a transformation of meaning for the women experiencing them, and how disorders that are “objectively (and, on one level, experientially) constraining, enslaving, and even murderous, come to be experienced as liberating, transforming, and life giving” (Bordo 1997, 93). All three disorders were extreme manifestations of the idealized femininity dominant in the particular historical time in which there was a significant increase in diagnoses, and Bordo interprets these manifestations as unconscious protests against the restraints imposed upon women in the effort to be feminine. For example, Bordo argues that the woman suffering with anorexia may not intend to make a political statement, but that we can understand her actions and how they give the woman an illusion of power only if we take into account the expectations of femininity. Importantly anorexia diagnoses increased with the introduction of film and television and when expectations of femininity were “culturally transmitted more and more through standardized visual images (Bordo 1997, 94). Obviously, the body of an anorexic is an extreme representation of the hyperslenderness demanded of

femininity, but Bordo must grapple with Foucault's notion that power is always simultaneously restrictive and productive. Bordo argues that women were not only passive victims to media representations that enslave them to unrealistic and unhealthy ideals of femininity, but instead when the practice of dieting for any number of possible reasons is taken too far, the women come to feel empowered by possibilities normally attributed to masculinity. Bordo explores a number of ways a girl or woman experiencing anorexia may feel in different institutional and social settings. She describes how friends at school may praise her for her self-control; how she feels in control of her parents when they beg her to eat; how she loses feminine curves and her body appears to be more like a male (privileged) body; how seeing her body appear to be male gives her an illusion of safety from sexual violence which is especially important when so many sexual assault survivors develop anorexia. Bordo is not suggesting that this is a healthy way in which we should strive to feel empowered. She is merely asking what the experience means to someone deeply entrenched in the illusion of control. She says, "To feel autonomous and free while harnessing body and soul to an obsessive practice is to serve, not transform, a social order that limits female possibilities (Bordo 1997, 101). Bordo is in fact deeply concerned about the shift in feminist analysis away from feminine praxis, that is how we understand and then do femininity, which was much more central to feminism of the 1960s and early 1970s.

Bartky's essay "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" explores a broader set of disciplinary measures used to create a docile

feminine body. Rather than looking at specific manifestations of femininity as Bordo did, Bartky mirrors Foucault's analysis by examining categories of practices that create recognizably feminine bodies. Specifically she looks at disciplinary practices that "aim to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration; those that bring forth from this body a specific repertoire of gestures, postures and movements; and those directed toward the display of this body as an ornamented surface (Bartky 1997, 132). Bartky begins delving into these disciplinary practices by stating that the idealized feminine figure is socially constructed- it varies by time, place, and culture. Our current dominant ideal of femininity is the hyperslender body Bordo spoke of, requiring women to diet and exercise to try to achieve this goal. Bartky explores the barrage of magazine articles on dieting in virtually every issue, how studies consistently show that women are much more concerned about weight than men (although this is sadly changing as men are becoming increasingly weight conscious), that women visit diet doctors more than men, and women far outnumber men in dieting groups. Women also turn to exercise to discipline their bodies under the "tyranny of slenderness," but that it is difficult to distinguish what exercise is done for the sake of fitness and what is done "in obedience to the requirements of femininity" (Bartky 1997, 133). However, there are certain exercises that are directed specifically at women to address "problem areas" such as facial exercises to erase lines and crow's feet, thick ankles, and "saddle-bag" thighs. Moreover, women are encouraged more to participate in aerobics classes and discouraged from engaging in weight lifting, an important point I will discuss in the next chapter. These are all

technologies used to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration.

Building off of Young's seminal essay "Throwing Like a Girl," quoted in the Introduction, Bartky explores the ways in which feminine bodies are limited to a specific repertoire of gestures, postures and movements. Specifically, we are reminded that most women have a shorter stride than men even when we consider body proportion. Women are encouraged not to meet eye contact by looking down or averting their gaze and women are taught to smile more often than men. "The economy of touching is out of balance, too: men touch women more often and on more parts of the body than women touch men" (Bartky 1997, 135). Finally, Bartky summarizes the imperatives of feminine movement by noting that there are three requirements: constriction of movement, grace, and modest eroticism. Importantly, women are taught how to combine all three seemingly contradictory requirements in fashion magazines that offer precise instructions and encouragement.

The last category of disciplinary technologies that Bartky highlights in the construction of the feminine body-subject is "the body as an ornamented surface." I think this category resonates with most people as we rarely see men wearing makeup or advertisements encouraging men to buy specialized facial creams. It is worth reviewing all of the ways in which women produce a feminine body in highly normalized ways. In U.S. culture, women's bodies are expected to be hairless and the various ways in which women accomplish this unnatural feat include shaving, depilatories, tweezers, wax, and electrolysis. To develop or preserve "good skin" women are encouraged to use a wide selection of products including, but not limited

to; a host of facial cleansers, astringents and toners, night cream, eye cream, moisturizer, sun screen, body lotion, sun tan lotion, hand cream, face masks, lip balm, fade creams for women of color, anti-wrinkle products, as well as anti-blemish. There is special knowledge that women are taught as well such as eye cream being gently applied toward the nose and how to take care of her skin regardless of the physical environment she has been in (harsh sun, dry wind, etc). Bartky calls the arrangement of hair and application of cosmetics the “crown and pinnacle” of these technologies. She points out that women often learn to use a wide variety of instruments that serve no other purpose than producing the ideal feminine body. For example, what other use could women apply their skills with a blow dryer, eyelash curler, or liquid eye liner? Finally, Bartky emphasizes that although the discourse of the beauty industry is that women are accomplishing individuality, there is actually very little room to play with these technologies. Women who choose to experiment with make-up are not lauded, and women who refrain from these disciplinary measures face sanctions as well⁴.

Returning to the concept of self-surveillance, we can now clearly see the ways in which the feminine body is constructed and also the expectations for femininity. These are the standards that women are held accountable to when they monitor themselves or when others monitor them. This in no way means that all women

⁴ Consider Darlene Jespersen who was fired from Harrah’s casino after twenty-one years of employment as a bartender in a casino when she refused to comply with the company’s new “Personal Best” policy that requires female employees to wear make-up. In April of 2006 in a 7-4 full court decision, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Darlene Jespersen, upholding the sex-differentiated dress code.

adhere to all of these standards. For some women it is literally impossible to accomplish the ideal, especially when we factor in race and class (Banks 2000). The ideal feminine body is not only produced by the use of all the products listed above which are unattainable for many women, but it is also a white body. Moreover, our genetic makeup also prevents many women from being able to adhere to these standards. It is extremely important to acknowledge that many women are rejecting at least some of these standards, and that these once very rigid standards are becoming more flexible.

For this study, it is important to point out that although participants discussed varying degrees to which they were concerned with normative gender displays, none of the climbers- female or male- were concerned about their gender performances. Being a “dirt bag” is very prevalent in the climbing world, and has a different connotation than mainstream culture where the term often refers to a man who has done something offensive. A “dirtbag climber” is someone who prioritizes climbing above the comforts of a domestic life. This is often applied to someone, or claimed by someone, who travels to remote locations to climb and therefore does not have the ability to shower or do laundry at the same rate as is the domestic norm. Even at home, many climbers will describe themselves as “dirtbags” because their lifestyle has led them to believe that it is simply not necessary to do these chores as often as mainstream culture would have us believe. I asked Kristen to explain how her lifestyle has changed since she left the theater world and started climbing.

Shower every day. I used to do that all the time. Now I try and do it when I smell bad. [LAUGHS] But to be honest, I’m not always

around showers. [LAUGHS] My clothes, I really only wash them when they need to be washed. I think I used to wash them after I wore them all the time. I don't know why. They were not always dirty but I would just wash them after I wore them. Now I kind of wash them if I have time to wash them.

There are clearly different expectations in the climbing culture and in many ways, being a "dirtbag" is a critique of the consumerism prevalent in the dominant culture.

These climbing community norms necessarily affect the gendered expectations for both male and female climbers, but women may feel these differences more because the expectations to be concerned about our appearance is higher in the mainstream culture (Wesley and Gaarder 2004; Craig and Liberti 2007). For female climbers this may very well feel liberating, but it is important to note that this same effect deters some women from even participating in outdoor activities. I asked Erica if there are any activities she does not participate in because she is a woman and her answer is revealing. "I am fascinated by backpacking and I haven't done too much of that and it is mostly because of my own comfort with personal hygiene outdoors being so far away from civilization. I think that is the only way I have ever felt that I couldn't do something." Although Erica understands this as a personal issue, taking a step back we can clearly see that this falls in line with traditional expectations of femininity. Boys and men are expected to get dirty, but girls and women are expected to always be clean and smell nice. The negative effects of mainstream media on the self-esteem of women and girls has been widely documented (Aubrey 2006; Shaw and Waller 1995; Henderson-King, et al 2001), but I wanted to know if climbing media offers alternative images of femininity and masculinity. The next section of the chapter reviews previous research on media

representations of female athletes before transitioning to explore the findings of the content analysis I conducted on the two primary rock climbing magazines in the United States.

Media Research

Several scholars have studied the media representations of female athletes, and four main findings have emerged from this body of work. Many studies have proved the extent to which male athletes receive far more attention in all forms of media (Cuneen and Sidwell 1998; Eastman and Billings 2000; Bishop 2003; Buysse and Embser-Herbert 2004; Pratt et al. 2008; Frideres, Palao, and Mottinger 2008) from intercollegiate publications to newspapers to internet news. Still others have found that media coverage of athletes promotes hegemonic masculinity and its compliment, emphasized femininity (Davis 1997; Messner, Dunbar and Hunt 2000; Curry, Arriagada, and Cornwell 2002). The sexualization of female athletes (Messner, Duncan and Cooky 2003; Hardin, Lynn, and Walsdorf 2005) detracts from women being perceived as serious athletes, and restores male authority by promoting a “vigilant heterosexuality” (Shugart 2003) whereby the connections female athletes have to men are promoted as more newsworthy than their athletic accomplishments. Finally, the ways in which female and male athletes are described differ quite a bit, as do the ways in which men of color are discussed (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen 1993). According to the “hierarchy of naming” female athletes and men of color are often referred to by their first names while white men are usually called by their last names. Additionally, female athletes are often referred to as “girls” and “young

ladies,” but male athletes are called “men.” In their analysis of representations of female climbers in *Climbing* magazine between 1991-2004, Vodden-McKay and Schell (2010) found that the infantilization of female climbers occurs in climbing media as well. Female climbers were often described as appearing younger than their age and like “the girl next door.” In summary, media representations of athletes tend to focus primarily on male athletes, promote hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, sexualize female athletes, and infantilize female athletes.

It is important to note that while women have made many advances in the United States over the last several decades, media representations of female athletes do not reflect this increasing gender equality. Over the last two decades, Michael Messner has led teams of researchers to replicate studies on both the quantity and quality of TV news and highlights shows coverage of both female and male athletes. The first study was conducted in 1989, and similar studies were repeated in 1993, 1999, 2004, and 2009. To study the representations of athletes in television news and highlights shows Messner and his colleagues studied three Los Angeles networks coverage of sports over the course of three two-week segments in March, July, and November. They also studied ESPN’s SportsCenter beginning in 1999. The latest study identified five themes: the coverage of women’s sports is lower than ever; men’s basketball, baseball, and football are always the central focus; women’s college and professional basketball was largely ignored; there was less sexual objectification of women but they were still largely portrayed in stereotypical ways as wives and girlfriends; and finally although sports commentators are racially diverse

they are mostly men. Shockingly, the coverage of female athletes not only declined, but was lower than in 1989. Two decades ago, female athletes received 5.0% of network news time, but in 2009, they received only 1.6%. Although rock climbing is a sport rarely mentioned in any news, it is important to understand the social context in which female athletes are performing today.

Media Representations of Climbers

Since I began my research, I have noticed more representations of rock climbing in mainstream media which I attribute more to marketing than an increase of interest in the sport. Certainly climbing is becoming more popular, but I believe that advertising agencies are commodifying adventure activities to sell unremarkable products to people who want to feel more adventurous. I call this process “adventure commodity” and have noted it on products ranging from television boxes to allergy medicine commercials. The reason this tactic works is because people who do not climb are essentially climbing illiterate- they are often as incapable of discerning the difficulty of the climb portrayed in an image as they are unable to assess the type of climbing that has been captured. Is it a 5.7 on top-rope or a 5.13a on lead? Yet, these images convey some sort of meaning to many people and if they are not climbing literate, individuals most rely upon other sources of social knowledge to make sense of an image.

We all may not be experts in deciphering climbing images, but we all become well versed in socially salient markers of difference such as gender, race, age, and ability. For this study, I was particularly interested in the story about gender being

told in climbing media, but I wanted to begin this section by delineating between the way non-climbers and climbers may interpret the same images. Most of my participants agreed that people who do not climb perceive climbing to be a very extreme sport, and more importantly that this perception does not match their own understanding of the risks involved in climbing. For example, Carolina, Kai, Teri, and Jeff all mentioned that crossing the street could be considered just as dangerous as climbing, and yet because we all cross streets with great frequency we do not perceive it to be as dangerous. Teri explains this eloquently when she said “I think it’s the case that people’s perception of risk is increased when the number of samples they have to make inferences by is small. And so even if an activity is less risky than something everyone does on a daily basis, if it’s only a handful of people who choose to do that it will be perceived as riskier.” This does not negate that climbing is an inherently dangerous activity, but rather that from an outside perspective it is tempting to think that climbers are all extreme thrill seekers. This is one assumption that I believe advertising agencies are exploiting- by associating a product with rock climbing because it allows the consumer to become a vicarious daredevil.

This research explores the representations of climbers in two popular climbing magazines to determine if the magazines embrace or reject markers of sexual difference, thereby helping to determine if rock climbing is in fact a gender-neutral sport. *Rock & Ice* and *Climbing* are good cases to compare because they are the two most popular climbing magazines in the United States, and because they have comparable publication cycles. I developed my quantitative coding instrument off of

previous studies that have analyzed the representation of sexual difference in sports photography (Cuneen and Sidwell 1998; Hardin, Lynn, and Walsdorf 2005; Hardin, Dodd, and Chance 2005). I analyzed nineteen issues of each magazine beginning with the sets in spring of 2008 (Issues 166-184 of *Rock & Ice* and 265-283 of *Climbing*). The units of analysis were the sex of the authors and each individual depicted in all photographs featured in the magazine including advertisements. Photographs of silhouettes or featuring large crowds where the sex of individuals was too difficult to discern were not recorded. When necessary, I looked individuals up on the internet to determine their sex. The variables coded for photographs were: a) biological sex: female or male; b) for cover photographs: the difficulty of the climb; c) motion in photographs: active or passive. A picture was coded as active if the individual was already on a route (whether they were climbing at the moment of the shot or hanging at a rest) or if the individual was belaying. It was a conscious decision on my part to include belayers as “active” for a couple of reasons. One is that women who are seen at crags are often assumed to be there only to belay their boyfriends and presumably have no interest of their own in climbing, which are heterosexist and sexist assumptions. In Robinson’s study of masculinity and climbing, she explains that female belayers are sometimes referred to as “belay bunnies” (2008b). Additionally, as *Rock & Ice* publisher and editor-in-chief Duane Raleigh explains in a May 2009 article “Better Belaying: Common Belay Screw Ups, and What You Can Do About Them,” it is imperative that the belayer be actively engaged and focused on the task for both individual’s safety. An individual pictured

was coded as passive if they were observing others, looking at something, or posing for the picture. The goal was to compare the frequency with which female and male climbers appear in these two climbing magazines as well as the ways in which they are portrayed. The question was whether female and male climbers are shown in equal numbers and doing comparable things to portray gender equality or if they are shown in different amount or doing very different things to portray sexual difference.

I organize my findings from content analysis of *Rock & Ice* and *Climbing* following the list of variables above, and therefore begin with the data on the sex of the individuals photographed. In the 38 issues of the two magazines that I coded there were 985 photographs of women and 3,100 of men. The average number of women portrayed in an issue was 26 and for men it was 82. Pictures of women made up less than one quarter of the photographs (0.242) and pictures of men made up just over 75% of all photographs. In an article published in the *New York Times* it is reported that according to a *Rock & Ice* survey “about 70 percent of the regular climbers in the United States were male, with about one million people participating over all when those who try it only once are excluded” (May 21, 2010). This would suggest that women are slightly underrepresented in photographs, but considering I also included advertisements in my sample, this does not appear to be a great disparity.

Figure 1: Percentage of photographs by sex category

	Photographs	Percentage
Female	985	0.242
Male	3100	0.758
Total	4085	1

The maximum number of photographs of women ever recorded in one issue was 43, and the minimum was 6. Similarly, the maximum number of photographs for men in one issue was 116 and the minimum was 32. Interestingly, the maximum and minimum for male photographs correspond with special issues that provide seemingly “obvious” explanations for high and low numbers. That is, issue 274 of *Climbing* had the lowest coded number of male photographs, and was the “Annual Gear Guide” issue. On the other hand, the two issues that had the highest numbers of male photographs were both special photo issues (*Climbing* issue 276 with 116, and *Rock & Ice* issue 176 with 108). However, these patterns do not hold true for photographs of women. The issue that had the highest number of females photographed was a “special training edition” (*Rock & Ice* issue 178), while the issue with the lowest number of female photographs printed was an “Alpine Issue” (*Rock & Ice* issue 184). Looking at authorship is important to determine whose voice is being presented in climbing media, but it is important to acknowledge that I was only able to count the articles that were published. I have no way to know how many female and male authors submitted work to these magazines, or the acceptance rate of these magazines. Including all written articles and side boxes in every issue, there

were 191 articles published by female authors, and 756 published articles by men.

Figure 2: Percentage of authorship by sex category

	Authorship	Percentage
Female	191	0.205
Male	756	0.795
Total	947	1

That is, female authors made wrote 20% of the published written work in these 38 issues.

My coding of photographs for the sex of the individual and authorship supports the theme found in the larger literature that male athletes receive more attention than female athletes, and that male commentators on the sport have a privileged voice. However, this may be because more men participate in the sport.

The first thing people see when they pick up a magazine is the front cover, and that first impression is intended to make people want to keep reading the magazine. Therefore, it matters who and what is portrayed on the cover of any given magazine. Women made the cover for 11 out of 38 issues, or 29%. This number closely mirrors the percentage of female climbers according to the *Rock & Ice* survey. However, the difficulty of climbs that women were photographed climbing was lower than the difficulty of the climbs when men made the cover. Male or female, the majority of the covers featured climbs with a difficulty rating of 5.11 or higher on the Yosemite decimal system. But when we look at the lowest difficulties for men and women and compare, we see another difference. The lowest difficulty climb that a

woman was shown on was a 5.8 (*Climbing* issue 278), while the lowest for men was a 5.11c (*Rock & Ice* issue 171). Yet, the highest difficulties shown for women and men were more comparable with Beth Rodden being shown on her 5.14 route (*Climbing* issue 267) and Chris Sharma being shown on his 5.15b route (*Climbing* issue 271). Considering that a female climber did not appear on the cover of *Climbing* until 1995 (Vodden-McKay and Schell 2010, 141) these findings suggest that representation of female climbers on the cover of climbing magazines has improved over time.

Previous research on *Runner's World* has found that women are more often shown in passive stances, rather than active or competitive stances (Hardin et al 2005). I was interested in whether a similar pattern could be found in rock climbing magazines. What I found was only a small difference in representation. There was virtually no difference between male and female head shots (111 or 4% for men and 31 or 3% for women). Moreover, *Climbing* featured more head shots (30 of the female and 109 of the male) than *Rock & Ice*. Women were represented as passive-observing others, looking at something, or posing for the picture- in 29% of photographs, and men were represented as passive in 25% of pictures.

Figure 3: Percentage of passive photographs by sex category

	Active	Passive	Total	Percent Passive within Sex
Female	677	277	954	0.29
Male	2254	735	2989	0.246
Total	2931	1012	3943	

Therefore, there seems to be no significant ways in which female and males are photographed in terms of activity level. Importantly, this means that women were

shown as climbers, spotters, or belayers in comparable quantities to men.

I became interested in the media representations of female climbers when I first saw a Sterling Rope advertisement that reads “Climb like a girl...takes on a whole new meaning. Women climb differently-gracefully, smoothly, and powerfully. Not to mention with style. More women are climbing and that’s why we make great rope for them.” To fully understand the context of this advertisement it is important to note that the “great rope for them” is actually three different diameter ropes in various shades of pink and purple, and that the female climber shown is wearing the same colors. I began my content analysis with this ad, but eventually analyzed all of the covers that feature women, the five articles specifically about female climbers, two “tech tips” aimed at women, a collection of shorter news articles or editorials, letter- to-the-editor that mention advertisements sexualizing women, other letters- to-the-editor about climbing with children, phallogentric letters- to-the-editor, a collection of ways that women are pictured in sexualized or fragmented ways, and finally a collection of advertisements that in contrast to one another elucidate the ways in which advertising can reinforce or minimize sexual difference.

My content analysis revealed several interesting findings. First, as mentioned earlier the climbing community often embraces, or at least excuses, “dirtbag climbers,” and it would be fair to say that the aesthetics celebrated for femininity in climbing media do not include make-up or hair styling as Bartky describes. However, there are still remnants of emphasized femininity that are easily observable in the images of women. In “Sex Cells: Why ‘First Female Ascent’ Matters” the

author shares an anecdote of congratulating professional climber Kate Rutherford on a recent photo and Rutherford responded that she was “just another cute girl in a tank top on a moderate” climb. The author explains, “This self-deprecating talk is typical of elite women who think their sends must go above and beyond to be notable so that they are not just considered eye candy. A man can feel confident the photo of him on a V8 is published because it’s a great shot. Not because he’s selling his sexuality” (McInerney, 24-25). I asked the climbers I interviewed if they thought that female and male climbers are portrayed differently or similarly in climbing media. Andy’s response echoes McInerney’s comment.

I think differently for sure. Usually the female climbers, it’s like, “Oh, she’s a babe, and climbs hard you know.” Male climbers it’s like, “Yeah, he’s tough. He does this. He does that. Climbs without one hand”, that kind of more extreme thing. She has to deal with looking hot. He can be in some ratty... whatever.

These images of female climbers still manage to convey elements of traditional femininity, and female climbers who do not present in traditionally feminine ways, even as “dirtbags” such as having long hair, can experience criticism.

A particularly sad story published in *Rock & Ice* by a breast cancer survivor and climber for more than 20 years, Jany Mitges, documents the cruelty that women who do not look traditionally feminine can face even within climbing culture. Mitges’ story is mostly about how she used climbing as inspiration to battle and recover from breast cancer. It is a triumphant story about her spirit, her husband’s love and support, the support from an amazing group of friends, and her love for climbing. However, she also shares some of the negative comments she overheard and the mental toll they took on her at a time when she describes herself as being

extra-sensitive.

I guess being a “dirtbag” climber, wearing the same clothes for weeks, reeking of sweat, and having greasy hair was OK, but somehow it wasn’t OK to be a bald female climber. I heard whispers of ‘Is that a guy or a girl?’ and ‘Dude, that’s definitely a guy.’ Or: ‘Check out Butch, I bet she’s a dyke.’ Then there was the photographer who said loudly, when someone suggested he take my picture on a certain problem, ‘Bald chicks aren’t sexy and don’t sell.’

Mitges is forgiving with these comments explaining that these climbers did not understand her situation, and that she was admittedly very sensitive to these comments since the baldness she was being criticized for was not a choice she had made and was a constant reminder of her illness. My interpretation of these comments is that she was being policed for her “infractions” of femininity and her (hetero) sexuality was therefore suspect. This is only an anecdote in my research, but is widely documented in the larger culture. It should also be noted that other than Mitges’ bald photo in this story, no other bald women were in my two year sample. The significant point for me is that the climbing community’s gender expectations are not that different than the larger culture’s.

Female competitors were mostly shown in similar ways to male competitors, but I did notice a couple of occasions where female competitors were shown in sexualized or fragmented ways. In an article rating 10 great climbing towns “to live for,” there are two pictures from the Hounds Ear leg of the Triple Crown bouldering competition held in Boone, NC. One picture shows over fifty competitors in line for the competition. The other shows two women from the back. One of the women is in a sports bra, and the other is taking off her t-shirt to reveal her sports bra. The caption of this photo reads “competitors prepare to burn at the country’s largest

outdoor bouldering competition” (Bagley 2008, 76). The photo shows two faceless women in sports bras doing nothing related to climbing. I did not find any similar back shots of male competitors in any articles in the sample. In another article focused on the Arco Rockmaster competition in Italy (Gimenez 2010) there are four pictures of competitors on routes, one picture of a large crowd enjoying the competition, a picture of seven female competitors titled “the female wolf pack, Arco 2009, and one headless torso shot of female competitor Yulia Abramchuk (58). This emphasis on women’s bodies with no head or face shown is a common way in which women are objectified in photography (Fredrickson and Harrison 2005; Archer, Et al 1983). In a segment of his documentary on the representation of female sexuality in music videos, Dr Sut Jhally explains the ways in which women are filmed so that they are reduced to only sexual objects.

These ways of visually representing femininity seem to lead almost naturally to focus the gaze on only one part of women’s bodies. The women of the dream world are fragmented and presented as a number of simple and disconnected body parts... When you think of someone only as a body part you deny them subjectivity and what makes them unique individuals. In this case, these ways of filming reduce women to one part of their bodies and only to the sexual part of their multifaceted characters (Jhally 2007, 8-9)

In the photo, Abramchuk is shown standing with her feet wide apart, chalked hands on her hips, and bulging veins in her biceps suggesting she just finished a climb and is “pumped.” She is wearing a fitted tank top, and the viewer’s gaze is drawn to her hourglass body shape. The subtle suggestions of her climb, her chalked hands and pumped arms, are the only suggestion she is a serious athlete. The omission of her face, like the two female competitors in sports bras, means that she is interchangeable

with any other female competitor, thus denying her unique subjectivity. Moreover, we have no idea what emotion she may have been feeling at the moment this picture was taken. “Women become nothing but shadows or silhouettes, merely outlines; just empty shapes that men can fill with their own desires. There is nothing important and unique inside, nothing that makes them human (Jhally 2007, 9).” Was she beaming with pride after her climb? Was she nervously watching the competitors who followed her to see if they would beat her score? These two examples of sexualizing and fragmenting female rock climbers do not represent the majority of photos, but yet we do not see similar images of male competitors. It is difficult to overlook these ways of viewing female bodies that have constrained our understanding of femininity because they dominate mainstream media, and strip female competitors of complex personhood.

Finally, some advertisements in these magazines celebrated strong, capable female athletes, while others reinforced a sexualized, normative femininity. Several companies deserve to be acknowledged for creating ads that reflect the incredible athleticism of both female and male climbers. A common way in which companies achieve this equality in advertising is by creating ads that are virtually identical that feature male and female climbers. Prana, a clothing and accessory company, runs many ads that show their ambassadors on impressive climbs. The climbers and the climbs change, but the layout of each ad is very similar with the name of the climber and the Prana logo. Scarpa, a climbing shoe company, has employed a similar strategy. For example, I have collected nearly identical female and male ads that

have a head shot of a climber on the top with a look of determination on their face with the words “for lives less ordinary” typed across their face. In the middle of the page is a rock shoe with a paragraph about the shoe, and on the bottom of the page it shows the climber in action. Finally, Petzl, a company that makes all sorts of gear from harness and headlamps to belay devices and ropes, has created a series of ads that show female and male members of Team Petzl on a trading card, and all around these cards are other professional athletes in various sports. These types of ads minimize sex differences between women and men, and draw our attention to their athleticism and the product.

Yet other companies employ traditional ways of objectifying women to sell their products. I use the reactions in letters- to-the-editor and grounded theory to understand the ways in which women are objectified in these advertisements. The ads made by climbing shoe company, Red Chili typically show someone climbing in one shot (it can be a man or a woman depending on the ad), a group of people walking on the beach presumably heading to a climb, and fragmented images of a female climber in a bikini. In one such ad, we see the face of a female climber in one shot, and then the rest of her body is shown from the side and the center of the frame is her bikini bottom which partially exposes her right buttock. In one letter-to-the-editor Tom Deeds from Albuquerque is complaining about never receiving a hat promised to him by *Climbing* magazine. In a tongue-in-cheek manner Deeds is describing how his life has fallen apart since he did not receive this beanie and he mentions the Red Chili ads. “Before that, I was young, single, in perfect shape, and

had memorized most of your mag's lingo. I was ready to meet a babe- maybe one of those Red Chili girls- and whisper sweet Beta in her ear" (Deeds 2008, 16). Clearly, Deeds associates the Red Chili ads more with the "babes" than with the rock shoes they are selling.

Another company who utilizes conventional ways of objectifying women to sell their products is AustriAlpin. In a series of ads designed to sell quickdraws and ice tools, AustriAlpin show us a blonde woman wearing only a pair of white "cheeky" underwear and climbing shoes. The quickdraw ad appeared first in my sample in *Climbing* issue 266, and in this ad there is a text box over her white underwear so the reader cannot discern whether she is wearing anything other than climbing shoes. The text in the box reads "nearly nothing." The woman is shown standing on the balls of her feet with her legs spread far apart so that we actually only see her left leg, and the very top on her inner right thigh. She holds a quickdraw in her left hand, and it would seem that the text "nearly nothing" refers both to her attire and the weight of the quickdraw she is holding. The second ad which I first noted in *Climbing* issue 274 shows a much smaller version of the same woman, but this time we see her white underwear. She is still holding the quickdraw even though this ad is for an ice tool, but in this photo, she has lots of chalk on her upper thighs. The slogan for this ad is "everything will be alright in the end," and it is hard not to assume the company was referencing her buttocks. It was the first ad though that generated two different letters-to-the-editor, and both are male authored. In *Climbing* issue 267 Chris Nafziger from Houghton College in New York writes to express his

disappointment with the ad in a letter titled “Birthday-Suit Blues.”

I look forward to getting your mag for the great photos and articles, and I even recommend your magazine to my students as they pursue their own climbing journeys. That said, I was quite shocked to see an ad with a nude woman on p. 16 of the most recent issue (No. 266). Have climbers truly fallen the way of the cigarette and beer advertisers? What product is she even selling? Come on, people- we don't need to see that (Nafziger 2008, 14).

In the next issue of Climbing Oscar Olea from San Diego responds to Nafziger's letter with his own perspective in a letter titled “Austri-Girl Fanboy.”

When I saw the AustriAlpin ad [p. 34, No. 267], I was shocked to see such a beautiful girl nude, though it makes perfect sense with the product advertised. In that issue's Letters, one writer said we don't need to see that. Well, I don't know if I *need* to, but I definitely *love* to (emphasis in the original Olea 2008, 18).

Besides the two authors having differing opinions about the objectification of women,

I find it interesting that Olea believes the woman's nudity “makes perfect sense with the product advertised.” It is difficult to imagine how this woman would be able to utilize this product in her naked state. Quickdraws are mostly used for sport climbing for the leader to clip into bolts in case they fall before they construct an anchor at the top of the pitch. One carabiner gets clipped to the bolt and the other clips the leader's rope near their harness. Even if we wanted to entertain the possibility of her climbing nude, she doesn't have a harness on to be able to tie rope into, much less clip. The strategies in use by Red Chili and AutriAlpin seem much closer to those that we see in cigarette and beer advertisements as Nafziger (2008) points out.

The media representations of climbers help us to understand the microcosm of the climbing culture. Recalling Foucault's observation that we live in a disciplinary society where we all play the roles of the guards and the prisoners when we think of

these roles as they relate to gender we must take into account media representations of femininity and masculinity. People are literally punished for their gender presentations- whether it is Jespersen who was fired for refusing to wear make-up or Mitges who was called hurtful names for being a bald female climber- but there so many more subtle ways in which we take in messages about femininity and masculinity that do not require someone chastising us directly. Climbing media shows a slightly broader representation of femininity in that women rarely are seen made-up, but in many ways traditional emphasized femininity is still the dominant representation of women. However, we see very few images of women who have short hair and no pictures of women with armpit hair, although both would presumably be likely in a “dirtbag” lifestyle. Using grounded theory, the differing opinions expressed in letter-to-the-editor demonstrate that we are not slaves to media images. The media images often reflect what many people consider “normal.” However, as active agents continuously creating our gender presentations we limit ourselves, and media representations reinforce our already limited perspectives. The next chapter explores the ways in which climbing may create opportunities to expand our understanding of femininity by expanding women’s self-perception of their own bodies.

CHAPTER FOUR

Disciplining the Body

In so far as, when I reflect on the essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world. The ontological world and body which we find at the core of the subject are not the world or body as idea, but on the one hand the world itself contracted into a comprehensive grasp, and on the other the body itself as a knowing-body. – Merleau-Ponty (1999, 408)

Challenging the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy, Merleau-Ponty's concept of a "knowing body" argues that subjectivity is embodied. That is, we make sense of our social world through embodied experiences. This has tremendous ramifications for female-bodied individuals because the dominant gender discourse asserts that female bodies are weak, fragile, delicate, and to some extent, incapable. The concept of a knowing-body helps elucidate the relationships between our gender ideology, our gendered practices, and the bodies we produce through discipline. This chapter will begin with an explanation of the consequences for female-bodied individuals steeped in a culture that consistently tells us that we are weak. I will then suggest that when feminine-identified women use their bodies in ways that teach them that they are in fact strong and capable it creates new possibilities for their knowing-bodies as feminine subjects.

The Women's Sports Foundation published an article on their web site "25 Benefits of Girls Playing Sports." Some of the benefits girls acquire from participating in sports include: higher self-esteem, practical applications to math skills, leadership skills, learning how to take risks, and higher academic success.

Jacobs Lehman and Silverberg Koerner (2004) found that girls who play sports have greater reproductive and sexual health, measured by lower rates of sexually transmitted infections and fewer teen pregnancies. Teegarden et al (1996) found that participation in high school sports may help prevent osteoporosis as women age. Blindie, Taub, and Han's (1993) study of female collegiate athletes demonstrated a correlation between women's participation in sports and the development of a feeling that their bodies are competent, that they themselves are competent, and a proactive approach to life. Stevenson (2010) assessed the participation of girls in high school sports across states by what she calls "pre- and post-Title IX cohorts," and found that an increase of female participation in sports resulting from Title IX led to an increase in female college attendance, entrance into the labor market, and particularly in highly-skilled male-dominated jobs. She explained to the *New York Times* "It's not just that the people who are going to do well in life play sports, but that sports help people do better in life" (Parker-Pope 2010). Both structural changes like Title IX and cultural changes that promote a more positive view of female athletes have led to more girls and women than ever before playing sports. Yet research also demonstrates that girls are still socialized to be much more restricted with their bodies.

Previous chapters have described the ways in which women *do* femininity, but it is also important to understand how girls are taught to be feminine. Martin's research (1998) on preschools reveals a "hidden curriculum" which plays a part in turning children's bodies into bodies of girls and boys. "Schools are not the only

producers of these differences. While the process ordinarily begins in the family, the schools' hidden curriculum further facilitates and encourages the construction of bodily differences between the genders and makes these physical differences appear and feel natural” (Martin 1998, 496). After eight months of semi-structured field observations taken three times a week in five preschool classrooms, Martin identified five practices that contribute to the gendering of children’s bodies: the effects of bodily adornment; the gendered nature of formal and relaxed behaviors; the effects of restricting voices on physicality; gendered differences in teacher bodily instructions; and the gendering of physical interactions between children and teachers and among children. Of particular interest to this study are the ways in which girls are taught to be more restricted in the use of their bodies through encouragement of more formal behaviors and instruction from teachers. Martin and her research assistant coded activities such as raising your hand, sitting upright in a chair, and covering your nose when you sneeze as “formal,” while activities like crawling on the floor, yelling, and running were coded as “relaxed.” They observed that girls did eighty-two percent of all formal behaviors, while boys did eighty percent of all relaxed behaviors. One of the ways this manifests is through teachers encouraging girls to do formal activities during free time such as sitting at a table coloring, while boys who for example played in a relaxed way with blocks on the floor were not channeled into formal behaviors. Similarly, the instructions teachers gave to children were different as well. Boys were usually told to stop a disruptive or dangerous behavior: don’t climb on that, stop throwing, no pushing, etc. Girls, on the other hand, received less bodily

instructions, but they received more directive ones: sit here, talk to her, be gentle, etc. “This gender difference leaves boys a larger range of possibilities of what they might choose to do with their bodies once they have stopped a behavior, whereas girls were directed toward a defined set of options” (Martin 1998, 506). Martin’s research is an important contribution to our understanding of the ways in which doing gender is ingrained in us as soon as the socialization process begins, and it reveals that from the start femininity as an embodied state is restrained.

Fredrickson and Harrison (2005) extended Young’s theoretical analysis offered in “Throwing Like a Girl,” and through empirical research found that self-objectification limits girls motor performance. Feminist theorists following de Beauvoir have contributed to objectification theory, which postulates that girls and women learn through their own experiences and cultural messages that they will be evaluated on their appearances and come to see themselves as objects. That is, women and girls are socialized to self-objectify, being more concerned with observable than nonobservable characteristics. Therefore, they may worry more about how they look than what they are capable of accomplishing. Freud attributed this preoccupation with physical appearance to narcissism, but the authors argue that it can be understood as an adaptive strategy in a cultural context where women’s physical appearance has real consequences for their social success in life (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, 178). There are many negative consequences of self-objectification including having less mental resources available for other activities, more opportunities to experience emotions such as shame and anxiety, and health

risks such as depression and eating disorders. Moreover, their research on 202 middle and high school aged girls indicates that self-objectification decreases girls' motor skills. Because self-objectification is not something all girls possess to the same degree, they administered each girl a "Trait Self-Objectification Questionnaire." This tool measures self-objectification as an enduring trait that girls possess to varying degrees. Yet, self-objectification may also present as a temporary state of being, and the authors administered an open-ended "State Self-Objectification Assessment." Each girl was then asked to throw a softball as hard as she could at a wall fifty feet away three times. Immediately after the throwing task, she was asked two questions. The first was "how much did you think about your skill at throwing?" and the second was "how much did you think about how you looked?" All of the girls were videotaped while throwing the three softballs, and these recordings were coded for the five elements of a pitch (backswing action, trunk action, humerus action, forearm action, and stepping action). "Throwing like a girl" is a phrase that describes a pitch that is only powered by the arm, rather than these five coordinated body movements that include torquing the trunk of the body and stepping into the pitch. The girls who measured higher on the self-objectification measures performed less effectively on the throwing exercise verifying their hypothesis that self-objectification affects motor skills. Their research also suggests that self-objectification may be linked to less physical activity in general, although more research is needed to verify this point. The authors end with very concerning point. "Studies show that far and beyond any actual sex differences in motor performance,

relative to boys, girls severely underestimate their own strength and physical effectiveness. Believing in their own frailty can in turn create a self-fulfilling prophecy as girls' and women's erroneous beliefs lead them to limit the effort they put into physical tasks and take the resulting handicapped performance as evidence of their low ability" (Fredrickson and Harrison 2005, 93. Indeed this is exactly what Dworkin (2001) calls "the glass ceiling on muscular strength."

Dworkin's research is fascinating because she is able to illuminate the complex ways in which women negotiate with dominant gender ideals and their own knowing bodies. Acknowledging that several studies had previously been done on female body builders, she focused on the women she classified as "non-lifters" and "light to moderate lifters." She conducted participant observation four days a week, for two to six hours a day, for two years. She had two research locations based on the socioeconomic status of members measured by membership fees, the types of clothing members wore both when they entered as well as what they worked out in, and the types of cars common at the different locations. One location she called the "Elite Gym" and the other was the "Mid-Gym." Finally, she conducted thirty-three in-depth interviews and hundreds of informal interviews with women at these gyms. In both the "non-lifters" and "light to moderate lifters", the majority of women explained in their own words that they were aware of an upper limit on how much muscular strength they felt comfortable acquiring. Dworkin uses the concept of the "glass ceiling" to describe this upper limit. Importantly, she does acknowledge that the glass ceiling on muscular strength is different than the "glass ceiling" as a concept

to describe the structurally imposed barricades to women's advancement in the workforce. The concept as it is used here describes an internalized form of oppression, rather than a structurally imposed one. However, the concept is still useful in this context because it describes the artificial obstructions, or cultural norms, that hold women back. The fear of getting "too big" or "too bulky" was commonly expressed, and many women "shared explicit fear of and repulsion to female bodybuilders" (Dworkin 2001, 337). This fear is what kept many women in the "non-lifter" group and on a regimen of cardiovascular routines only. The "light to moderate lifters" is a fascinating group of women because they dabbled with the "masculine activity" of weightlifting, but consciously tried to maintain an ideally feminine body (read: not too muscular).

Contrary to the widespread belief that women cannot get big from weights, moderate lifters clearly struggled with their own bodily responses to weights. Moderate lifters carefully negotiated this upper limit, watched their bodies for signs of "excess" musculature, and consciously adjusted or stopped their weight workouts accordingly. So as to mediate an expressed fear of bulk with a simultaneous desire to seek strength, several distinct strategies were used that pushed upward on a glass ceiling on strength yet bumped up against it and then "held back." (Dworkin 2001, 341)

Specifically, the women described four strategies. The first strategy was keeping the weight the same rather than increasing the weight in different sets. Some women stopped doing weight workouts after they discovered they developed "too much" muscle." Some women described "backing off" of their weight routine so that they did weights with less frequency during the week. Finally, some women "held back" on their ability to lift more weight to try to develop "lengthened" muscles that were less bulky.

One of the most pervasive and potentially damaging gendered myths in our culture is that biologically women are weaker than men. We are told that no matter how hard we train we simply will never be as strong as men because presumably women's bodies are incapable of building the necessary muscles. Dworkin's research demonstrates that when women do activities with their bodies that build muscle mass, such as weightlifting, they are often startled to discover that they can in fact build muscle mass. The problem is not that women's bodies are physically incapable of getting stronger. The problem is that being strong is considered masculine in our culture. This elucidates the relationship between our gender ideals and the bodies we discipline. In sum, the dominant gender ideology, that is what we believe feminine and masculine bodies *should* be like, directs what we do with our bodies. The activities we do with our bodies discipline the physical body to have certain characteristics. We create dichotomous bodies, strong male bodies and toned female bodies, by participating or refraining from different physical activities. These dichotomous bodies then validate our gender ideology, completing the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Kane (1995) suggests that when we view sports as a continuum we are able to see that women often outperform men. The "muscle-gap" is validated only when we compare the average woman against the average man, or only the best of both sexes. "We typify all males as aligning with the one or two elite men, and we typify all females as no more capable of beating any man as the elite women are of beating the one or two elite men" (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008, 56). Many women are

stronger or faster than many men, but we lose our ability to recognize these capabilities when we insist on viewing all men and all women as homogenous groups. The accomplishments of the women who do outperform many men are often overlooked and or diminished which denies other women the opportunity to see their own expanded potential as well. These stellar female athletes often are left feeling like they are anomalies in a world of weak women, and worse many feel self-conscious of their strong and capable bodies. Indeed, many female athletes feel obligated to accentuate femininity when they are not involved in sports to make-up for transgressing expectations of femininity. This pattern is known as “The feminine apologetic” (Messner 1988; Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). This leaves us in a bit of a quandary: when women do develop physical prowess they often still compare their bodies against the normative ideals and feel self-conscious of their strength; but when women do not pursue physical strength either because they believe they are incapable or because they do not want to be perceived as masculine they are left with the normative feminine script of weak, fragile, and delicate. Can women be strong and feminine?

One of the greatest mistakes of the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1970s-1980s was that feminism became associated with a rejection of femininity. There were, and still are, many different veins of feminist thought, but the one that garnered the most mainstream attention was the radical feminist branch. To this day, many people still associate feminism with bra burning, despite the fact that it never happened (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004). Redstockings, the New York radical

feminist organization that considered many tools of femininity (like brassieres) more aptly tools of patriarchy, was denied a fire permit and so instead of burning their bras they simply threw these scorned objects into a “freedom trashcan” (Luck 2003). Bartky (1997) reminds us that our gender identities play an important part in our social ontology helping us organize our social worlds. Gender identity plays a role in everything from how we speak to how we dress up for a date. When radical feminists declared that wearing bras, high heels, and skirts was colluding with patriarchy many women felt desexualized by feminism in toto.

My project aims to explain how an expanded meaning of femininity can grow out of a knowing body. I am interested in how women can be both strong and feminine, as well as how this physical strength impacts their sense of themselves as gendered beings. Roth and Basow argue that sports should play a critical role in feminism and physical liberation, and are worth quoting at length.

Although the creation of new body ideals is unfortunate and oppressive, feminists must expect that however one manages one’s body, this management will play a part in one’s self-image and self-esteem given the Merleau-Pontian framework of body as self. We cannot, nor should we hope to disconnect women’s esteem and self-worth from their bodies; to do this would be to fall into the trap of dualism. We must instead acknowledge the body’s essential connection to self-worth and acknowledge that all bodies are constructed. There can be no choice, individually or collectively, as to *whether* female bodies are constructed, but there can, to some extent, be choice as to *how* they are constructed. (2004, 260-261)

In the next section of this chapter, I begin by describing the female participant’s gender identity and how they understand gendered climbing styles before relating things that they learned about themselves through climbing. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on how the female participants came to feel empowered as

women through their experiences rock climbing. Said differently, gaining physical strength and accomplishing goals was an embodied experience that positively affected the subjectivity of the female participants.

Knowing Bodies

The female participants self-identified their gender identities in different ways. In order to help determine how participants viewed their gender, I asked them to first identify where they would fall on a scale of zero being very feminine and six being very masculine. I then asked for an open-ended explanation of why they situated themselves at that point on this gender continuum. Simone, a butch lesbian, was the only one who identifies as a masculine woman, but there were several participants who placed themselves at a three or a four. Beth, for example, describes herself as a three and when asked to elaborate on why she feels she is in the middle she said: “I don’t really like girly things. Pink, hair, makeup. I would say sororities are girly.” Most self-identified as feminine or on the feminine-side but slightly more masculine than other women they know. Michelle explains,

There are definitely women I know who are much more classically feminine than me. They wear makeup when they go to the gym and they do their hair. They always look nice. They are always wearing fancy tank tops and things like that. But I feel like we are all there to climb. I feel like no matter what you look like, I don’t care.

Nicola echoes this description and looked to me for affirmation that this is widely seen. She said “I’m sure you know what I’m talking about. You’ll see the women with the cute sports tank tops and the yoga pants that match and things like that.”

Indeed, I do know what she is talking about. Prana is a very popular brand of clothing that is marketed towards climbers and yogis specifically, and is sometimes

jokingly referred to as the Prada of outdoor clothing due to its reputation as fashionable and more expensive. One only needs to open any climbing magazine and many of the women photographed are wearing sports tank tops and stretchy pants. This is definitely clothing that lends itself to climbing because you can pack fewer clothes if your shirt has a built-in bra and you need pants that will not limit your range of motion. That being said, there are many women who are completely content wearing a t-shirt and cargo pants just like many men, which makes the ubiquity of the “feminine climbing outfit” a clear way of doing femininity while climbing.

Participation in outdoor recreation is often perceived to be a defeminizing activity. This is not to say that women who participate in outdoor recreation lose their femininity entirely, but rather that it is an activity associated with masculinity. The result of the activity defeminizing women can therefore be understood as a state of defeminization, not necessarily a trait. Aleya explains how she can be stereotypically feminine in some ways, and yet she understands herself to be deviating from femininity at times.

I'd say I'm somewhere off center towards the girly side. [laughs] I love dressing up. I like pink and sparkles. You know? But then again, I'm also perfectly fine being dirty and sleeping in a tent for a few days. I'm in the middle but I'm definitely feminine.

Boys and men are expected to get dirty, but girls and women are expected to always be clean and smell nice. The very idea of backpacking into a climbing spot is often perceived to be less feminine. Lizzy explains how to a certain extent female climbers need to let go of some of the expectations of femininity.

I know climbers who are more girly than me, but I think there's a particular amount of not-girliness that you have to have, at least to

venture out of climbing in the gym. And at any point if you start climbing hard, you have to keep your fingernails really short. You have to worry about getting like dirt and chalk all over. I think there has to be some degree of being fine with not being like perfectly made up all the time.

Lizzy is able to identify that a climbing gym may provide a suitable context for many aspects of normative femininity, but as soon as women venture into the dirty outdoors they need to have less strict adherence to these norms.

One issue that came up a lot for the women I interviewed was the length of their nails. Many women reported that they not only grew long nails in the past, but that they also would often paint them. Climbing with long nails is virtually impossible because they either get filed down against the rock or they break off. Moreover, when climbers use chalk to keep their hands dry while climbing this usually dries out their cuticles as well, and it is common for the dried cuticles to rip and bleed. In her book, *Climbing Free*, Lynn Hill explains how she and her friend Mari would examine their hands and joke about needing manicures. When I interviewed Lynn I asked her to explain this sort of joke because it helps illuminate how women make sense of the gender norms and venturing outside of these cultural norms.

That's why it's a joke. Because we don't care about manicures. That's the last thing we're going to concern ourselves with, because first of all climbers have rough, lizard skin. We might even have a goby [author's note: a climbing term for a torn flap of skin] if we've gone crack climbing... So our self-image was not based on what was considered feminine in culture.

Here Lynn is explaining how women can, and do, deviate from the normative expectations of femininity, and can find this acceptable within the dirt bag climbing community among other places. Crawley, Foley, and Shehan explain that “although

one may choose to go along with the pressures of any set of messages because it is beneficial to do so, one may also decide to resist the public messages in favor of another choice, especially if public messages are inconsistent with experiences of one's own body" (2008, 199).

It is worth noting, however, that this resistance to the dominant ideals can still be experienced as somewhat painful. Lynn reported she was called a tomboy often while growing up and that it felt like an insult. She explained

So I was strong enough in my own sense of what I wanted that I accepted, okay, well if you're going to call me a tomboy, that's fine, because this is what I like to do and if that's what defines tomboy, then okay. But it seemed like an insult because it took away from the feminine side of me according to them. Why is sports, why is an activity like that, considered unfeminine? That's the assumption that I made, that most people probably make, 'oh she's just a tomboy.' So that's less than a girl, it's between a boy and a girl, and it's just not fair. It should be encouraged. It should be celebrated. It should be a positive trait.

Theresa grew up with a mother and grandmother who actively discouraged her from participating in sports, and none of her friends were involved in athletic activities.

She said that growing up she and her friends spent a lot of their free time going to the mall. Her socialization into "proper" feminine activities as a girl made it somewhat more difficult for her to participate in sports such as rock climbing, snowboarding, and mountain biking at a later age.

The constant messages out there, that women are weak creatures physically, and it is super scary and risky and you should be afraid. I think you are still impacted by the message and you have to get over that. It certainly doesn't help playing these sports at a later age either. I mean, when you are super young you do not have the fear. Boys tend to take up these sports at a younger age.

The fact that boys are introduced to many sports and highly encouraged to participate was an advantage according to Theresa. Hopefully, as girls are increasingly encouraged to play sports, being an athletic girl will require less resistance and therefore cause less pain.

Men often come into the sport of climbing with more than prior sports experience. Importantly, they often come in with greater strength, and especially upper-body strength. Many people who do not have experience climbing assume it requires a tremendous amount of upper-body strength, and this perpetuates the notion that it is more suitable for men. While strength is certainly necessary on more difficult routes, it is usually not necessary on the introductory and even intermediate routes. Many people even assert that women tend to do better on their first day of climbing than men because they are more attentive to body position and balance. This defines the gendered climbing styles. All of my participants could describe a “feminine climbing style” and a “masculine climbing style” regardless of whether they had ever used or heard these terms before. As I explained in the “Introduction,” Kai was the first person I heard use the term in the gym to describe women’s different styles.

Let us start with the feminine because it is easier to explain. It is very precise and technical, footwork oriented, body positions. It is more aesthetic and less relying on strength but more on the classic split between strength and technique...Guys come in with more strength thinking they have to do more pull-ups. Women might come in thinking they are weak so they have to make do with what they have. If you don’t focus on your feet, you’re not going to get better at it. The consensus is that women come in with less strength and therefore are forced to focus on their technique, such as foot placement, earlier in their climbing career.

Men may come in with more upper-body strength and be able to muscle their way up easier climbs early on. By the time someone is climbing a route that is rated 5.10 or higher they will need to have more technique, and this is where men often find they need to learn to “climb like a girl.” Women who develop technique earlier because of an initial lack in upper-body strength often find that as they keep climbing they develop more of the muscles they need in climbing, and by the time they are climbing 5.10s they usually are stronger *and* more technical than when they started. Rock climbing is an interesting sport because it is the only sport I have heard of where doing it “like a girl” is considered a compliment. “Running like a girl,” “throwing like a girl,” “hitting like a girl,” none of these are positive statements. But men actually aspire to “climb like a girl.” Ben explains that this is something that is not only personally desired, but encouraged by others when men start climbing.

The very first class I took, people said you are going to want to learn how to climb like a girl because when most guys start climbing they think they should just start grabbing and muscle their way through it. Women, when they first start to climb, they are thinking about how they are supposed to do it and what is the technique to do it, and in a lot of cases they don't have as much upper-body strength so they do have to rely on technique. That was proven as a positive thing to me because I was told to watch how the girls climb and I noticed several different girls had put in my mind that they could climb really well. It is important to acknowledge that women do not just enter the sport lacking strength, but many come in with previous athletic experiences that cultivated skills such as balance and flexibility. Many female participants had been involved in dance, gymnastics and yoga before they ever started climbing, and these activities helped prepare their bodies to use these skills in climbing. Erica argues that female climbers often need to be more creative as well. She explains “I would say that

women are more creative because we may not be able to reach the next pull that is supposedly the next hold for the route and so we might find another crack that the guy completely overlooked.” This is especially poignant because most climbing routes are established by men who tend to be taller in addition to often having more strength. Finally, these gendered climbing styles are not determined by biological sex. Many participants explained to me that in order to become better climbers both men and women need to learn the “other” style, and that the ideal climbing style is more of a complimentary blend of power and grace. For many, the goal is to be able to climb difficult routes in the most fluid and graceful way possible.

Climbing gracefully means that the climber is able to do the climb in a way that looks virtually effortless. In order to accomplish this feat a climber must be able to coordinate all of their movements so that the climb looks more like a dance than a workout. This requires coordinating all of the bodily movements to maximize efficiency and reserve strength for only the necessary movements. Andy explains that many climbers get caught up in the numbers when they start, that is with the difficulty of the climbs, but that he personally experienced a kind of switch. Instead of emphasizing difficulty, he began to prioritize climbing smoothly.

It was something that’s just a little bit more like your whole body, kind of working together. Then it’s not just like pulling my arm, or pushing sideways on my feet. It’s like I’m tightening my core, my arms play into this motion as well. It’s a whole body incorporated into this kinesthetic movement that can make it really graceful going up. I had somebody say a couple of years ago when I was climbing in Joshua Tree, and she was like ‘Wow, you made that look really pretty.’ And I was really flattered. I don’t know, maybe some guys would be like, ‘What do you mean pretty?’ I don’t know. I really liked it.

This coordinated kinesthetic movement that Andy is describing takes a great deal of technique and strength, despite the fact that when accomplished, it looks completely “natural” and effortless. “Climbing like a girl” is a phrase used to describe this combination of power and grace, strength and technique, but ironically can be difficult for women to attain.

Female climbers must overcome the self-objectification that Fredrickson and Harrison’s research documents in order to “climb like a girl.” Katie explains clearly how girls and women view themselves from a third-person perspective. She feels like girls and women often think about their bodies as separate from themselves.

I mean, using our brains versus using our bodies as if they are completely separate from each other. I’m talking like, oh, I wish my body did this or I wish my legs would do that. Looking at our bodies as something outside of our perception of ourselves. I’m aware of the need to pay more attention to my body as a whole. I haven’t quite figured out how to do that yet. But it’s very obvious that climbing requires use of your whole body.

Therefore, women must unlearn the self-objectification as well as the fragmentation that is ingrained in our feminine bodies in order to succeed in climbing. The women I interviewed described a number of ways in which they personally learned to develop better technique including: taking technique classes, reading instructional books, watching instructional videos, watching other people climb, and personal experience climbing. Eileen started climbing in the early 1990s before there were many videos available. Reflecting on her recent exposure to these instructional videos, she felt like she had already been doing many of the suggested movements. “It was just like something I naturally did. I think that came up out of just climbing, just having the experience of just doing movement and then realizing what worked and what didn’t

work.” Many people describe climbing as providing instant-feedback on technique because if a particular approach does not work you fall. Eileen has developed her technique from her many years of experience. Theresa, on the other hand, who grew up being discouraged from engaging in any physical activities sought out instructional books and classes to assist in her technical advancement.

When I first started climbing I bought a book, and so the things I would practice were things like not dragging your feet along the wall, not stomping around on the wall... just trying to have quiet feet and how to use my legs more instead of my arms which wasn't hard because I had no upper-body strength. Which I think helped me because I *had* to use my legs more. Then I took a class recently so I was concentrating on different stuff. I would deliberately concentrate on these things. One of the things he was telling me is my body is a little too far away from the wall. As soon as he pointed it out, I knew immediately what he was talking about...So I have been focusing on those things, keeping my body closer to the wall, keeping my arms straight, not using my muscles for hanging off things.

Theresa is worth quoting at length because she really captures the process of learning new bodily repertoires. We are able to understand how a knowing body is disciplined to become a more efficient climbing body. Her description of the intentional focus she puts into learning new techniques is similar to Foucault's descriptions of how soldiers are created. “By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has ‘got rid of the peasant’ and given him ‘the air of the soldier’” (Foucault 1995, 135). Through

instruction and/or practice, the fragmented feminine body can be transformed into an efficient climbing body that works in synchronicity.

Climbing is certainly not the only activity where individuals learn how to use their bodies in a holistic manner, but it may provide more opportunities to be consciously aware of the body. Mary had been practicing yoga before she started climbing and feels that it has really made her aware of her body and how to use it. She feels that her yoga practice has helped her climbing but in a different way. “Yoga actually makes me think more about the separation instead of bringing it all together because it makes you separate them first, the different parts of your body, and then bringing it all together. I think that helps me out with climbing.” Several respondents feel that climbing’s instant-feedback really provides an opportunity to focus deliberately on movement, more so than other activities. Amy explains, “If you were running or swimming you can, not do a perfect stroke, and you’re not gonna drown, you’re gonna continue forward. On climbing, every movement has to be right, to be precise.” Moreover, I think it is very important for the disciplining of the feminine body that climbing builds strength in addition to the qualities historically associated with femininity like flexibility, balance, and poise.

Women definitely gain a sense of strength from rock climbing. Simone and Katie felt strong before, but most female participants did not feel strong before they began climbing. Katie began swimming at age nine and swam through college. This prior athletic experience disciplined her body to have more upper-body muscle, and

made her self-conscious of her body. I asked her if this made her uncomfortable to wear certain types of tops or dresses and she emphatically agreed.

They've kind of shrunk down to normal size now that I'm not swimming, but it was mostly just my lats and shoulders, and arms. They don't really make clothing for women who have developed arms. So I'd find myself shopping at the same store that my friends were shopping in and I couldn't find anything that fit because the arms were too small.

Katie's description is further evidence that our gender ideals impact the activities we do with our bodies, which in turn affect the bodies we create. Katie's bodily discipline through swimming created a body that was not characteristically "feminine," and this deviation was reinforced by women's clothing that would not fit her muscular body. Simone, on the other hand, felt strong before she began climbing, but not as strong as she does now. In fact, she began swimming with paddles "to build that arm strength for climbing specifically." Many of the female participants did notice that they have gained arm strength from climbing. For example, Mary said she has definitely gained upper-body strength and when asked to expand on why that is definitely happening she laughed and said simply "it hurts!" Rebecca and Nicola however do not feel that they have gained arm strength so much as core strength, but this does still make them feel stronger. Finally, women like the fact that climbing makes them feel stronger. Jamilah actually started climbing to gain upper-body strength.

One of the motivating things that I wanted to get out of climbing was to have better upper-body strength and to have toned muscles. I hate just lifting weights. So all I would do at the gym before was just run. I heard other people talking about climbing and I thought I could do some upper-body stuff. And since I have been climbing I am filling that void of maintaining my upper-body strength.

Rebecca expressed really liking the way that climbing made her “muscle” and made her like being muscle. She likes it so much, in fact, she now regularly works out with weights to both improve her climbing and because it makes her feel good.

One of the most interesting discoveries I made in talking to women about the strength they gain from climbing was learning more about how it impacts their sense of their bodies. That is, it is fascinating how learning about the activities that people engage in creates different physical bodies, and how this affects their knowing-bodies. First, I learned that women internalize an androcentric notion of strength, and that this also impacts men. Specifically, women often do not relate their lower-body strength to being “strong.” This is important culturally because we often accept as common-sense that men have more upper-body strength and women are commonly said to have more lower-body strength. Yet, if we as a culture are dismissive of leg strength then this bolsters the already dominant message that women are weak. I asked all of the participants if they currently felt strong, and then probed to find out if they felt strong prior to climbing. Amy, who had completed triathlons and a 50 mile ultramarathon, provides a very clear example of this internalized message in her response.

That’s a good question. I would have to say that I didn’t. I felt competent in triathlons. I’m thinking right now because I’m kind of feeling like I didn’t feel strong until I started climbing. Like that adjective didn’t apply to me... But I think that word strength really feels like it was not only my body was feeling stronger, maybe it was the connection. Maybe my legs were really strong, but I didn’t really notice it until the arms came with them, that whole integration of my body is strong, not just my legs.

Kristen, another participant who self-describes as a “big runner” said she definitely did not feel strong before she started climbing, but just moments later explained to me that she has always had a lot of lower-body strength. Having already spoken with Amy and recognizing this androcentric definition of strength where only upper-body strength is considered “strength” I asked Kristen about this directly. She replied “Yeah, I don’t think I would have ever realized it until I finally got it. ‘ Oh, gosh, this is what it feels like for your entire body to feel strong.’ It’s such a better feeling actually.” Furthermore, I wanted to know if men also internalized this androcentric notion of strength and asked Andy if feeling strong means upper-body strength specifically.

Yeah, actually that’s true... I think climbing definitely has improved my leg strength, but generally I’d say when you talk about strength, now that you’ve mentioned it in that context, generally it is kind of upper-body that’s used. Yeah, like ‘how do I feel strong?’ It is usually my upper-body, which is very fascinating.

Climbing therefore provides an introduction for women to gain upper-body strength and to consider themselves, sometimes, for the first time in their lives as “strong.”

The second way in which climbing altered individual’s knowing-bodies was that there is a spill-over effect that occurs when people see themselves as strong. Several participants noted that they can perceive a marked difference in the ways they use their bodies in everyday life because of knowing how they most effectively use their bodies in climbing. Most commonly, participants explained that they can feel the spill-over effect of climbing when they are carrying something or otherwise lifting heavy objects. The physical activity of climbing alters the ways in which knowing-bodies perceive themselves as capable and strong bodies.

Climbing has given both men and women greater confidence in their everyday lives. Confidence from climbing seems to come from two different aspects. The first way in which climbing gives people confidence is that they often have to overcome their fears. Ben explains how leading a traditional, or trad, route benefitted him outside of climbing.

When you are first learning how to lead trad, there are moments where you get above your piece and you start thinking you are going to fall and rip your piece out. I had moments where I completely started freaking out and shaking on the rock and worrying about shaking myself off the rock so I had to calm myself down and take some breaths and stand there and get myself back into the mindset where I can focus on what I am doing. To me that has been a huge difference that I also think helps in day-to-day activities like going into a room and meeting people at work. Like if you were nervous about it you can think this is the process that I use climbing.

A trad route is one where there are no bolts or other forms of protection preplaced for the first climber to secure themselves to as they proceed up the route. The only protection the leader has if they fall are pieces of removable gear they place along their way. Most of this protection, or pro, is placed into cracks, but some may be trees or boulders that can have webbing secured around them. Placing pro into cracks requires knowledge and skill to be able to select the correct piece of pro for the size and shape of the crack, and position it correctly for the direction of pull if the climber were to fall on it. This requisite skill is why Ben felt afraid of ripping his pro out when he was first learning how to lead trad. Selecting pro along the route is also a skill because the leader has a finite amount of gear. If you only have one spring loaded camming device (SLCD) in a particular size the leader has to decide whether to place it in a lower location or save it for higher up on the route. All of these

decisions are done while climbing and usually when you are deciding to place a piece of protection it is because you need it. It could be that your last piece of pro is a good distance away and you want to place another piece so that if you fall you will not fall as far. When you fall on lead, you fall the distance to your last piece of protection, plus the same distance below it when you take the length of slack in the rope into account, and an additional distance depending on how much stretch the rope has. Another reason to place pro is that you are coming up on the hardest part of the route, or the crux, and are anticipating that you might fall soon. Either way, the decision to place pro is one that is often done when there are ample opportunities for the climber to be stressed. As Ben explained, climbers must learn how to calm themselves down when they are nervous in order to complete their task and to keep themselves safe.

The second way in which climbing fosters a greater confidence is through a sense of accomplishment. Many participants described how success in climbing often makes them realize that they can accomplish their goals. Simone and Erica specifically stated that they felt greater confidence and improved self-esteem from the process of problem solving while climbing. Nicola feels that she has learned how to make quicker decisions and commit to them from climbing.

I get to a point, I know I need to make the next move, I think about what I need to do, and I think about it too much. I spend too long thinking and not enough time making a decision and acting. I feel like I am conscious of it now. So I know what I'm doing and I know to just breathe, decide, get it, move on, and do the next thing. So that's had an impact on how I feel about myself as a person and how strong I feel mentally.

The confidence climbers gain from accomplishing a great climb is something they can tap into in their everyday lives to accomplish other sorts of goals.

An important part of gaining confidence from climbing though comes from actually climbing. The small decisions on where to place your feet or where to place the pro accrue and when climbers finish the climb, they have a cumulative sense of accomplishment. This may seem obvious, but is important to acknowledge because this is where women can miss out on the positive effects of climbing. Women who have been socialized to have less self-confidence, particularly in their strength and physical abilities as I have described, can hold themselves back in climbing. Both Kai and Lynn described strong female climbers they knew who would often do easier routes than what they were capable of climbing. Both Kai and Lynn considered these more personal issues, and yet both acknowledged that women tend to have more self-imposed limitations. There are obviously women who do push their own comfort zones and cross their own boundaries and gain greater confidence in themselves in the process. Yet, the pattern of women holding themselves back we can consider a glass ceiling on women's climbing efforts reminiscent of Dworkin's research.

This chapter has examined the ways in which the dominant feminine discourse disciplines the bodies of girls and women to be weak, and the ways in which rock climbing challenges these norms. From an early age, girls are encouraged to use their bodies in more confined ways, and learn to see themselves as fragmented objects from a third-person perspective. This self-objectification affects the ways in which girls and women use their bodies, and produces fragmented actions that correspond to the ways women see themselves as a collection of parts. Women are also taught that they cannot and should not be too strong, and when embodied

experience demonstrates that female bodies can gain muscle, women hold themselves back to construct weaker bodies that match the cultural expectations. Instead of acknowledging the athletic accomplishments of women and men as existing on a continuum, we often presume that all men are stronger than all women. Moreover, when women do excel at sports and or have muscular bodies they often have a heightened way of performing femininity to apologize for their gender infractions. Climbing however challenges some of these dominant expectations of femininity. To participate, especially in outdoor climbing, female climbers must have a more flexible expectation of femininity. One of the great ironies of rock climbing is that it is perceived to be a sport that lends itself more to masculinity because of the assumption that it requires a great deal of upper body strength, and yet actual climbers often aspire to “climb like a girl.” This assumption highlights the androcentric notion of strength prevalent in our culture, and typifies the underestimation we generally have of women’s athletic abilities. The gendered climbing styles reflect the ways in which both women and men generally think of their bodies. That is, women often enter the sport with less upper-body strength because of the ways they have disciplined their bodies thus far, and are therefore forced to develop more technique at an earlier time. But even this outcome of “climbing like a girl” does not come “naturally.” Women must unlearn the self-objectification and fragmentation ingrained in them already. Men, on the other hand, must learn to be more flexible and technique oriented instead of trying to muscle their way up every route. They often enter the sport with more

upper-body strength and have an easier time using their bodies in holistic ways, but these assets will only get them so far.

Practice and instruction provide opportunities to rediscipline our bodies, and this is true for both men and women. The consequences of redisciplining our bodies can greatly impact the ways in which our knowing bodies understand what our gendered bodies can and should do. Women may come to think of themselves as strong for the first time in their lives, and this spills-over into other arenas of their lives. Importantly, the strength women gain from climbing may be greater core and upper-body strength, but it is gained from pulling their own weight. Climbing advantage comes from a strength-to-weight ratio, and this gives women an advantage. If women tend to be smaller and lighter than men, they do not need to develop huge muscles to be able to pull themselves up. This may make climbing a more suitable activity for redefining femininity than other sports because women will still gain a sense of being strong while not falling into the “feminine apologetic.” Once women gain a sense of being strong many may find it an enticing and deliberate pursuit being “muscle” as Rebecca has. All of the climbers expressed gaining confidence from climbing, and this may have greater impacts on women than men. In a world where women are consistently told they are weaker and less capable, to feel an embodied sense of empowerment avoids the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy and fosters a new knowing-body for the feminine subject.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

What I am trying to do is grasp the implicit systems which determine our most familiar behavior without our knowing it. I am trying to find their origin, to show their formation, the constraint they impose upon us. I am therefore trying to place myself at a distance from them and to show how one could escape. - Foucault (Simon, 1971)

The goal of my research was to explore specific ways in which the feminine body could be redisciplined to signify independence, strength, assertiveness, and proficiency. Feminist scholars before me have done the important work of documenting the historical and current status of women and the social meanings ascribed to femininity. Most of the literature explores various ways in which gender operates as a system that maintains gender inequality. To truly change our gender regime (Connell 1987) we must not only document the ways in which gender confines us, but also how we might do gender differently. Staggenborg (1995) identified three primary social movement outcomes: political and policy, mobilization, and cultural outcomes. Taylor and Van Willigen (1996) argue that gender cannot be considered part of the cultural changes of a social movement because this approach fails to see how gender itself is an institution. Taylor (1996) explains further “Gender is an institution that serves its own particular purpose- just like other core institutions such as the family, religion, the economy, and politics.” Resistance to gender expectations has manifested through institutional acts of resistance such as Title IX, through collective action, and through everyday acts of

resistance. Participation in the sport of rock climbing offers the opportunity to challenge gender norms through everyday acts of athleticism and resistance.

Central to this study is an exploration of the embodied state of femininity in order to consider how femininity might be done differently. I have been fascinated by the feminist poststructuralist analysis of the feminine subject for years, but it always bothered me that the feminine is accomplished through eating disorders, hysteria, hypervigilance regarding our personal appearance, and a restricted use of our bodily capabilities. I know that institutional policy changes are vital to the advancement of women, but I also learned from these scholars that changes must be embodied as well. My hope was to explore one possible activity that offered possibilities for redefining the feminine body in a more positive and empowered manner.

I have argued that rock climbing is an activity through which the rediscipling of the feminine body is possible. In order to promote this contention I began with an analysis of the current state of gender relations found in the sport. Rock climbing is a male-dominated sport, although women are participating more than ever before. The climbing community is generally very positive on the increased participation of women, and younger climbers seem to be more welcoming than older generations. Climbing fosters an environment that is both social and supportive. These characteristics often lead climbers to have intense partnerships and as a matter of course, they trust each other with their lives repeatedly. I believe that this creates a condition in which climbers are more likely to see their climbing partner as a unique

and talented subject, and for women this can be a rare opportunity. Women are often considered a homogenous group, and the descriptions tend to be very limiting. Our prescriptions of masculinity and femininity are equally myopic, although in the case of femininity, the limited script available is rooted in weakness and nurturing. That is, women as a group are defined by physical inadequacy compared to men, but we are acknowledged for being excellent care-takers. Interestingly, one of the few ways in which women are commonly acknowledged for being strong is in childbirth. The data suggests that to participate in an activity that cultivates an appreciation for the climbing partner's uniqueness, talent, and proficiency can be incredibly rewarding for anybody, but provide a great opportunity for women.

Even though climbing has the potential to see women in non-traditional ways-read capable, strong, talented, skillful, etc. - women are still treated differently within the sport. One of the ways in which women are treated differently is the higher expectation of women to refrain from any dangerous activity if they are mothers. Increasingly, there is acknowledgement that men need to be more cautious as well with respect to their fathering responsibilities, but the critique of mothers who have died still is much greater than that of fathers. Women often describe being the only woman in a climbing environment and that they can feel the difference. That is, they can feel that they are being treated differently. From fairly benign or even friendly disparities such as offering a belay or carrying more gear to condescending and insulting behaviors such as directing all questions to men in the group and asking why men are not leading women describe being treated differently. There is

consensus that women are often underestimated and receive more unwanted and unsolicited advice than men. One of the obvious ways in which the sexual difference issue is actively negotiated is the debate surrounding the practice of marking first female ascents. The positive aspect of the practice is that it highlights the accomplishments of women, especially with respect to certain climbs or ratings that some men previously thought a woman would never be able to climb. The negative side is that it reinforces sexual difference. Personally, I think that sexual difference continues to structure our social world and therefore the positive outcomes of marking first female ascents outweigh the negative, and the climbing world needs to acknowledge the ways in which sexism still manifests within the community. The practice of down-rating climbs after women are able to complete the route is a blatant devaluation of women's abilities, and is evidence enough for me that we need to acknowledge the accomplishments of women.

The fact that women are treated differently in the climbing community does not negate the possibility for redisciplining the feminine body. Women are treated differently in virtually every environment, and therefore illuminating the ways in which femininity can be redefined within a context of sexual difference is an even more valuable sociological contribution. Chapter two explored the current state of gender relations as the participants in this research experience them. Chapter three transitioned to explore the ways in which gender is portrayed in climbing media. These two chapters together provide a more complete analysis of gender in climbing because we are able to compare and contrast the individual experiences of thirty

climbers with the ways in which gender is represented and discussed at the institutional level of the media.

My content analysis reveals that men do receive more attention and have a privileged voice within climbing media, but this can be understood as a reflection of the male-dominated climbing community. I found little difference between the ways in which women were represented in terms of number of images, activity level in the photograph, and cover photographs. The differences I discovered were that women are published less frequently than male authors, and that cover photographs for women tend to show them climbing less difficult routes. With respect to authorship, I have no way to know how many female authors submitted work that was not published. It could be that the magazines publish as much as they can by women, but simply do not receive female authored work. Internal analysis by each magazine would be needed to learn the submission vs. publishing rate for women and men. Women shown on easier climbs can have a positive and a negative interpretation. On the one hand, most women do climb easy to moderate routes more than they climb extremely difficult routes. Depicting women on climbs they could imagine themselves climbing can have a positive effect of inspiring female climbers. On the other hand, most men also climb easy to moderate routes, and yet men are more frequently shown on extremely difficult routes. This could perpetuate the idea that men are better climbers in toto.

Climbing media's representation of femininity was less rigid than mainstream media representation, but it certainly was not heterogeneous. Women were not

portrayed wearing make-up or in restrictive clothing. Yet, almost all of the women pictured have long hair, and most are wearing fitted sportswear that shows off their athletic bodies. Where are the women climbing in old, baggy cargo pants and t-shirts? Where are the extremely muscular, bigger women who could not be described as petite and toned? Why are there not images of women climbing with lots of tattoos or body hair? There are so many more possible representations of women than we actually find in these two magazines. The climbing media therefore reinforces our normative ideals of femininity even though it is slightly less “made up” than representations in mainstream media.

My last substantive chapter explored the ways in which the female body could be redisciplined as an empowered knowing body. Empirical evidence demonstrates that the self-objectification that women and girls are more likely to do than their male peers negatively impacts their motor skills. Moreover, outside of any actual observed motor skill difference between girls and boys, girls are far more likely to underestimate their own physical strength and ability. This prior research is very important for demonstrating the ways in which girls and women internalize messages about the feminine body and the way these messages physically impede the full use of our bodies. An important part of this process is that women hold themselves back to create bodies that are consistent with the feminine ideal. The feminine ideal body is not muscular, but rather, toned. In order to accomplish a toned body women must do certain exercises with their bodies and abstain from others. Finally, research

suggests that women strong resist embodying “strength” if it contradicts “feminine.” This is where my research contributes to the sociological literature on gender.

My research demonstrates that women can rediscipline their knowing bodies through an activity like rock climbing and that this has a positive effect on how they see themselves as social agents. Many women entered the sports with very little upper-body strength, and because of our culture’s androcentric notion of “strength”, they therefore did not consider themselves strong. Through participation in the sport, women often developed more core and upper-body strength, but they also developed more technique earlier than their male peers. “Climbing like a girl” is perceived as the ideal way to climb because of the focus on technique. What is crucial and rarely acknowledged is that women develop more strength as they participate and that “climbing like a girl” is about having both the strength and precision to make a climb look effortless. Climbing is a venue that celebrates skills traditionally associated with femininity such as flexibility, but because it is assumed to require a lot of upper-body strength it is not sport typed as feminine. This creates an ideal environment to combine qualities traditionally associated with both femininity and masculinity, and as individuals excel in climbing, they discipline their bodies to cultivate both sets of characteristics. This is why climbing offers important opportunities to redefine our knowing bodies with respect to our gender. Furthermore, feeling strong from climbing has a spill-over effect whereby women come to see themselves as more capable in their everyday lives. Women I interviewed described feeling both physically and socially stronger in their everyday lives, and more empowered.

Climbing is an ideal activity for redefining the feminine ideal and redisciplining the feminine knowing body. In addition to combining traits traditionally associated with masculinity and femininity, climbing does not necessarily develop women's bodies in ways that they resist. That is, women do gain physical strength and come to see themselves as strong from climbing, but they do not necessarily develop bulging muscles that are considered masculine. Women therefore do not describe feeling any sort of contradiction with their climbing bodies and the feminine ideal, but they do describe the positive outcomes. This means that climbing is an activity that provides women the opportunity to feel strong and empowered in their bodies and their everyday lives, but does not promote the feminine apologetic. When women feel they have transgressed gender norms they often hold themselves back or somehow try to compensate for their gender infraction. Climbing does not prompt women to feel they have transgressed any gender norms, and yet the feminine body is now known by the subject as a competent, strong, and capable body.

Women still do hold themselves back and struggle with a glass ceiling of climbing capabilities. This is important to acknowledge for a number of reasons. First, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which women limit themselves to resist overly simplistic arguments that blame men entirely for women's inferior social status. Secondly, when we acknowledge that women hold themselves back we can then ask why women limit their own potential. This is a much more fruitful line of inquiry because we can then identify the messages women and girls receive that ingrain in them that they are not as physically capable as men and boys. Finally, once

we have identified these messages we can promote new messages. The climbing media can play an important part in this process by continuing the positive trend of increasing representation of female climbers, increasing the number of articles authored by women, publishing more articles on female climbers and issues women find interesting, and by showing more comparable cover photographs. There should be more men on the covers doing easy to moderate routes and there should be more photographs of women doing routes that are more difficult.

In this study, I have identified one specific activity for rediscipling the feminine knowing body, but of course, there are questions I have left unanswered. Future research should explore other activities that offer similar possibilities and identify the characteristics of the activity that lend it to rediscipling the feminine body. There is a strong suggestion that these positive effects would be even greater if taught to girls at a younger age. I would propose a longitudinal study of children that measured their sense of self-objectification, self-efficacy, perception of personal strength, and confidence before they were introduced to climbing. The study could continue observation of these same children as they are learning to climb, and follow-up measures after climbing experiences to track the effects of climbing. In addition to having a greater impact on girls when introduced earlier, kids also have a higher strength to weight ration which makes climbing easier. This physical advantage of childhood could further level the playing field between boys and girls.

Finally, I would encourage more thorough and queer friendly examination of the climbing community. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT)

individuals are a minority group in any community, but I suspect there are more LGBT rock climbers than climbing media and my sample suggest. I tried to find as many diverse individuals to interview as possible, including sexual diversity, but was only able to locate one gay man and one lesbian to interview. I have friends who live in San Francisco who frequent climbing gyms and have reported to me that there is a lot more diversity in gyms there than here in Santa Barbara. This does not surprise me, and suggests that doing research in a community that has a flourishing LGBT community would be necessary to really capture the sexual diversity I think is necessary.

As I wrap up this research project, I am encouraged by my findings and hope that research in this vein continues. As feminist scholars we must continue to document the ways in which women are subjugated, but also I think it is our responsibility to suggest alternatives and give women, men, and genderqueers hope that we can organize society differently. It is vital we offer critical analysis that enriches the minds of individuals, and embodied analysis that offers expanded possibilities to our knowing, gendered bodies.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Guide for Rock Climbing Participants

The purpose of my research is to learn more about the experiences of female and male rock climbers. In particular I am interested in the gendered experiences of climbing and the perception and feeling of risk associated with the sport. I will be asking you questions about your childhood, how you got into the sport of rock climbing, and your current involvement. There is no right or wrong answer because I am only interested in your experiences.

The interview should last under two hours. Your responses will be recorded digitally but are absolutely confidential. Only my advisor and I will have access to your responses and you will never be identified in any way when I present or publish my findings.

If there is any question with which you are not comfortable, feel free to not answer or to ask me to turn the recorder off. If I have your permission to record will you please sign this consent form?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Respondent Biographical Background:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your adventure activities as a child (if any)?
 - a. Probe: Was it common for kids your age to be doing these activities?
 - b. Probe: who did you do them with?
2. Can you tell me about your first experience rock climbing?
 - a. Probe: who took you?
 - b. Probe: what did it feel like? Emotions
3. When would you say that you started climbing regularly?
4. What motivates you to climb?
 - a. Probe: living on the edge? Exciting? Pushing boundaries?
5. Do you consider yourself to be an average fe/male? Or do you think of yourself as exceptional in some ways?
6. Have you ever had people express surprise or concern that you climb? Who?
7. Have you ever been underestimated by other climbers?
8. Do you ever feel competitive with other climbers?
 - a. Probe: what brings that out?

9. Do you feel that you seek out social relationships with other climbers specifically because they climb?
10. Do you feel that you are encouraging to other climbers?
 - a. Probe: who are your most encouraging to?
11. What other adventure activities besides climbing do you participate in currently?
12. Do you have any children and if so, do they climb?
13. How important is leisure & recreation for you?
 - a. Probe: is it difficult to make time for these activities?

Respondent Perception of Risk:

14. What kinds of risks do climbers take?
15. What if anything do you do to minimize your risk?
16. Do male & female climbers take the same risks? The same amount of risk?
17. Do you feel strong now?
 - a. Probe: did you feel strong before you started climbing?
18. How do you identify in terms of gender: do you feel girly or manly?
 Very feminine 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very masculine
 Probe: narrative description- can you elaborate on that for me?
19. Has climbing changed your perception of gender at all?
 - a. Probe: your own or others?
 - b. Have you changed any grooming habits?
20. Do you think risk perception is affected by age?
 - a. Probe: how does the age and gender of a climber affect risk perception?
 - b. Probe: is it generational?
21. Do you have concerns about going into remote areas for climbing or other adventure activities?

Respondent Use of Climbing Space

22. Where do you climb most often?
 - a. Probe: is that because of time, lack of transportation, lack of skill, etc?

23. Who do you climb with most often?
24. Are you in a relationship now? Does your partner climb too?
 - a. Probe: do heterosexual women prefer to climb with other women because male partners get jealous?
25. Is there a difference between male & female partners?
 - a. Probe: any preference between male & female partners?
26. What kind of climbing have you done? (top-rope, sport, trad, bouldering)
27. How often do you climb now?
28. Do you think you climb harder indoors or outside?
29. How would you describe your climbing style?
30. What movements do you enjoy & why?
31. Does climbing make you more aware of your body movements? More so than other activities?
32. Some scholars have noted that girls are socialized to view their bodies as fragments instead of as a whole and attribute this to the ways girls use their bodies in sports. So for example, “throwing like a girl” is to throw only using your arm. Do you relate to this at all? How did it affect you growing up and as you learned to climb?
33. Has climbing made you feel stronger or more capable in other areas of your life? (given confidence?)
34. What have you learned about yourself from climbing?
 - a. Probe: physically? Emotionally?

Informant Questions:

35. Are there different styles of climbing?
 - a. Probe: Do they relate to gender?
36. In what ways do you think women and men are alike when it comes to climbing?
37. In your experience, do you see more women or men climbing?

- a. Probe: has that changed over time?
38. Are women treated differently than men in climbing environments?
- a. Probe: sexualization of women
39. Why do you think some women seek out all female groups or classes?
40. How do you feel about marking first female ascents?
41. Do you think female & male climbers are portrayed differently in climbing media?
42. How do you think the climbing community views female climbers today?
43. Do you think most non-climbers think climbing is a really extreme sport?
Does that match up with your perception?
- a. Probe: What do you think non-climbers think when they see pictures of female climbers?
44. What do you think about women climbing while pregnant when they have children?
45. Do you think female climbers are different from other women?

Last Question: Is there anything that you think I should know that I haven't asked you?

Demographic Data:

Your full name: _____

If you do not want me to use your legal name in connection with this study please write a pseudonym that you would rather me use: _____

Your Age: _____

Your race (circle one): African-American
 Asian-American
 Latina/o
 White
 Mixed (please specify): _____
 Other (please specify): _____

Your highest education (circle one): High School
 Some college
 Associate's degree
 Trade certificate (please specify): _____
 Bachelor's degree
 Graduate or professional degree

Your occupation: _____

Do you have children? Y/N Number: ____

Are you married/a registered domestic partner? Y/N Same-sex partner
or opposite sex partner

Spouse's race (circle one): African-American
 Asian-American
 Latina/o
 White
 Mixed (please specify): _____
 Other (please specify): _____

What is your individual/combined income bracket (circle one)? Under
\$25,000

\$25,000-\$34,999
\$35,000-\$44,999
\$45,000-\$74,999
\$75,000-\$99,999
\$100,000-\$149,999
Over \$150,000

Where do you live (city & neighborhood)?

APPENDIX B: Difficulty of Climbs of Magazine Covers by Sex Category

	Women on the Cover	Difficulty of Climb on Cover
R & I 166 March 2008	0	5.8
R & I 167 April 2008	0	n/a
R & I 168 Annual Gear Guide	0	n/a
R & I 169 June 2008	0	5.13d
R & I 170 July 2008	1	7b/5.12d
R & I 171 September 2008	0	5.11c
R & I 172 October 2008	0.5	5.12a
R & I 173 December 2008	no climbers	n/a
R & I 174 January 2009	1	5.11c
R & I 175 March 2009	0.5	UIAA IV+
R & I 176 April 2009	0	no rating
R & I 177 Special Gear Guide	no climbers	n/a
R & I 178 June 2009	1	5.12d
R & I 179 July 2009	0	5.14b
R & I 180 September 2009	0	5.13+
R & I 181 October 2009	1	V3
R & I 182 December 2009	1	5.13c
R & I 183 January 2010	0	5.8
R & I 184 March 2010	0	WI 7
<i>Climbing</i> 265 April 2008	1	5.10b
<i>Climbing</i> 266 May 2008	0	W16
<i>Climbing</i> 267 July 2008	1	5.14
<i>Climbing</i> 268 August 2008	0	5.13d
<i>Climbing</i> 269 September 2008	0	5.14b
<i>Climbing</i> 270 October 2008	no climbers	n/a
<i>Climbing</i> 271 December 2008	0	5.15b
<i>Climbing</i> 272 January 2009	0	W14
<i>Climbing</i> 273 March 2009	0	no rating
<i>Climbing</i> 274 Annual Gear Guide	0	5.12
<i>Climbing</i> 275 May 2009	1	5.11
<i>Climbing</i> 276 Annual Photo	0	5.12b
<i>Climbing</i> 277 August 2009	0	5.11d
<i>Climbing</i> 278 September 2009	1	5.8
<i>Climbing</i> 279 October 2009	1	5.11a
<i>Climbing</i> 280 November 2009	0	no rating

<i>Climbing</i> 281 December 2009	0	5.13a
<i>Climbing</i> 282 January 2010	1	M10/ 5.12
<i>Climbing</i> 283 March 2010	0	trad 5.13d

APPENDIX C: Total Representation of Female and Male Climber Photographs

	Total Female Photos	Total Male Photos	Percent of Female Photos	Percent of Male Photos
R & I 166 March 2008	20	98	0.17	0.83
R & I 167 April 2008	41	77	0.35	0.65
R & I 168 Annual Gear Guide	16	43	0.27	0.73
R & I 169 June 2008	22	78	0.22	0.78
R & I 170 July 2008	21	70	0.23	0.77
R & I 171 September 2008	36	92	0.28	0.72
R & I 172 October 2008	25	64	0.28	0.72
R & I 173 December 2008	26	98	0.21	0.79
R & I 174 January 2009	40	87	0.31	0.69
R & I 175 March 2009	29	80	0.27	0.73
R & I 176 April 2009	20	108	0.16	0.84
R & I 177 Special Gear Guide	17	49	0.26	0.74
R & I 178 June 2009	43	95	0.31	0.69
R & I 179 July 2009	12	89	0.12	0.88
R & I 180 September 2009	20	66	0.23	0.77
R & I 181 October 2009	18	63	0.22	0.78
R & I 182 December 2009	28	80	0.26	0.74
R & I 183 January 2010	40	77	0.34	0.64
R & I 184 March 2010	6	66	0.08	0.92
<i>Climbing</i> 265 April 2008	29	70	0.27	0.73
<i>Climbing</i> 266 May 2008	33	96	0.26	0.74
<i>Climbing</i> 267 July 2008	29	78	0.3	0.72
<i>Climbing</i> 268 August 2008	38	83	0.31	0.69
<i>Climbing</i> 269 September 2008	27	102	0.21	0.79
<i>Climbing</i> 270 October 2008	25	86	0.23	0.77
<i>Climbing</i> 271 December 2008	30	85	0.26	0.74
<i>Climbing</i> 272 January 2009	34	80	0.3	0.7
<i>Climbing</i> 273 March 2009	33	94	0.26	0.74

<i>Climbing 274 Annual Gear Guide</i>	20	32	0.38	0.62
<i>Climbing 275 May 2009</i>	26	88	0.23	0.77
<i>Climbing 276 Annual Photo</i>	29	116	0.2	0.8
<i>Climbing 277 August 2009</i>	37	67	0.36	0.64
<i>Climbing 278 September 2009</i>	14	96	0.13	0.87
<i>Climbing 279 October 2009</i>	29	91	0.24	0.76
<i>Climbing 280 November 2009</i>	22	84	0.21	0.79
<i>Climbing 281 December 2009</i>	17	85	0.17	0.83
<i>Climbing 282 January 2010</i>	19	99	0.16	0.84
<i>Climbing 283 March 2010</i>	14	88	0.14	0.86
	985	3100	0.24184210	0.75815789

APPENDIX D: Authorship by Sex Category

	Total Female Authors	Total Male Authors	Percent Female Authored	Percent Male Authored
R & I 166 March 2008	3	20	0.13	0.87
R & I 167 April 2008	5	22	0.19	0.81
R & I 168 Annual Gear Guide	4	42	0.09	0.91
R & I 169 June 2008	4	20	0.17	0.83
R & I 170 July 2008	3	20	0.13	0.87
R & I 171 September 2008	3	18	0.14	0.86
R & I 172 October 2008	5	20	0.2	0.8
R & I 173 December 2008	2	19	0.1	0.9
R & I 174 January 2009	6	19	0.24	0.76
R & I 175 March 2009	3	12	0.2	0.8
R & I 176 April 2009	4	25	0.2	0.8
R & I 177 Special Gear Guide	3	19	0.14	0.86
R & I 178 June 2009	8	26	0.24	0.76
R & I 179 July 2009	3	23	0.12	0.88
R & I 180 September 2009	5	18	0.22	0.78
R & I 181 October 2009	4	23	0.15	0.85
R & I 182 December 2009	1	19	0.05	0.95
R & I 183 January 2010	6	17	0.26	0.74
R & I 184 March 2010	5	17	0.23	0.77
<i>Climbing</i> 265 April 2008	4	16	0.2	0.8
<i>Climbing</i> 266 May 2008	4	10	0.29	0.71

<i>Climbing 267 July 2008</i>	4	12	0.25	0.75
<i>Climbing 268 August 2008</i>	12	17	0.41	0.59
<i>Climbing 269 September 2008</i>	6	19	0.24	0.76
<i>Climbing 270 October 2008</i>	6	27	0.18	0.82
<i>Climbing 271 December 2008</i>	6	22	0.21	0.79
<i>Climbing 272 January 2009</i>	8	19	0.3	0.7
<i>Climbing 273 March 2009</i>	4	29	0.12	0.88
<i>Climbing 274 Annual Gear Guide</i>	0	2	0	1
<i>Climbing 275 May 2009</i>	5	21	0.19	0.81
<i>Climbing 276 Annual Photo</i>	4	4	0.5	0.5
<i>Climbing 277 August 2009</i>	3	25	0.11	0.89
<i>Climbing 278 September 2009</i>	12	20	0.375	0.625
<i>Climbing 279 October 2009</i>	10	21	0.32	0.68
<i>Climbing 280 November 2009</i>	7	22	0.24	0.76
<i>Climbing 281 December 2009</i>	6	24	0.2	0.8
<i>Climbing 282 January 2010</i>	5	28	0.15	0.85
<i>Climbing 283 March 2010</i>	8	19	0.3	0.7
	191	756	0.2048684	0.7951315