**I declare this dissertation to be my own work**

# An Examination of the Role of the Women's Memoir in Contemporary Mountaineering Culture

Priya Lauren Kochhar

40236758

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of the women's memoir in contemporary mountaineering culture with a specific focus on the memoirs of Clare Sheridan and Lynn Hill. The dissertation aims to portray, though memoir, both writers' personal experiences of navigating the hegemonic gender power dynamics of their respective mountaineering and rock-climbing communities. This dissertation finds that the women's memoir form is integral to ongoing efforts to challenge these gender power dynamics.



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I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Alison Garden, for supporting me through the writing of this dissertation.

QUBMC (2018-2024), I'm so proud of the welcoming environment we have created. May the hive-mind prevail until either island madness, or those jangling hexes finally catch up with us.

Contents

# Introduction

This dissertation aims to examine the purpose of the women's memoir form in contemporary mountaineering culture, focussing on the Irish mountaineer Clare Sheridan's memoir, *Uncoiling the Ropes* (2020), and the American rock-climber Lynn Hill's memoir, *Climbing Free* (2002). These women's choosing to write in the memoir style, it will be argued, is integral to ongoing efforts to rebalance mountaineering culture's traditional hegemonic masculine power dynamics, as women's personal experiences challenge the masculinised histories which have until recently informed popular understanding of the culture. As modern mountaineering as we know it developed in Europe, the memoirs written by women in mountaineering fall into the branch of the long historical tradition of women's writing, which began in Europe. Margaret King and Albert Rabil state that throughout European history 'the culture imposed silence upon women, considering speaking out a form of unchastity' and so 'before the fourteenth century [writings] were almost always [produced by] nuns or religious women whose isolation made their pronouncements more acceptable', as (King and Rabil xxii). She states that 'from the fourteenth century on, overall the volume of women's writing rose. Women continued to write devotional literature, although not always as cloistered nuns' (King and Rabil xxii). King and Rabil convey the increasing importance of women's' writing as 'in plays and catalogs, in verse and letters, in treaties and dialogues, in every language: the problem of chastity, […] power, […] speech, and […] knowledge' were discussed, indicating the increasing detail of women's challenges to the monopoly of hegemonic ideologies over such topics (King and Rabil xxiii). Helen Buss' research highlights the fundamental aspects of the emerging women's memoir form:

> two principles of the contemporary memoir- its incremental, episodic structure and its preoccupation with the physicality of the materially located place in history and culture- are present as early as the fifteenth century (Buss 10)

Buss continues to describe the ongoing development of the women's memoir as 'in the eighteenth century a phenomenon known as the "scandalous memoirs" marked English Literature profoundly in helping to shape the novel form in its earliest stages' (Buss 11-12). As she states that 'these memoirs can also be seen as a precursor of the

contemporary memoirs of women', it is suggested that women's stylistic approaches to expressing their experiences have in some ways, remained similar, just as their quarrels with the hegemonic masculinity of their societies have also remained similar (Buss 12). As Jennifer McCue states that 'the contemporary female-authored memoir […] creates a strong voice for feminism by expressing the personal while also examining cultural contexts from a female perspective', Sheridan and Hill's memoirs, support ongoing efforts to rebalance the mountaineering community's gender power dynamics (McCue 1).

Whilst Sheridan hails from the Irish mountaineering community, and Hill the American rock-climbing community, both communities' cultures are historically linked to the British origins of mountaineering. Simon Bainbridge describes how the meaning of the word 'mountaineer' began to change in the early 19th century (Bainbridge 1). He states that whereas 'the noun form of the word was also used to define 'a person who is native to or lives in a mountainous region'', 'mountaineer' as a verb […] was also coming to denote 'a person who engages in or is skilled at mountain climbing'' (Bainbridge 1). The process of this word coming to define the explorer rather than the 'native […] [of the] mountainous region' reflects the imperialistic ideologies underpinning the emergence of mountaineering attitudes in Britain, that sought to claim and discover landscapes, ignoring the already established claims of the native people. Delphine Moraldo writes that 'modern mountaineering and its codification began between the years 1850 and 1900' (Moraldo 728). She elaborates that 'At the time the [London] Alpine Club (AC) reigned supreme: British mountaineers accomplished most of the first alpine ascents, accompanied by local guides' (Moraldo 728). She describes the AC's homosocial nature as 'from its inception in 1857 until 1974, the AC was exclusively male' (Moraldo 728). In retaliation, 'women banded together in 1907 to organize the Ladies Alpine Club (LAC), which remained a small structure', and in this way, 'female mountaineering thus grew apart from, and in the shadow of, male mountaineering' (Moraldo 728).

In light of the absence of feminine influence in the AC, Peter Hansen describes the British AC members' imperialist ideologies:

> Albert Smith [(one of the founding members of the AC)] embodied a set of related social and cultural changes which the middle-class members of the Alpine Club later institutionalized as a form of imperial exploration in Victorian mountaineering (Hansen 304)

Hansen continues to describe how over time, 'middle-class men elevated the exploits of athletes and the adventures of mountaineers into cultural symbols of British masculinity, patriotism, national character, and imperial power' (Hansen 314). Hansen also describes how 'many mid-Victorians […] used the language of conquest to describe their climbing' (Hansen 317). Joseph Taylor concurs with Hansen, stating that 'climbing rules were developed by upper-middling Victorians who borrowed aristocratic traditions of chivalrous masculinity to create a tempering contest with nature' and 'Nineteenth-century mountaineers saw nature as "sensuous and feminine" and competed for her "virgin" summits' (Taylor 15, 16).

It is clear that in British mountaineering culture, the male figure of the mountaineer, made so by the originally homosocial nature of mountaineering clubs, is traditionally presented in opposition to the femininity of the landscape, and Val Plumwood discusses this anthropocentric ideology:

> 'Nature' then encompasses the underside of the rationalist dualisms that oppose reason to nature, mind to body, emotional female to rational male, human to animal, and so on. […] a culture of rational colonization in relation to those aspects of the world, whether human or nonhuman, that are counted as 'nature' is part of the general cultural inheritance of the West (Plumwood 52-53)

The impact of such ideologies upon female mountaineers is that they exist on both sides of this dualism: on the one hand they are mountaineers, a figure symbolically associated with masculinity, and on the other, women, their femininity associated with nature as part of the 'underside of the rationalist dualisms' (Plumwood 53). The relationship between female mountaineers and nature is therefore an extra issue that they must navigate, as it ultimately challenges hegemonic power dynamics by rejecting mountaineering's traditionally anthropocentric attitudes towards the landscape. Susan Buckingham describes 'an interpretation of ecofeminism that is constructivist' (Buckingham 147):

> women's position in society […] derived from prevailing social and economic structures, which exposed them to a particular set of environmental incivilities. The specifically ecofeminist argument here proposes that, since the same social and economic structures also produced widescale environmental damage, then women could, in some sense, share this experience and were therefore better placed to argue on nature's behalf (Buckingham 147)

Buckingham's constructivist ecofeminist perspective resists essentialist associations of femininity with nature, highlighting the socio-political origins of this association. Such a perspective will therefore be appropriate for this dissertation's examination of each of Hill and Sheridan's relationships with the landscape, as they navigate the socio-political construction of 'rationalist dualisms' in mountaineering culture (Plumwood 52).

The first chapter focuses on Clare Sheridan's experience as a woman in the Irish mountaineering community, the history of which will be discusses in relation to Paddy O'Leary's book, *The Way That We Climbed* (2015), with particular focus on the position of women. O'Leary writes that the more skilled Irish alpinists were members of the AC in London, and consequently 'had no impact on the development of mountaineering in Ireland' (O'Leary 9, 10). The beginnings of Irish mountaineering activities were a small-scale, homosocial endeavour until 1935 when a group formed that 'Joss Lynam [a prominent figure in the development of Irish climbing] felt […] should be regarded as the first Irish climbing club' (O'Leary 24, 27). The name 'Barbara Catford' is recorded in relation to this club, suggesting the beginnings of female presence (O'Leary, 28). The Irish Mountaineering Club (IMC) was established in 'December 1948' and 'from the beginning [the IMC] was open to all those interested in the hills regardless of gender' (O'Leary 32, 33). Although the IMC welcomed women, the hegemonic values of Irish society still impacted their experience as one male member felt 'contempt for what he called 'the nylon hand-bag brigade' (O'Leary 40). Despite instances of patriarchal disapproval such as this, 'in the Dublin IMC […] Hazel Fitzpatrick and Emily Innes, each led a first ascent on rock, and the latter was prominent on at least one Alpine trip' (O'Leary 44). One particularly prominent Irish female climber 'Elizabeth Healey' who emerged in the 1950s 'joined the IMC in 1954'

(O'Leary 67). Although at this time 'there had been other female climbing leaders, notably Sylvia Yates, Ruth Ohrtmann, Ingrid Masterson and Jill Rowe', O'Leary writes that, 'Elizabeth Healy was in a class of her own' (O'Leary 83, 83). As 'Healey was winding down when the Spillikin [Club] was formed [in 1965 and became the most prestigious Irish mountaineering club] […] the club never had a woman member' (O'Leary 87). Another club that did not initially accept women was Trinity College Dublin's, Dublin University Climbing Club (DUCC) (1958), which O'Leary states 'would remain a little exclusive and largely Anglocentric, besides being all-male, well into the 1960s' perhaps highlighting the presence of homosocial British mountaineering ideologies in the club (O'Leary 68). In contrast, University College Dublin (UCD) 'had a covert, fledgling club […] in 1961: covert because of the attitude of college authorities […] [due to] their ban on the wearing of trousers by female students' (O'Leary 89). O'Leary outlines the religious socio-political context underpinning this as 'the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, J. McQuaid, […] forbade the wearing of trousers or shorts by girls taking part in sports' (O'Leary 89). This is the club that Clare Sheridan later joined in 1970, introducing her to mountaineering and rock-climbing and O'Leary states that she 'would go on to outstrip Elizabet Healy's achievements and perform on equal terms with men at home and abroad' (O'Leary 119).

As the second chapter will focus on Lynn Hill's experiences of rock-climbing in Yosemite Valley and the surrounding areas from the mid-1970s onwards, apart from brief experiences on trips abroad, only details of women's involvement in mountaineering and rock-climbing activities in Yosemite that contextualise the gender power dynamics from the 1970s onwards is included. In *Pilgrims of the Vertical* (2010), Joseph Taylor provides a comprehensive history of mountaineering and rock-climbing activities in Yosemite Valley. He indicates the connection of American mountaineering to British mountaineering in its origin as 'early American mountaineers were disparate and idiosyncratic, yet they were highly compatible with British mountaineers of their era' (Taylor 55). He also describes how during this earlier period 'American climbers already ranged from casual funseekers to egotistical imperialists' (Taylor 53). With regards to the origin of mountaineering activities in Yosemite Valley, Taylor states that 'in 1864, Congress declared Yosemite […] North America's third national park' (Taylor 21). He continues to describe how the state committed to 'evicting

Ahwahneechees, Miwoks, and Paiutes, and renaming features to fit their image of place', and 'one of the most forceful and sustained efforts [to help rename features] was by a group of mountaineers […] in the Sierra Club', inextricably linking the origins of mountaineering and rock-climbing in Yosemite to the colonial erasure of native culture. (Taylor 21, 22). In contrast to British mountaineering's patriarchal imperial ideologies, which excluded women, mountaineering clubs in the USA often welcomed them as 'women's participation drew men into more complex social and cultural experiences' (Taylor 88). Despite this inclusion, though 'gear was used by everyone in the RCS', the Rock Climbing Section of the Sierra Club, 'the most aggressive climbers [who] paid greater attention to technology, […] were young men strongly committed to the sport' (Taylor 112-113). Therefore, when stronger individual climbers moved away from club affiliations they were mostly male (Taylor 160). The authority of the RCS over rock-climbing activities in Yosemite was replaced by a new generation of individual rock climbers, who populated Yosemite's Camp 4 (a campsite for rock-climbers in Yosemite which started to become more popular in the 1960s), known as the 'Beats [who] were also part of the service generation' in America, and for them 'Climbing, parties, and the Army created community' (Taylor 181). Taylor states that the Beats were 'also overwhelmingly young, single, and male. Sport structured [the men] into a homosocial hierarchy with the strongest enjoying the greatest prestige' (Taylor 181, 183). This cultural shift towards the favouring of homosocial masculine groups in the 1960s meant that, 'beyond sex, women were afterthoughts', and inevitably, 'patriarchal values were also applied to women climbers' (Taylor 185, 186). One tragic figure, Penny Carr, committed suicide after her 'belated realization […] that she would never be an equal among those [elite, coincidentally male climbers] who mattered' (Taylor 188). This strongly homosocial atmosphere continued into the 1970s as a new authority emerged known as Jim Bridwell. Taylor states that Bridwell, a prominent figure in the development of Yosemite rock-climbing, 'ruled Camp 4 with a scary combination of cunning charm and ruthless coercion […] Apprentices and veterans alike knew who was in charge' (Taylor 268). Indeed, Taylor writes that 'rather than being feminized, Camp 4's hypermasculine values seemed to spike in the late 1970s' (Taylor 287). One prominent female climber who emerged at the beginning of this generation was Beverly Johnson whose achievements along with a female climbing partner, Sibylle Hechtel, 'eroded the sex divide' in Yosemite (Taylor 282). When Lynn Hill entered Yosemite rock-climbing culture in the mid-1970s, a female community had begun to emerge as

it was ‘a world now mediated by mentors such as Mari Cranor and Mari Gingery’ and therefore ‘although she, too, suffered a lot of patriarchal insults, in no way was she alone’ (Taylor 300, 300).

Jenny Hall examines some of the differences between men and women’s mountaineering literature. Hall highlights the cultural precedent for the perceived superiority of men’s mountaineering writing as ‘for men, recording their achievements was a means to secure place and position and was thus a very public affair’ (Hall 33). In comparison, ‘women rarely featured in […] journals and if they did, it was generally through a male voice reporting on their achievements’, and furthermore, ‘when women did write about their experiences, the stories would be devoid of emotional content and self-promotion’, suggesting their perception of the lower status of their achievements (Hall 32, 33). Eventually some female mountaineers such as Dorothy Pilley (1894-1986) emerged whose ‘writings were yet another innovation in the development in women’s mountaineering; she opened up about the female perspective of the sentient and emotional world that mountaineering could evoke’ (Hall 48). However, the issue of the modesty of women’s mountaineering writing continued, as Hall writes of how the name of famous mountaineer Julie Tullis ‘has fallen out of general parlance, similar to many elite women from the mountaineering world’, positing that this has happened because ‘women continued to reinforce their silence for fear of appearing brash or less than feminine’ (Hall 54). It is unsurprising then, that a great range of memoir literature written by female mountaineers only emerged again after the turn of the twenty-first century. These women, who had in the 1970s been anomalous within masculinised mountaineering and rock-climbing communities, are now, as Buss describes, ‘bringing female gendering to bear on [their] previously male-gendered narratives of the self and culture’, and contributing to the effort to rebalance the gender power dynamics of mountaineering culture (Buss 3).

The first chapter will focus on Clare Sheridan’s memoir, as she narrates her experiences as a woman in the Irish mountaineering community. The chapter will examine the memoir form’s facilitation of her commentary upon her experiences of the male-dominated atmosphere of University College Dublin’s Mountaineering Club

(UCDMC), and an interaction with the homosocial Spillikin Club on a trip with UCDMC. It will also examine her personal reactions to the representations of women in mountaineering magazine advertisements, and her frustrations towards a newspaper's posthumous criticisms of female high-altitude mountaineer Alison Hargreaves because of her subversion of hegemonic masculine expectations of motherhood. It will also examine how through the memoir form, she describes the development of her positive attitudes towards other women in mountaineering, as she understands her previous internalisations of misogyny which had also affected her self-perception. Finally, the chapter will examine, through a constructivist ecofeminist reading, the way in which she utilises her memoir to explore the development of her rock-climbing abilities through her relationship with nature.

The second chapter will focus on Lynn Hill's experiences of entering Yosemite's rock-climbing culture during and after the 1970s. The chapter will examine Hill's detailed description, through memoir, of the position of women in the male-dominated atmosphere of Yosemite's rock-climbing culture and the misogyny that she experiences both within that culture, and when travels abroad to climb. It will also examine Hill's descriptions, through use of the memoir writing style, of her meaningful relationships with strong female climbers through the shared emotional and physical experience of climbing, and through her respect for their achievements. Finally, the chapter will propose an ecofeminist reading of Hill's utilisation of the memoir form to express her humility towards nature during her climbing experiences, as well as her understanding of the value of its beauty to the diversifying of her rock-climbing skills.

## Chapter 1

## Clare Sheridan's Experiences as a Woman in Mountaineering in Her Memoir *Uncoiling the Ropes* (2020)

This first chapter will examine Clare Sheridan's use of the memoir form in narrating her experiences as a woman in the Irish mountaineering community, beginning in the 1970s when she joined UCDMC. The gender-neutral subtitle, 'The Memoir of a Trailblazing Irish Climber', conveys her success in transcending the hegemonic narratives of femininity that contextualised the beginning of her mountaineering career in her more conservative patriarchal Irish society. This chapter will examine her use of the memoir form to explore experiences of objectifying comments and statements of essentialist beliefs in innate feminine weakness. It will also examine her experiences of the sexualisation of women in mountaineering magazines, and newspapers' posthumous criticisms of Alison Hargreaves as she had been both a mountaineer and a mother. The chapter will also examine Sheridan's experiences of internalising misogynistic attitudes and their divisive effects upon women's relationships within the mountaineering community, as well as her eventual realisation of the true value of climbing with other women. Finally, this chapter will take a constructivist ecofeminist critical approach to examining Sheridan's exploration of her development as a climber through her relationship with the natural world.

Sheridan documents her experience of casually misogynistic comments made by members of the homosocial Spillikin Club whilst on a club trip with UCDMC. Jennifer McCue states that 'through sharing the intimate details of her own life, the memoirist expresses the raw […] nature of the female experience' having the impact of 'unveiling the many (and often silenced) challenges that contemporary woman face […] such as the paradigm of women's roles in relation to identity and self and the male gaze' (McCue 2). In light of this, Sheridan's 'unveiling' of her once private feelings towards the Spillikin Club members' objectification of female sexuality challenges the hegemonic perceptions of acceptable attitudes towards women in mountaineering

culture (McCue 2). Sheridan describes how 'Halfway through the week, four hill walkers, all male, arrived down from Dublin. 'Spillikin Club,' said Jimmy quietly as they strolled into the bar', the word 'strolled' suggesting their confidence (Sheridan 27). As Sheridan writes of her thoughts at the time that, 'These must be real climbers, real mountaineers, if they were members of the legendary Spillikin Club', her repetition of 'real' and use of the word 'legendary' almost mythologises their reputation and the value of their praise to a new climber (Sheridan, 27). However, this heroic image of the men is quickly tarnished as Sheridan describes how 'when they checked the dorms for space and realised how strictly [the UCDMC members] had segregated [themselves] into boys' rooms and girls' rooms, they were amused' (Sheridan, 27). This amusement betrays the men's patriarchal sense of entitlement to female sexuality as one of them had commented 'at least we sleep with our women' (Sheridan, 27). Sheridan writes of her reaction, indicating her recognition of the objectifying, possessive pronoun 'our':

> So these fellows had women? And they slept with them? This was all a bit disconcerting. Were they married? How could they speak so casually and shamelessly about sex? They were obviously different from us, and a bit dangerous. And where were their women anyway? (Sheridan 27)

Here, Sheridan's rhetorical questions convey her disbelief as she wondered how the men could speak so 'casually and shamelessly about sex' (Sheridan 27). These men's attitudes towards sex stand in stark contrast to Sheridan's account of her experiences of sex education for girls in Ireland in the 1960s as 'sex was shameful, and ignorance, particularly in girls, was a virtue' (Sheridan 20). Presented with such crude attitudes, she describes how she had found the situation to be 'disconcerting', and concluded that they must be 'different […] and a bit dangerous' (Sheridan 27). Therefore, the men who were initially 'real […] [and] legendary', reduced themselves to figureheads of the misogyny implicit within mountaineering culture, and most clearly voiced within its homosocial groups (Sheridan 27). Sheridan's expression, through her memoir, of women's struggles to navigate the conflicts between hegemonic expectations of women, and hegemonic attitudes towards sex, challenges the acceptance of such gender ideologies within mountaineering culture.

Sheridan explores experiences of discussions surrounding innate feminine weakness within UCDMC. In David Moscoso-Sánchez's study involving a group of Spanish rock-climbers, he found that 'femininity would be associated with debility and delicacy and masculinity with strength and protection', and Sheridan finds that members of UCDMC also subscribe to such gender essentialist ideologies, believing in the detriment of perceived innate feminine weakness to women's rock-climbing experiences (Moscoso-Sánchez 190). The fourth chapter of Sheridan's memoir begins with the quote ''Girls don't climb,' said a senior (female) member of the mountaineering club to Sheila when we talked of starting to rock climb in the spring of 1971' (Sheridan 33). Sheridan elaborates that 'hill walking was an acceptable activity for girls, [but] climbing – actually pulling yourself up steep rock by your own strength - certainly wasn't' (Sheridan 33). As Sheridan had previously stated in her memoir that the Victorian era saying, 'Horses sweat and men perspire but ladies only glow' [that] still held currency', this suggests that patriarchal ideologies of feminine respectability were intertwined with club members' beliefs in the inappropriateness of the more physically demanding 'activity' of rock-climbing for women (Sheridan 33). As Sheridan writes that Sheila and herself had 'thought, *if the boys are climbing and it's fun, then we're going to climb too*', she utilises the introspective nature of the memoir form to communicate their defiance of hegemonic ideals of femininity by taking ownership of their rock-climbing ambitions (Sheridan 33). Sheridan writes of her experience of a more detailed conversation regarding gender essentialist notions of feminine weakness on a rock-climbing outing with UCDMC when she had 'wondered aloud if [the] girls would develop bulging muscle from all this climbing' (Sheridan 38). She states that in response, 'Barry, a postgrad science student, said that we needn't worry, that our jeans wouldn't allow it', and as she comically writes the homophonous pairing to Barry's intended meaning of 'genes', she conveys the absurdity of the idea as she initially interpreted his comment as referring to clothing (Sheridan 38). As Sheridan writes of how Barry was forced to clarify, ''No, you needn't worry […] Your female genes definitely won't allow it'' (Sheridan 38), it is perhaps suggested that the maintenance of masculine hegemony in sporting cultures relies upon women's internalisation of such absolutely limiting notions. As Sheridan writes of her defiant or confused reactions to statements invoking gender essentialist ideologies of innate feminine weakness, she utilises her memoir to express challenges to the hegemonic ideologies of femininity within mountaineering culture.

Sheridan also interrogates the sexualisation of women in the British mountaineering magazines available to her Irish mountaineering community. She writes that 'one aspect of the British climbing scene that [the Irish climbers] did appreciate was its climbing magazines as [they] had nothing comparable at home' (Sheridan 92). Sheridan describes how in these magazines, 'there were girls, but only in the ads', conveying her disapproval of their role in perpetuating expectations of female inferiority in the mountaineering community, to satisfy the objectifying gaze of the predominantly male readership rather than cater to women's desires to see images of strong female mountaineers (Sheridan 92). Jennifer Hargreaves describes the implications for sportswomen, of the sexualisation of women in sports photography:

> Snooker cues, cricket bats, boxing gloves and footballs are such obvious symbols of manliness that for bare-breasted women to be holding them suggests a provocative sexual message: that 'real' sports are for men, and women are there to provide excitement and arousal. It is as if women's bodies are part of the equipment – apparatuses of male 'sporting' pleasure – 'playthings' for men. […] Whether female images are used in advertisements for selling products, or explicitly to titillate male voyeurs in order to increase sales, is immaterial – they are both representations similar to softporn, and examples of eroticized subordination. (Hargreaves 167)

In the British mountaineering magazines read by Irish climbers like Sheridan, the props were not 'snooker cues, cricket bats, boxing gloves and footballs', but instead specialised mountaineering equipment such as technical clothing and rock-climbing gear were the 'symbols of manliness' (Hargreaves 167). The effect of photographing women with such symbolic objects outside of their usual mountaineering context remains the same and serves to create a cultural perception of women in 'eroticized subordination' (Hargreaves 167). In keeping with Helen Buss' statement that 'the mandate of the memoir [is] to personalize history', Sheridan therefore weaves her disdain for the advertisements she saw into her descriptions of them, challenging the hegemonic power dynamics in mountaineering culture that encouraged the sexual objectification of women in its media (Buss 125). She describes images where girls 'appeared wrapped in their boyfriend's oversized duvet jacket looking petite and

feminine, and nude' (Sheridan 92). Here, the emphasis Sheridan places on 'and nude', after the comma, conveys her frustration towards the image as the already disappointingly 'petite and feminine' girls, appealing to masculine ideologies of strength and protection, were also 'nude' in order to appeal to 'male voyeurs' (Hargreaves 167) (Sheridan 92). Sheridan continues to describe images where girls 'appeared […] emerging coyly from the latest expedition sleeping bags, bags that were obviously not their own' (Sheridan 92). Here, 'coyly' perhaps conveys her criticism of the magazine's problematic portrayal of feminine flirtatiousness as possessing a feigned reservedness (Sheridan 92). Furthermore, as the girls were 'emerging from […] [sleeping] bags that were obviously not their own', alluding to their belonging to the men who were the target audience of such advertisements, it is clear that the magazine perpetuated associations of entitlement to female sexuality with ''sporting' pleasure' (Sheridan 92, 92) (Hargreaves 167). Sheridan identifies an advertisement produced by the brand 'Berghaus [that] had one lassie who was viewed from behind wearing nothing but their new lightweight rucksack frame' (Sheridan 92). Here, Sheridan's use of the infantilising, dialectal variant of young girl, 'lassie', highlights her distaste for the brand's trivialising of the image of women in mountaineering as the 'lassie […] was viewed from behind wearing nothing but' their product (Sheridan 92). Sheridan also writes that 'Javlin advertised their latest men's fleece jacket by draping it seductively around an alluring female who wore nothing else', the words 'draping' 'seductively' and 'alluring' conveying the woman's purely ornamental function (Sheridan 92). Finally, she names the brand 'Edelrid', stating that 'the German rope manufacturer chose to feature a naked girl with a rope coiled around her shoulders, and promised that it would be uncoiled gradually over a series of forthcoming issues' (Sheridan 92). Here, Sheridan's use of the words 'chose' and 'promised', serve to criticise the intentionality of the advertising decision, to 'provide excitement and arousal', for the male readership (Hargreaves 167) (Sheridan 92). Sheridan emphasises the magazines' role in reinforcing notions of female inferiority in mountaineering as 'Women's place was clearly marked in the lads' mag *Crags*' (Sheridan 92). As Annabelle Mooney states that ''the similarities of lad's magazines to pornography are clear when one considers the poses in which women are depicted', Sheridan's allusion to the 'lads' mag' in describing '*Crags*' conveys her disdain for its reduction of women, and by association women mountaineers, to the value of their sexuality to the male gaze, as 'Sexism seemed to be one of the mainstays of [*Crags*] editorial policy' (Mooney 250) (Sheridan

92). Sheridan's adherence to the memoir style to communication her frustration within her descriptions of the magazine advertisements highlights her confrontation of hegemonic masculine attitudes towards women in mountaineering culture.

Sheridan also explores magazines' influence over narratives of gender history in mountaineering culture. She describes her experience of editors' omissions of the stories of skilled female mountaineers and rock-climbers:

> Right through the 1970s, neither *Mountain* nor *Crags* had any pictures of women climbing, and you'd never have guessed, from the content of either magazine, that a woman, Jo Scarr, had led 'Cenotaph Corner' in Wales, for years the hardest climb in Britain, […] as far back as 1960 (Sheridan 93)

As Sheridan states that 'you'd never have guessed, from the content of either magazine, that a woman [….] had led […] the hardest climb in Britain', the implication is that omitting stories of strong female climbers served to maintain the masculine hegemony of mountaineering culture through the predominance of narratives of male climbers' successes (Sheridan 93). In light of this, Sheridan states that it was not until '1980, [that] there was a photograph of an American climber Coral Bowman in *Mountain*', twenty years after Scarr's achievement (Sheridan 93). She goes on to write that Bowman 'was climbing steep rock, and this was the first public acknowledgement that hard climbing was a game for women too – the first that [Sheridan] had spotted at any rate (Sheridan, 93). Here, her clarification that it was 'the first that [she] had seen at any rate', suggest the superior importance of what Helena de Bres calls the 'experiential truth' (de Bres 68) (Sheridan 93). de Bres explains that 'the historical truth is what happened in the past, whereas the experiential truth is how what happened felt to you and how you interpreted it, then and after' (De Bres 68) (Sheridan 93). She continues to state that 'experiential truth is the sort of truth that memoirists should be after' and concludes that if historical and experiential truth do not agree, then 'experiential truth should prevail' (de Bres 68). Therefore, Sheridan's 'experiential truth' is most important here, as the apparent lack of representations of strong female mountaineers and climbers in magazines until '1980' informs her experience (de Bres) (Sheridan 93). Sheridan's detailing of her personal experiences of mountaineering magazines' exclusion of narratives of strong female mountaineers and climbers, highlights her

criticism of the deliberate engineering of mountaineering history, to maintain the culture's masculine hegemony.

Sheridan later interrogates newspapers' posthumous criticisms of the skilled mountaineer Alison Hargreaves. Sarah Vodden-McKay and Lea Schell explain the media's method of criticising female athletes:

> There are many ways that the media achieve the subversion to counter hegemonic ideals that the female athlete represents. One common tactic is to concentrate the content of an article on the female athlete's private life and role as a mother, wife and girlfriend (Vodden-McKay & Schell 138)

Here, Vodden-McKay and Schell assert the media's crucial role in maintaining 'hegemonic ideals' of femininity and Sheridan examines this issue through newspaper critics' posthumous sentiments towards Alison Hargreaves (Vodden-McKay & Schell 138). Carolyn Heilbrum has stated that 'women were traditionally forbidden to practice male sins' and as 'women have come to resent the place in which they have so long been confined', 'that anguish has now found its place in the autobiographical memoir' (Heilbrum 41). In light of both Vodden-McKay and Schell, and Heilbrum's statements, Sheridan locates her anguished challenge to the newspapers' attempted 'subversion of the counter hegemonic ideals that the female athlete represents' within her memoir, as she defends Hargreaves', and by extension, her own role as both a mother and a mountaineer (Vodden-McKay & Schell 138). Sheridan writes that upon being told by her son of Hargreaves' death, she had thought 'Alison, the brave, had been blown to her death off K2', and the powerful epithet 'the brave' conveys Sheridan's solemn respect before the heartbreakingly short description of circumstances (Sheridan 186). She continues to describe the comparatively insulting response of the media as 'the initial shocked headlines that went around the world were followed, almost immediately, by a swelling tide of vilification' (Sheridan 186). Here, through the ocean metaphor in 'swelling tide', Sheridan conveys the suffocating inescapability of the mass media's collective consciousness, and 'vilification' indicates its attempt to destroy the integrity of Hargreaves' character (Sheridan 186). As Sheridan states that newspaper critics 'all seemed to be asking the same thing: what right had she to be climbing dangerous peaks? 'An unfit mother,' cried the Guardian', she highlights the centrality

of Hargreaves' femininity to the discussion of her mountaineering, conveying the fragility of patriarchal dominance in its reliance upon women's capitulation to hegemonic ideals of motherhood (Sheridan 186). By comparing this treatment of Hargreaves' to the fact that 'there was no discussion about the fathers who had died climbing in the Himalayas that summer', Sheridan stresses the gendered hypocrisy of the British media's representations of extreme sports athletes. Sheridan continues to describe one particular critic's comments about Hargreaves':

> In the *Guardian*, Polly Toynbee wrote about danger being powerfully addictive, like crack, and left an image in the public mind of Alison as a person who craved risk just for the sake of it and who in so doing had 'behaved like a man'. This last revealing comment aside, Toynbee's criticism was way off the mark. (Sheridan 186)

Here, Sheridan's description of how Toynbee 'wrote about danger being powerfully addictive, like crack', likens Hargreaves mountaineering to a drug addiction, which unjustly 'left an image in the public mind of Alison as a person who craved risk just for the sake of it' suggesting her to be careless and impulsive (Sheridan 186). Sheridan challenges Toynbee's criticisms as she states that 'Alison's high-level mountaineering was indeed risky, but she worked very hard to manage that risk and never chose to be reckless', clarifying Hargreaves' professional ability to navigate the inevitable dangers of the terrain in mountaineering (Sheridan 187). Furthermore, Sheridan reinvokes Toynbee's 'revealing' statement that Hargreaves ''behaved like a man'', through her rhetorical question 'She acted like a man?' (Sheridan 186, 187). This rhetorical question prefaces Sheridan's direct response to Toynbee as she writes, 'Yes. Because for far too long the choice of being selfish like that has only been open to men' (Sheridan 186, 187). Here, Sheridan directly addresses the gendered hypocrisy underpinning notions of acceptable risk-taking that have created the 'place in which [women] have so long been confined' (Heilbrum 41). In confronting this hypocrisy, she perhaps also suggests Toynbee's internalisation of misogyny as she had insulted the femininity of a mother who engaged in the male-dominated extreme sports culture of mountaineering (Heilbrum 41). Sheridan expresses the truth of Hargreaves' situation as 'She was under a lot of pressure […] and had hoped that by climbing K2 as well as Everest she would ensure an income for herself and her children', highlight her intention to fulfil her role as a mother through her mountaineering career (Sheridan 186). Sheridan conveys

Hargreaves' conflicting desires as 'the opportunity [for Hargreaves] to test herself on such a formidable peak fired her up, even as she ached to get back to her ordinary life with her children' (Sheridan 187). Here, 'fired' expresses the excitement Hargreaves feels towards mountaineering, and 'ached' expresses the conflicting importance of her yearning to see her children (Sheridan 187). Sheridan's defence of Hargreaves' choice through her memoir, and by extension her own choice to be both a mother and mountaineer, challenges the hegemonic ideals refusing women the freedom to fulfil both roles.

This chapter will now examine Sheridan's utilisation of her memoir to express the effect of the male-dominated nature of mountaineering culture upon her self-perception and attitudes towards other women in the community, before conveying her realisation of the value of climbing with other women.

Sheridan examines her own experiences of being a woman in the more extreme environment of high-altitude expedition mountaineering. The masculinised nature of high-altitude mountaineering, particularly in the British and Irish community, had largely been created by the originally homosocial culture of the British AC as discussed in the introduction by Moraldo, Hansen, and Hall. Susan Frohlick describes how in 'mountaineering narratives written by men', the authors 'remain unmarked and are assumed to be male, or worse, to be neutral as though gender meant nothing to the world of high-altitude mountaineering' (Frohlick Web). Frohlick continues to state the importance of such narratives:

> Although narratives that use "man" as a universal term tend to have been written in the 1970s and earlier, these texts remain important because they form the mediating textual ground on which younger climbers and authors make their own connections between masculinity and mountaineering (Frohlick Web)

These texts therefore have the potential to not only influence the entire atmosphere of high-altitude mountaineering, as Frohlick states that the effect is that 'gendered bodies disappear from view [in narratives] as the space is aggressively masculinized', but also women like Sheridan's feeling of belonging in that environment as she entered the

mountaineering community ‘in the 1970s’ when these texts had been written (Frohlick Web). Jenny Hall describes how during the 1980s ‘It was no longer considered a weakness to express such emotional experiences. The pithy matter-of-fact descriptions were giving way to a new style of expressing what mountaineering meant to women’ (Hall 523). In light of Hall’s statement, Sheridan’s memoir authentically conveys her navigation of the experience of being the only woman in a group with prominent Irish mountaineers, Anthony Latham, Calvin Torrans, Emmet Goulding, and Joss Lynam, when descending from Cathedral Peak in Kishtwar, Pakistan in 1977 (Hall 53). Sheridan describes how she had become overheated due to not being able to stop to remove extra layers of clothing, and ‘was reduced to an incompetent mess in no time,’ highlighting her embarrassment at her decreasing independence and capabilities as a member of the team (Sheridan 107). She continues to describe how Goulding, Latham, and Lynam had packed their rope away and walked down confidently, whereas she had ‘insisted on keeping the rope on and descended facing in to the slope, kicking in step after step, while Calvin belayed [her] from above’, her fear betrayed by her methodical approach (Sheridan 107). Sheridan describes the emotional dynamic between herself and Calvin as his ‘patience was at its limit’ and she was ‘exhausted’, ‘completely demoralised’, and after falling into a river, she ‘gave in to tears’ (Sheridan 107). Sheridan describes what had been her private ‘emotional’ reflections regarding the descent (Hall 523):

> I felt terrible. I’d been very slow on the descent, and while that wouldn’t have mattered if it had just been Calvin and me, I felt I’d let myself down in front of the others. They’d have guessed that I was overcautious because I was fearful. And they weren’t. Maybe women weren’t tough enough for expeditions after all (Sheridan 107-108)

Here, Sheridan creates a semantic field of failure and self-ridicule in the words ‘slow’, ‘overcautious’ and ‘fearful’, and as she ‘felt [she] had let [herself] down in front of the others’ who, coincidentally were experienced male mountaineers, this suggests her feeling of the need to prove herself (Sheridan 107). As she recants her perception that she ‘was fearful. And they weren’t’, and ‘maybe women weren’t tough enough for expeditions after all’, she perhaps suggests that her feeling of needing to prove herself had emerged from her internalisation of the implicit misogyny of the high-altitude mountaineering environment, almost devoid of female figures (Sheridan 107). Sheridan

writes of how during a river crossing she was ‘swept away’ and ‘went hurtling downriver, face in the freezing water, immobilised by the heavy pack frame’, the words ‘swept’ ‘hurtling’ and ‘immobilised’ conveying the danger of her powerlessness to rectify the situation (Sheridan 109). Sheridan’s description of the situation does convey its severity but whereas Paddy O’Leary describes what happened to her as a ‘frightening experience’, suggesting that anyone would find this experience frightening, regardless of their sex, Sheridan continues on to express how she had viewed the incident through her internalisation of essentialist notions of feminine weakness (O’Leary 152). Indeed, Sheridan states that ‘Being the damsel in distress didn’t appeal to [her] at all, especially after having been so slow coming down off Cathedral Peak, and [she] decided [she] was fine as soon as [she] stopped shivering’ (Sheridan 109). Here, Sheridan’s self-critical use of the idiom ‘damsel in distress’ (Sheridan 109), evokes imagery of the patriarchal stereotype of a defenceless young woman, which she did not wish to be perceived as. Sheridan’s use of a warrior metaphor in her description of a high-altitude mountaineering experience in 1980, in which she and her partner ‘stood roped up and ready for battle’, conveys the equal strength in the partnership, highlighting her much greater skill and confidence in the environment despite her earlier feelings of incapability (Sheridan 125). Sheridan’s emotionally authentic exploration of her internalisation of the implicit misogyny of the high-altitude mountaineering environment exposes the effect of this masculinised culture upon women’s sense of belonging, and her commitment to developing as a mountaineer in this environment challenges the hegemonic ideals of feminine weakness.

Sheridan also examines the impact of internalising misogyny upon her experiences of other women in the mountaineering community. Maureen Murdock states that ‘in writing memoir, the writer’s capacity to remember the past in the present informs her ability to reclaim and release the past with the intention of envisioning the future’ (Murdock 5). In light of this statement, Sheridan recalls her ‘past’ attitudes towards some other female climbers, informed by her own internalisation of misogyny, in order to later demonstrate the ‘future’ of her positive attitudes towards climbing with other strong women (Murdock 5). Rachel Dilley describes Australian female trad climbers’ attitudes towards other female climbers who appeared to be less committed:

> Some of the research participants differentiated themselves from other women climbers who they saw as less committed, particularly […] ‘belay bunnies’.

> Belay bunnies are usually girlfriends of male climbers who only climb with their boyfriends; they do not lead and tend to […] (belay) and second. […] These women were taken less seriously […]. They were thought to be involved in order to gain the attention of their boyfriends or other male participants. They were also seen as less physically and mentally capable. (Dilley 206)

The attitudes of Dilley's research participants are comparable to Sheridan's descriptions of her earlier attitudes as she states that 'there were very few women among the climbers in Dalkey, and we never saw any of them leading' (Sheridan 38). She continues to describe how she had felt that 'Some people, particularly girlfriends, never led. And people who never led were not real climbers' (Sheridan 45). Through these quotes, Sheridan conveys her previous internalisation of misogyny as she had felt critical of other female climbers who she perceived to be less committed than herself, wishing to disassociate herself from these 'women and 'girlfriends' who 'never led' as they 'were not real climbers' (Sheridan 45). As Sheridan writes of 'the leader (who was almost always male apart from [herself])', she suggests the greater ease with which she could relate to the male climbers around her who did lead, concurring with Dilley's findings that 'how the research participants differentiated themselves from other women in the subculture was also a way of aligning themselves with core male participants and the dominant values in climbing' (Dilley 210) (Sheridan 45). Sheridan's recalling of her perception of some women in Chamonix in her memoir, further conveys this desire to 'align' herself 'with core male' figures, and therefore 'the dominant values in climbing' due to the hegemonic gender power imbalance of her mountaineering community (Dilley 2210):

> A few English climbers had girls with them – they were invariably fair-haired and pretty […]. None of the girls in the campsite seemed to be doing any climbing, even though the weather was perfect. They spent their days sunbathing. I was delighted one day when Sé called me an *alpiniste extraordinarie* – or was he slagging? (Sheridan 58)

As Sheridan describes the presumably male 'climbers' in genderless terms, this perhaps betrays the mountaineering community's idealisation of masculinity, as is certainly highlighted by Frohlick's previously mentioned comments on men's narratives of high-altitude mountaineering (Sheridan 58). As the 'girls […] were invariably fair haired

and pretty', and later in her memoir, Sheridan makes mention of 'the 'pretty girlfriend' world […] which [she] knew nothing about', this further conveys her feelings of dissimilarity to some of the women around her, especially as rather than 'climbing, even though the weather was perfect' she notes that they 'spent their days sunbathing' (Sheridan 58, 92). As she 'was delighted one day when Sé [a male, Irish mountaineer] called [her] an *alpiniste extraordinarie'*, it is clear that her criticisms of these women at that time arose from her internalisation of the implicit misogyny of the mountaineering culture, in her desire to be taken seriously by aligning herself with the masculine ideal image of the climber (Sheridan 58). As Sé's hyperbolic code-switching to French creates ambiguity causing her to wonder, 'or was he slagging?', this perhaps suggests her recognition of, and insecurity regarding the mountaineering culture's ideological trivialising of women's mountaineering (Sheridan 58). Sheridan's use of her memoir to express previously held beliefs highlights her recognition of her internalisation of misogyny, contextualising her later descriptions of increasingly positive experiences of climbing with women that challenge hegemonic notions of superior masculine ability in mountaineering culture.

Sheridan later explores the transformation of her perspective of climbing with women. Michael Messner describes how, 'by the 1970s, just when symbolic representations of the athletic male body had taken on increasing ideological importance, a second wave of athletic feminism had emerged' (Messner, 200). Indeed, Sheridan describes how 'in the gym-like atmosphere of [new] indoor walls', 'young women and girls developed strength that amazed [her], and they did this with the honed muscles of gymnasts and not, as [she] had once feared, the bulging physiques of bodybuilders' (Sheridan 179). This realisation perhaps finally disproved her internalised misogynistic anxieties created by the 1960s Irish education system that Sheridan describes had taught girls that 'strengthening muscles and investigating the body's possibilities was certainly not something a nice girl would do' (Sheridan 39). As Sheridan, here, writes of how she was 'amazed' by the young women and girls […] [with] the honed muscles of gymnasts', enthusiastically noticing their achievements, this is an example of Messner's notion of 'athletic feminism', helping to develop the basis for the formation of a women's community in mountaineering (Messner, 200) (Sheridan 179). Helen Buss describes the necessity of memoir in the deconstruction of internalised misogyny:

> The forces of division caused by the tradition of misogyny that we inherit are so great that such solidarity must be grounded in finding a common reality making process, a common experience of making identity. […] I think that performing acts of memoir can make that happen (Buss xxiii)

In Sheridan's memoir, her recanting of her experience 'in 1983 at a women's climbing meet in North Wales', presents an example of women 'finding a common experience of making identity' as rock-climbers, which Sheridan extends into her engagement with the activity of 'performing acts of memoir' (Buss xxiii) (Sheridan 183). At this meet, Sheridan describes how she 'could feel the exciting dynamic that emerges when strong women climb together', the words 'exciting dynamic', conveying a sense of vitality in the women's experience of community by climbing 'together' (Sheridan 183). She states her findings that 'the support that women give each other is warmer and more encouraging than that given by men' and 'women actually admit it if they're scared on a climb while men don't' (Sheridan 183). Here, the words 'warmer' 'encouraging' 'admit' and 'scared' convey the greater readiness of women to share emotional experiences whilst climbing (Sheridan 183). In this light, Sheridan expresses her epiphany regarding the valuable experience of climbing with women:

> I realised that climbing in the company of strong women would probably revolutionise my own mental approach, but there were never enough women active on the Irish cliffs to provide that sort of psychological springboard (Sheridan 184)

Here, 'revolutionise' perhaps highlights Sheridan's recognition that women's displays of emotional openness could radically transform her 'mental approach' to rock-climbing (Sheridan 184). Although she laments the scarcity of women climbing in Ireland, her metaphor of the 'psychological springboard' links to the previously described 'exciting dynamic that emerges', reinforcing the transformative potential of female unity within the mountaineering community (Sheridan 183, 184). Through the development of Sheridan's memoir from examining her disassociation from other women in the mountaineering community to describing her excitement at the cultural shift towards an increasing number of female climbers, she is able to express challenges to the hegemonic masculinity of mountaineering culture.

Sheridan explores her development as a rock-climber through her relationship with nature. Roberta Grandi writes of Gwen Moffat, a British mountaineer who began writing in the 1950s, that 'Moffat's writing differs from traditional mountaineering memoirs because she never constructs the mountain as "terra nullius"', a Latin phrase that Grandi describes as meaning 'empty spaces, lands of no one […] waiting for the European alpinist to explore, subdue, and, finally, seize them' (Grandi 4, 7). Much like Moffat, Sheridan presents the landscape not as a passive subject waiting to be conquered, but an organic space in which she may develop as a rock-climber. Given Hansen's description of the mountaineering community's historically patriarchal attitude towards the landscape, and Plumwood's argument that the association of femininity with nature has emerged through patriarchal anthropocentric concepts of 'rationalist dualisms', Sheridan's connection with the landscape is best understood through Sarah Buckingham's constructivist ecofeminism (Plumwood 52). As Dilley states that 'Women who develop these same bodily skills and strength [as men] also experience a sense of empowerment, which some theorists have suggested can challenge dichotomous notions of masculinity and femininity', a constructivist ecofeminist reading of Sheridan's memoir is that it challenges both the superiority of masculinity in rock-climbing, and human dominance over nature (Dilley 203). Sheridan's description of her first VS climb conveys her newfound understanding of her potential through the rock-climbing process, as her 'mind exploded with relief and triumph as [she] realised [she] was through the crux' (Sheridan 46). Although 'triumph', due to its being synonymous with 'mastery' and 'conquest' may be assumed to convey Sheridan's feeling of having overcome nature though the climb, her feeling of 'relief' that she 'could breathe again, ablaze in a new-burnished world', suggests 'triumph' to instead be understood in terms of the climb's facilitation of her overcoming her perceived limitations of her abilities ("triumph") (Sheridan 46). As, the phrases 'mind exploded' and 'new-burnished world' can be associated in an extended metaphor of transcendent discovery, Sheridan conveys the transformation of her world view through realising her capabilities (Sheridan 46). Sheridan again expresses the concept of psychological transformation, typical of the memoir style, in a metaphor of the irreversible development of an insect within nature as she describes how 'When you succeed you feel you've broken out of a chrysalis and now inhabit a better, braver, more powerful version of yourself' (Sheridan, 91). As her statement that 'testing your limits and surpassing your known self is at the heart of climbing too', directly follows the

‘chrysalis’ metaphor, a constructivist ecofeminist reading of this would perhaps suggests the benefit to climbers’ development of recognising their position within ecology, and therefore their relational connection to nature as the source of their climbing development, rather than the human desire to conquer (Sheridan 91). Most telling of this concept is Sheridan’s description of how when ‘climbing at Fairhead’ which is a bank of cliff on the north-east coast of Ireland, near Ballycastle, ‘it feels like spending time in another realm’ perhaps evoking animistic notions the landscape’s ancient vitality (Sheridan 199). She describes how as a climber ‘you stand dwarfed below its palisade of pillars’, and then as the climb begins, ‘the rock absorbs you, filling your vision and curving round to enclose you as you climb’, further conveying its ancient vitality through the suggestion of the climber’s insignificance to its dominating presence (Sheridan 199). Indeed, Sheridan continues to describe the transformation of the climber:

> The moorland, lakes and farms will be just as you left them but you’ll have changed – the physical and mental effort of the climb will have seen to that – while the cliff will still be as dark and as wild as ever, untamed by your passage (Sheridan 199)

Here, Sheridan emphasises the landscape’s role in creating the conditions for the climber’s psychological development as whereas the climb will ‘have changed’ them, the words ‘dark’ ‘wild’ and ‘untamed’ create a semantic field to express the cliff’s almost primordial power, and in particular its being ‘untamed by [the climber’s] passage’ conveys the impossibility of human dominance over nature (Sheridan 199). Sheridan describes how once she became comfortable with the formidable cliff, she ‘could flirt with its fierceness without being overwhelmed’ (Sheridan 200). Here, a constructivist ecofeminist reading of her interaction with the landscape may suggests that Sheridan’s use of fricatives in emphasising ‘flirt’ and ‘fierceness’ highlights her recognition of the landscape’s predominance, whilst she develops a connection with it by testing herself against its challenge (Sheridan 200). Although she writes that ‘there was never any shortage of virgin rock for [herself and Calvin] to explore’ this is not representative of her attitudes, as testified by the expressions throughout her memoir, of her relational experiences with nature, and instead indicates the mountaineering community’s sometimes old-fashioned language choices, codified during the height of British Imperialism, as discussed by Hansen and Taylor (Sheridan 200). Sheridan’s

recognition, throughout her memoir of the landscape's predominance over the figure of the mountaineer as she develops her abilities through her interactions with it, challenges both the notion of innate feminine weakness, and hegemonic masculine notions of humanity's dominance over nature.

This chapter has sought to highlight the importance of the memoir form in documenting the position of women in Irish mountaineering in the 1970s and onwards, whilst also challenging hegemonic masculine values in the community. Sheridan's use of her memoir to challenge the acceptability of misogynistic comments made by members of the Spillikin Club also communicates the difficulty for female mountaineers of navigating the conflicting hegemonic conservative expectations of femininity, with the sexually objectifying male gaze. She also highlights her challenges to popular, gender essentialist notions of innate feminine weakness, through both the activity of rock-climbing, and her contemplation of such limiting preconceptions. In interrogating the sexualisation of women in mountaineering magazines through the personalising style of memoir, she extends her challenge of hegemonic values also to the British mountaineering culture, naming magazines and brands that participated in such misogynistic discourses, and intentional omissions of the successes of female mountaineers and rock-climbers. Sheridan challenges the hegemonic ideals in British and Irish society that criticise women's decisions to fulfil the role of both a mother and a mountaineer, as she also interrogates newspapers' posthumous criticisms of British mountaineer, Alison Hargreaves. This chapter also finds that Sheridan conveys experiences of internalising misogyny through her memoir, both in the high-altitude mountaineering environment, and in her earlier criticisms of seemingly less committed female mountaineers and rock-climbers. She challenges hegemonic biases towards the masculine image of the climber through her descriptions of overcoming this internalisation of misogyny to become confident in high-altitude mountaineering and her use of the memoir form to express her cultivation of community with other strong female climbers. Finally, the chapter finds that Sheridan's description through her memoir, of her humility towards the vital power of nature and its role in the development of her rock-climbing abilities, challenges the patriarchal anthropocentric, imperial ideologies codified into the emergence of mountaineering culture.

## Chapter 2

## Lynn Hill's Experiences as a Woman in Rock-Climbing in Her Memoir *Climbing Free* (2002)

This chapter will examine Lynn Hill's experiences, in her memoir *Climbing Free* (2002), of being a rock-climber both in Yosemite Valley, and her travels abroad to climb. The chapter will first examine Hill's description of the homosocial nature of Yosemite's rock-climbing culture. It will then examine Hill's use of the memoir form to convey her experiences of the misogyny inherent within rock-climbing culture. The chapter will also explore how despite these experiences, she details throughout her memoir, the strong relationships she develops with other female climbers in the community. Finally, the chapter will take a constructivist ecofeminist approach to examining Hill's development as a rock-climber through her relational experiences with nature, as her ecocentric desire to learn from the landscape directly refuses the anthropocentric conquering ideologies that had underpinned earlier mountaineering activities in Yosemite Valley, as discussed by Joseph Taylor.

Hill describes the male-dominated rock-climbing community in Yosemite Valley at the beginning of her career. Rachel Hunt states that 'where the male experience is historically found in "formal" recordings of vertical accomplishment, the female experience may reside in attics, personal records, and other altogether less formal archival locations', (Hunt 5). Hunt's notion of the importance of personal accounts such as memoirs in bringing attention to the experiences of female climbers is relevant to Hill's personal experience of, and challenges to, the predominance of men within Yosemite's rock-climbing culture, and it's championing of feats of masculine prowess, as described by Joseph Taylor:

> Although women were always active in Yosemite, men dominated a cultural process informed by interrelationships among hegemonic masculine constructions of sex, gender and nature, and ideals associated with individualism, achievement, and competition (Taylor 212)

In light of this, Hill describes the masculine monopoly over the cultural image of Yosemite Valley, through mention of the 'unofficial clan of climbers called the Stonemasters', which is well-known in '"formal" recordings' and 'was an elite club that […] was exclusively male and a ritual was required to join' (Hill 53) (Hunt 5). Here, Hill evokes tribal and quasi-religious imagery in the words 'clan' and 'ritual', alongside suggestions of the groups hegemonic masculine ideologies as it was 'elite' and 'exclusively male' (Hill 53). Hill reinvokes tribal and religious imagery in her description of her first impressions of Jim Bridwell:

> When I first met Bridwell, he was in the manner of a tribal elder passing onto us youngsters bold lessons he had gleaned from Sacherer [one of the main, male, figureheads in the development of climbing in Yosemite]. Those lessons, passed on like a religion, included throwing oneself at routes with abandon (Hill 92)

Here, the phrase 'tribal elder' indicates Bridwell's status as one of the most knowledgeable rock-climbers in the community (Hill 92). As Hill describes how Bridwell was 'passing on to [the] youngsters bold lessons he had gleaned from Sacherer', which were 'like a religion' this suggests the canonization of male figureheads of knowledge in Yosemite, creating a cultural atmosphere in which 'the male experience' was most likely to be presented 'in "formal" recordings (Hunt 5). In light of this cultural bias towards presenting 'the male experience' Hill writes of a route called 'Ophir Broke', where 'Though [she] did the FFA of this route, the guidebook to the Ophir Wall credits John with the FFA, probably because in 1980 [she] was an unknown climber, just a protégé of Largo' (Hill 141, 143) (Hunt 5). This lack of public recognition of Hill's achievement suggests not necessarily the malice of her fellow rock-climbers but the unconscious cultural bias towards the familiarity of the established male rock-climber. Therefore, as Hunt describes the importance of looking to 'less formal archival locations' for women's experiences, Hill's memoir is essential to the knowledge that she actually achieved the FFA of 'Ophir Broke' (Hill 141) (Hunt 5). Hill's use of the memoir form in detailing the masculine monopoly over narratives of achievement in Yosemite Valley, and then stating the truth of her own achievement, highlights the importance of her memoir in challenging the prescribed hegemonic masculine histories of rock-climbing achievements.

Hill documents her experiences of misogyny within the global rock-climbing community. Anna Goorevich and Nicole M. LaVoi summarise de Haan and others, as they describe the 'lens of gender essentialism where male athletes have inherently different athletic capabilities than women, who are constructed as inferior, less confident, and less capable' (Goorevich & LaVoi 4). As Carolyn Heilbrun states that through memoir, 'women today do not flee public discourses; they attempt to redefine it', in a similar way to Sheridan, Hill utilises her memoir as a platform from which to publicly contemplate this 'lens of gender essentialism' that frames the attitudes of the men she encounters in the climbing community (Goorevich & LaVoi 4) (Heilbrum 37). Hill writes that after she completed a difficult boulder problem, a male climber had said '"Gee, I can't even do that" […] dismissively, and walked off in a huff', conveying his exasperation at her success. (Hill 43). Hill elaborates that 'his assumption seemed to be that as a man he should automatically be physically superior to a small girl, and he seemed put out to see the "weaker sex" outdo him' (Hill 43). Here, Hill's use of the phrase 'the "weaker sex"' indicates her recognition of the climber's gender essentialist ideologies and her role in challenging them, by disproving the concept of his being 'automatically […] physically superior' (Hill 43). Hill challenges the hegemonic gender power dynamics of rock-climbing as she muses upon the irrelevance of misogynistic attitudes to the actual activity of climbing:

> I was often disappointed by sexist attitudes outside the climbing scene, but it made me even more annoyed to see them among climbers. Perhaps this was because I felt that climbing was the first truly egalitarian activity I had participated in: everyone was equal before the rocks, it seemed to me (Hill 43-44)

Here, as she describes 'sexist attitudes' as a 'disappointment' that caused her to feel 'annoyed', she suggests them to be an unwelcome patriarchal imposition upon a sporting environment where they have no relevance, due to the ultimate authority of 'the rocks' over 'everyone' (Hill 44). Particularly, her use of the phrase 'it seemed to me', indicates her utilisation of the contemplative aspect of memoir to articulate her intention to 'redefine' 'public discourse' in climbing, regarding the authority of male climbers' misogynistic attitudes towards their female peers (Heilbrum37) (Hill 44). Hill later writes of how before leaving France, she had climbed a route in the Verdon Gorge, and Marco Scolaris had said '"I have not seen a woman climb a route so hard"' (Hill

189). As she writes that she 'was flattered, though [she] felt the climb had been well within [her] abilities' she perhaps suggests her recognition of his good intentions and contrasts his surprise with her assuredness of her 'abilities' (Hill 189). Her statement that 'By now [she] was accustomed to being judged not just as a climber, but by [her] gender' suggests her awareness that although well-intended, his words betrayed his perception of her through a 'lens of gender essentialism' (Goorevich & LaVoi 4) (Hill 189). Hill is therefore able to 'redefine' the power of such discourses as she conveys her recognition of the limitedness not of her own 'abilities' but of the 'sexist' belief systems through which she is 'judged not just as a climber, but by [her] gender' (Heilbrum 37) (Hill 43, 189). Hill experiences the objectification of female athletes at a rock-climbing competition in Arco, Italy, where an organiser said that '"the women would be paid an equal prize if they climbed without their tops on"' (Hill 192). Rachel Smoot's statement that 'the focus of physical attractiveness over physical skill in female athletes inadvertently sets a standard that only men can be "real" athletes' (Smoot 88). Therefore, the sexualisation of female rock-climbers in these earlier competitions perhaps arose from gender essentialist ideals which minimised women's 'physical skill', and resulted in the organisers perceiving women's 'physical attractiveness' as exploitable as these men suggested that the women were only of a value 'equal' to the male competitors 'if they climbed without their tops on' (Hill 192) (Smoot 88). Hill expresses her once privately contemplated astonishment as 'while these two revelled in their humour, [she] stood speechless, wondering what kind of *casino* – a bit of Italian slang suggesting a chaotic debacle – the Arco contest would be' (Hill 192). Here, she is able to 'redefine' the implications of the situation as although excluded from the misogynistic exchange as 'these two revelled' and she 'stood speechless', she communicates through her memoir, the damage of their attitudes to the integrity of the entire competition, as the word '*casino*' is also synonymous with '(*bordello*) brothel' (Heilbrum 37) ("casino"). Through her use of her memoir to highlight the irrelevance of gender essentialism to her self-image as a climber, and her disdain towards misogynistic comments, she challenges the climbing community's hegemonic gender power imbalance.

Despite the existence of misogynistic attitudes within the rock-climbing community, the presence of some strong female climbers in Yosemite allows Hill to develop deep

connections with them that support the development of her experience, strength and skill, and therefore challenge hegemonic notions of masculine superiority.

Hill explores the strength of her relationship with fellow Yosemite climber Mari Gingery, cultivated through their shared feminine experience of rock-climbing within their otherwise masculine group of rock-climbers. Helen Buss states, with regard to women in eighteenth century English society, that 'rather, the memoir form, but women's accounts specifically, seeks a reintegration that leaves the self desiring both autonomy and relationship in continuing negotiation with its community', and although she refers to an earlier period, it is clear that Hill's memoir also explores this concept through her and Gingery's navigation of Yosemite's rock-climbing culture (Buss 13). Indeed, although Lindsey Breitwieser and Jocelyne Scott state that 'within extreme sports, fitness and physicality are structured through femmephobia, which […] ties an individual's success to their embrace of masculinity', it is clear the presence of another woman in Yosemite's rock-climbing community helps both women to resist 'femmephobia' so that their sense of belonging, and 'success [are not tied] to their embrace of masculinity' (Breitwieser & Scott 151). Hill describes how at the crags in Southern California, herself and Gingery 'had often been the only women in a sea of coarse-talking, hard-cranking men' (Hill 87). Here, the 'sea' metaphor, conveys the overwhelmingly masculine atmosphere as 'coarse' connotes rough, vulgar speech, and 'hard-cranking' indicates the use of strength over technique, which are both stereotypically associated with masculinity (Hill 87). Whereas such an overwhelming sense of masculinity may cause an individual female to feel peripheral to the atmosphere, the presence of another woman, could validate each of their different experiences of climbing, and integrate them into the group (Hill 87). Hill's description of her and Gingery's 'sisterhood in figuring out [their] own methods of getting up sections of routes the guys simply muscled through', conveys the feminine 'autonomy' of their climbing style, and also their 'relationship in continuing negotiating with [their] community' as they used different 'methods' to participated in the same activity, challenging the 'femmephobia' of the notion of masculine physical superiority in rock-climbing (Buss 13) (Breitwieser & Scott 151) (Hill 87). Further to this notion of Hill and Gingery's unity challenging the 'femmephobia' of rock-climbing, they would 'examine [their] chalk-white hands with their calloused skin and frayed nails and

cuticles, and [they'd] joke about needing a manicure' (Breitwieser & Scott 151). Although the pair cared little for 'a manicure' Hill's inclusion of their light-hearted 'joke' in her memoir reminds readers of the feminine 'autonomy' of their rock-climbing identities, as they continue to have a 'relationship in continuing negotiation with [their masculine rock-climbing] community' (Buss 13) (Hill 87). As Hill and Gingery progressed together to make the first all-female ascent of a big wall climb, Hill describes how they 'had no fear of the height, only an enhanced sense of intimacy between [them]' highlighting the strength of their emotional unity (Hill 120). As she continues to write of how 'up here in this giddy place, [she] felt as if [they] were the last people on earth and secrets were of no further use', the phrase 'giddy place' conveys Hill's childlike sense of joy and freedom as she 'felt as if [they] were the last people on earth' suggesting their transcendent feeling of feminine unity and 'autonomy' from the masculine community in the valley below (Buss 13) (Hill 120). Furthermore, 'because this was one of the rare times when [they] could speak woman-to-woman without a bunch of guys hanging around, the topic of [their] conversation revolved around [their] relationship with men', highlighting Hill's utilisation of the memoir style to express the women's use of their 'autonomy' to discuss their 'relationship' with their 'community' (Buss 13) (Hill 120). Hill's exploration of the emotional depth of her relationship with Mari Gingery through the memoir writing style, highlights the relationship's facilitation of the women's integration into the masculinised Yosemite rock-climbing community, without absolutely sacrificing their sense of femininity as strong climbers, challenging the hegemonic masculinity of the culture.

Hill also explores the functional strength of an all-female rock-climbing partnership whilst big wall climbing on El Captain. Keegan Allee states, that the supportive social atmosphere of rock-climbing and absolute trust a climber must have in their belayer, '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' (Allee 114). In light of this, Hill utilises the contemplative nature of the memoir style to convey the women's pride in this 'rare opportunity' to demonstrate their talent as female climbers without men's involvement in their success (Allee, 114). Hill recants how during her and Gingery's first all-female ascent of a big wall route called the Shield, Mari had called it 'a wall without balls' (Hill 118). This play on words describes the

all-female nature of the climbing partnership whilst also invoking the association of courage with 'balls' and by default, masculinity, therefore challenging associations of the image of 'talented' big wall climbers with masculinity (Allee 114) (Hill 118). Hill notes that 'wall without balls' was the 'term Bev Johnson and Sybille Hechtel had coined when they did their first all-female ascent of the Triple Direct on El Capitan in 1973', which had actually been 'the first all-female ascent of El Capitan' (Hill 118, 126). In light of this, her inclusion of the phrase in her memoir highlights her intention to present the achievements of the two female partnerships together, as a challenge to the traditional perception of big wall climbing as a demonstration of masculine strength (Hill 118). Hill describes how 'The Shield, which loomed frighteningly steep over [their] heads, was now the sole domain of two women', and as 'domain' describes owned territory, she perhaps conveys their confidence in climbing together, and so although this cliff that 'loomed frighteningly' may have caused some fear, this fear may have ultimately been outweighed by a feeling of empowerment towards the process of their all-female ascent (Hill 118). Hill asserts that theirs 'had been the first female ascent of the Shield', and then continues to contemplate the implications of their achievement, stating that 'rather than feeling that [they] had done something "apart" from men, [they] felt [they] had done something "equal" to men' (Hill 125). Here, it is clear that through her memoir, Hill seeks to convey, with relation to Buss' comment, the 'autonomy' of her and Gingery's achievement from any support from male-climbers, but also their 'relationship in continuing negotiation with [their] community', as they could be recognised as '"equal"' (Buss 13) (Hill 125). Hill's use of the memoir form in conveying the empowering experience of her first all-female big wall ascent with Gingery, challenges hegemonic assumptions of the masculinity of the big wall climbing space in Yosemite Valley.

Hill also explores the value of female role-models to her development as a rock-climber. Hill writes, midway through her memoir, of becoming 'aware of how few women were pushing the limits of climbing and endurance like [she] was, and of how [her] passion had led [her] very much into a man's world' (Hill 138). In light of Hill's comment on her position as a woman in rock-climbing, Molly Loomis describes her understanding of the importance of female role models:

> For me it is more tangible, easily transferrable to watch a woman climb: I am in essence watching my own form – the form I most naturally, inherently relate to and identify with – and it doesn't stop at movement, but encompasses attitude and composure as well (Loomis 103)

In light of this, Hill utilises her memoir to elevate awareness of other female climbers in Yosemite such as Beverley Johnson who she had felt inspired by due to a sense of feminine kinship. In particular, as Nancy Caronia and Edvige Giunta state that 'memoir, with its associative spiral narrative, seeks to illuminate and understand the ties between the self and the world', Hill reinvokes the notion of 'sisterhood' which she felt with Gingery, to express Johnson's importance as a role-model in the development of her rock-climbing career (Caronia & Edvige 1) (Hill 87). She writes of how 'Bev Johnson was one of [her] first role models because she too was a strong woman who boldly followed her passions' (Hill 138). Here, 'strong' may refer to both Johnson's climbing ability and her conviction to the sport, and because Hill writes 'she to', her description of Johnson as a 'strong woman who boldly followed her passions' dually refers to herself and Johnson, conveying Johnson's value to Hill as a role model in terms of both her climbing 'movement' and her 'attitude and composure' (Hill 138) (Loomis 103). As she goes on to describe Johnson as her '"adventure sister"', evoking similar sentiments to her experience of 'sisterhood' with Gingery, this suggests that female community is not only cultivated through intense proximity, but also through respect for each other's commitment to 'adventure' (Hill 87, 138). Here, Hill's focus on her experience of feeling connected to Johnson contextualises her painful acceptance of Johnson's tragic death as she describes how 'the news of her death hit [her] hard. [She] had lost a soul sister' (Hill 139). Here, 'soul sister' highlights the strength of a connection that transcends the material aspect of being human due to the similarity of their 'attitudes', and the gravity of Hill's experience of her loss is consistent with the magnitude of her 'impact on [Hill] as a young climber' (Hill 138, 139). Hill's repeated invocation of the theme of sisterhood, highlights the importance of the memoir style in elevating the sense of shared experience between female climbers to augment the predominantly masculinised narratives of Yosemite rock-climbing culture.

Hill explores her humility towards the landscape as a female rock-climber. Janet Ellerby states that 'the memoir invites the writer and the reader to compose and clarify ethical positions, encouraging and deepening our sense of ourselves as ethical agents' (Ellerby 130). In light of this, as described by Sarah Buckingham, a constructivist ecofeminist reading of Hill's experience of the landscape will help to understand her 'ethical position', in refusal of the imperial, anthropocentric attitudes towards the landscape that had originally been codified into mountaineering and rock-climbing practices, as discussed by Moraldo, Taylor, and Hansen (Ellerby 130). Eric Brymer and Tonia Gray describe extreme athletes' relationships with nature, concurring with Hill's narrative of her experiences:

> In the face of such power, extreme athletes accept that the natural world is greater than they are and that participation depends on understanding the environment and on learning to work with it (Brymer & Gray, 368)

Hill describes how whilst climbing The Nose of El Capitan after sunset, she followed the sequence mapped out upon its surface, illuminated by a 'Bic lighter' (Hill 100-101). As 'the yellow glow would reveal a flash of information – the size of the crack in front of [her], a foothold to the right – then [she'd] let the flame flicker out', Hill's methodical description of the 'flash of information', 'the size of the crack', 'a foothold to the right' convey her acceptance of the limitations of her only tool with which to 'understand the environment' (Brymer & Gray 368) (Hill 101). Her metaphor describing how she had 'been learning by Braille for half an hour' further conveys her recognition of the importance of 'understanding the environment' by touch and 'learning how to work with it' as if the movement process constituted a language (Brymer & Gray 368). A constructivist ecofeminist reading of her relational interaction with the landscape would suggest that it serves to 'clarify [her ecocentric] ethical positions' of humility towards the predominance of nature (Ellerby 130). As Hill moves through her 'learning' process it is evident that she accepts that 'the natural world is greater than [herself]' as she describes how 'the crack opened into a V-shaped flare that swallowed [her] body', almost personifying its overwhelming power and the engrossing nature of the climbing experience (Brymer & Gray 368) (Hill 101). Hill's personification of the rock face becomes clearer as she states that 'the wall was like some living entity that was testing our mettle by throwing up new challenges, new unknowns, that we had to overcome', evoking animistic images of the rock as an ancient teacher, whose challenge she must

accept (Hill 101). In light of the sense of the predominating authority of the rock as a 'living entity testing [their] mettle', Hill describes her acceptance of the learning process of the climb (Hill 101):

> I shuffled and groveled. The process became hypnotic. It was neither pleasant nor unpleasant, calming nor terrifying, fun nor drudgery. It was just necessary, and I was simply there, like a bug on the wall, moving inexorably up out of instinct and need. My sense of time evaporated (Hill 101)

Here, as in 'shuffled and groveled' (Hill 101), 'groveled' (Hill 101) suggests both crawling and servility, she conveys her acceptance of the predominating power of the landscape. Furthermore, as she elaborates upon the statement that 'the process became hypnotic' by describing her almost emotionless state as 'it was neither pleasant nor unpleasant, calming nor terrifying, fun nor drudgery' she conveys her trance-like state as she concentrated absolutely upon the task presented by the 'living entity' of the rock (Hill 101). Hill's use of the simile as she states that she 'was simply there, like a bug on the wall, moving inexorably up out of instinct and need' perhaps suggests both her ecocentric recognition of the humble position of humanity within nature, and her determination to reach safety (Hill 101). In light of the constructivist ecofeminist reading of Hill's understanding of the insignificance of humanity to the predominating forces of nature, she states that there is 'no such thing as ownership of a route' (Hill 141). She extends her criticism of such anthropocentric ideologies of conquering land to her comments upon the attitudes of a climber who decided to chip his own holds into rock on 'the Southwest Buttress of El Capitan' (Hill 229). She comments that 'he failed to recognise that the spirit of free climbing is about adapting one's personal capacities and dimensions to the natural features of the rock, not the other way around' (Hill 229). In Hill's descriptions throughout her memoir of the power of the landscape in comparison to the figure of the climber, she presents an ecocentric challenge the hegemonic masculine anthropocentric conquering ideologies, codified during the emergence of mountaineering and rock-climbing practices in Yosemite Valley.

As well as Hill's humility towards the landscape as a rock-climber, she explores its role in directing the creativity of her climbing style. Diane Chisholm says of Hill that 'instead of dwelling on personal chutzpah like most (male) climbing literature, her book

focuses on a kinesiology that transcends the ego' (Chisholm 29). Indeed, as Hill describes in her memoir how she 'loved the touch and feel of the rock, and the intimacy between the climber and the cliff' this highlights her enjoyment of the process, or 'kinesiology', of climbing over the 'chutzpah' of perceiving oneself to have conquered the rock (Chisholm 29) (Hill 79). Her emphasis on the experience of 'the intimacy between the climber and the cliff' is evident as she describes, in detail, her awe at the rock formations in the Gunks:

> Oxides and lichens had painted the cliff with a riot of reds, greens, and yellows; sharp edges perfectly shaped for the fingers peppered the walls; and tiers of roofs jutted out over our heads (Hill 175)

Here, the word 'riot' perhaps conveys the artistic flourish of nature, as the vibrancy and vitality of the 'reds, greens, and yellows', and the 'sharp edges' that 'peppered the walls' and 'tiers of roofs' evoke images of the diversity of the cliff's texture (Hill 175). Hill inextricably associates the walls' fascinating texture with the possibility for movement as in particular the 'sharp edges [were] perfectly shaped for the fingers' (Hill 175). As she states that she had felt that 'a different texture of rock could offer [her] an entirely new world of climbing', she conveys her appreciation of the kinaesthetic experiences made possible by different types of rock. Hill's later description of climbing on limestone in the Verdon Gorge conveys her enjoyment of the movement styles facilitated by different rock-types as she 'was amazed at how fluid and dancelike the movement could be on this ornately featured rock', again associating the beauty of the 'ornate' rock with the beauty of movement in 'fluid and dancelike' (Hill 188). She reinvokes this notion of the artistic flare of movement in rock-climbing as she describes, whilst climbing underneath the 'Great Roof' on the Nose of El Capitan, a particular change of position that required 'strenuous yet delicate tai-chi-like dance steps to coordinate finger moves and foot shuffles' (Hill 233). Here, she references a Chinese martial art, valued for being a 'moving meditation', which she later describes in her memoir as she recalls how she had told people who had never seen rock-climbers before 'I climb for fun. It's a kind of moving meditation similar to dance or martial arts' (Hill 233, 269). Here, it is clear that Hill perceives rock-climbing to be a sort of powerful immersive kinaesthetic art that benefits both the mind and body, as she compares it, as a 'moving meditation', to the artistic sports of 'dance' and 'martial arts', contrasting the perception of power in the stereotypically masculine, 'ego' driven ascents that

Chisholm refers to (Chisholm 29) (Hill 269). Hill demonstrates her faith in her personal motivations for rock-climbing when she writes of how during her free ascent of the Nose, in one day, she had felt that 'for [her], this ascent represented a kind of performance art to demonstrate the values [she] believed in' (Hill 245). Here, as she interweaves notions of art and movement in 'performance art' with the importance of personal principles in the 'values [she] believed in', she conveys the importance of her relational experience with the landscape in her development as both a rock-climber and an individual, rather than expressing any desire to assert human dominance over it (Hill 245). Hill's use of her memoir to convey the intrinsic importance of nature in both the development of her climbing abilities and mentality, presents challenges to the egocentric narratives traditionally found in rock-climbing narratives of patriarchal success.

This chapter has sought to examine how Lynn Hill utilises her memoir to document the position of women in rock-climbing, and challenge the hegemonic values that seek to limit or minimise their successes. She begins by describing the cultural bias towards recording and canonizing men's rock-climbing achievements in Yosemite, and challenges this by utilising her memoir to publicly document one of her achievements once attributed, instead, to a male climber. Hill also describes her experiences of men's gender essentialist, and sexual objectifying attitudes towards femininity, and challenges them by utilising her memoir to devalue their power, expressing her contemplations of the limited perspective of such attitudes. She then utilises her memoir to explore her relationships with other female climbers, such as Mari Gingery with whom she developed a distinctly feminine emotional connection, and they incorporated their different abilities as women into their rock-climbing, which progressed to be able to challenge hegemonic associations of big wall climbing with masculinity. She also utilises her memoir to express Beverly Johnson's importance to her a female role-model, expressing the importance of women's community in rock-climbing to augment the culture's predominantly masculinised histories. Finally, this chapter found that through Hill's memoir, she expresses her humility before the predominant authority of nature, and her respect for its facilitation of the development of her rock-climbing abilities by engaging with different rock-types, challenging the egocentric conquering narratives codified into the beginning of rock-climbing culture in Yosemite Valley.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, both Sheridan and Hill utilise their memoirs to document the position of women in mountaineering and rock-climbing in the 1970s and onwards, but their experiences are inextricably tied to the atmospheres of their home communities. Both Sheridan and Hill utilise their memoirs to respond to experiences of hearing misogynistic comments, and gender essentialist ideologies. Sheridan utilises the contemplative nature of the memoir to express her confusion and discomfort towards sexually objectifying comments made by male Irish mountaineers, challenging the acceptability of such attitudes towards women. Her use of her memoir to recall both her defiance of, and confusion towards essentialist notions of innate feminine weakness convey her challenge to the unwelcome imposition of limiting hegemonic ideals of femininity. Hill, on the other hand, utilises her memoir to express her private contemplations of the irrelevance of men's essentialist expectations of her weakness towards her actual climbing abilities. She also communicates her shock towards competition organisers' overt sexual objectification of female climbers, utilising her memoir to express her once unspoken disdain for such attitudes.

Sheridan's memoir challenges the British mountaineering media's maintenance of hegemonic gender power dynamics through the sexualisation of femininity in magazine advertisements involving known brands, and neglecting to record women's noteworthy mountaineering and rock-climbing successes until 1980. Although Hill does not extensively detail the impacts of mountaineering and rock-climbing media upon the image of women in the community, she does make note, in her memoir, of the Yosemite rock-climbing community's attribution of one of her first ascents to a male peer as he was a more well-known figure at the time. She therefore suggests the secondary value of emerging female rock-climbers in Yosemite in the 1970s, and her memoir serves as the record of the truth of her achievement.

Both women convey their respect for, and elevate the stories of, other high-level female mountaineers and rock-climbers through their memoirs. Sheridan conveys her respect by defending Alison Hargreaves' role as both a mother and a mountaineer, and challenges the British media's hypocrisy in attempting to demonize her deviation from hegemonic expectations of motherhood. Hill expresses her respect for the American rock-climber Beverly Johnson, in terms of their similar love of adventure. She also describes some other aspects of Johnson's life and career but as the focus of this dissertation has been Hill's use of her memoir to describe her own experiences, the scope could not accommodate for an examination of Johnson's influence separately from her connection to Hill.

Sheridan's memoir documents her private emotional experiences of internalised misogyny in the masculinised high-altitude mountaineering environment, which initially caused her to feel embarrassed and unqualified, before she became a much more experienced mountaineer. She also writes of how she had internalised misogyny by differentiating herself from female climbers whom she perceived to be less committed, and sought acceptance from seemingly more committed, coincidentally male, climbers. Hill's negative experience of climbing with her sister, Kathy, who was not committed to rock-climbing could have caused her to internalise notions of feminine inferiority, but the scope of this dissertation could not extend to examinations of Hill's experiences outside of the global rock-climbing culture in her memoir.

Sheridan's inclusion in her memoir of her earlier less favourable attitudes towards other female rock-climbers contextualises her challenge to the hegemonic masculinity of Irish mountaineering culture, through her realisation of the exciting possibilities created by climbing with other strong women. Hill's memoir challenges the association of a rock-climber's success with their embrace of masculine qualities, particularly through her relationship with Mari Gingery, as the pair successfully navigate their rock-climbing style through their different capabilities as women. Mari and Hill also develop a deep emotional connection through their shared experiences as they continue to achieve success on big wall climbs.

Sheridan and Hill's memoirs both focus on the predominating vitality of nature, and its role in facilitating the development of their mentality and rock-climbing abilities. Hill develops this sense of respect further through her associations of the beauty of different rock types with the beauty of the different movements that she is able to learn from them. Both women's utilisation of their memoirs to describe the relationship of the female rock-climber to the landscape presents their challenge to the patriarchal anthropocentric conquering ideologies codified into the emergence of mountaineering practices.

Through an examination of Sheridan and Hill's use of the memoir form to document their experiences as women in mountaineering and rock-climbing in the 1970s and onwards, it is clear that the women's memoir is integral to the challenging and diversifying of the predominantly masculinised histories of mountaineering culture. The legacies of these memoirs will continue to be felt by the increasing numbers of women entering the culture, who in finding themselves able to identify with Sheridan and Hill's experiences, will be inspired to assert themselves within their communities.

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**Glossary**

- Anglocentric- centred on or considered in terms of England or Britain. An Anglocentric club would be majority English / British and would hold ideas from that point of view.
- Anthropocentric – ideas that regard humankind as the most central and important element of existence, especially as opposed to nature, for example.
- Chutzpah – extreme self-confidence. From the Yiddish language.
- Codification- the action or process of arranging laws or rules according to a system or plan.
- Constructivism - a theory that suggests that learners do not passively acquire knowledge, and instead construct and further develop their understanding through experiences and social interactions over time.
- Contemporary – refers to the historical period from about 1945 (end of WWII) to the present time.
- Discourse – ongoing conversation on a particular topic, involving a variety of different viewpoints.
- Disparate- essentially different and not easy to be compared.
- Dualism - the belief that two fundamental concepts exist in opposition to each other, for example humanity and nature, man and woman, science and religion.
- Ecofeminism – a political theory that highlights historical association between women and nature in terms of their shared devaluation by their common oppressor- male-dominated culture- and therefore emphasises the role of women in advocating for humanity's better treatment of the environment.
- Egalitarian – believing in or based on the principle that all people are equal and should have equal rights and opportunities.
- Egocentric – thinking only of oneself.
- Episodic Structure (in memoir) – organising a memoir around a series of scenes or moments, centred around a common theme.
- Essentialism – a belief that all things have a set of basic characteristics that make them what they are, so the nature of all things can be explained, and there are no variables or accidents.

- Femmephobia- dislike of, or hostility towards individuals who present with stereotypically feminine traits. This is slightly different to misogyny, where individuals dislike women, regardless of what traits they may express, but the perspectives often occur together.
- Gender – refers to social and cultural differences between either male, female, or other identities that do not correspond to the socially constructed binary.
- Gender essentialism- theory that gendered differences are rooted in nature and biology, conflating sex with gender and refusing any expressions of gender outside of the binary of man and woman. Examples of perceived biological gendered differences might be that all men are physically strong and all women are physically weak.
- Hegemony – the position of being the strongest or most powerful, in the greatest numbers, and therefore able to control others.
- Homosocial – social interactions between members of the same sex. This word is typically used when referring to male social relationships.
- Hyperbolic – deliberately exaggerated for effect.
- Idiosyncratic- a distinctive, peculiar feature or characteristic of a place, thing, or group.
- Implicit – always to be found in; essentially connected with.
- Internalised misogyny – this is misogyny felt and expressed by women. They may express it through minimizing the value of women, mistrusting them, and showing gender bias in favour of men.
- Kinaesthetic – relating to a person's awareness of the position and movement of the parts of their body.
- Kinesiology – the study of the mechanics of body movements.
- Memoir- A historical account of one or a couple of interlinked aspects of someone's life written from their personal knowledge, differing from an autobiography which is a historical account of a person's whole life written from their personal knowledge.
- Misogyny - feelings of hating women, or the belief that men are much better than women for example intellectually and physically.

- Monopoly (in the context of the power of certain ideologies over culture) - the exclusive control of social cultural dynamics by a certain set of ideas, that inform social rankings and how people treat each other within a society.
- Parlance – a particular way of speaking or using words, especially a way common to those with a particular job or interest.
- Patriarchy – a system of society or governance in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded. Patriarchal ideas devalue the importance of the role of women, their physical strength, and intelligence.
- Posthumous – after death.
- Rationalism – the principle of basing opinions and actions on reason and knowledge rather than emotion or impulse.
- Reductionism – the practice of analysing a complex phenomenon in terms of its most simple, fundamental parts, especially when this is said to provide sufficient explanation for strengths and limitations.
- Semantic field – a set of terms related to one theme, for example words conveying power.
- Stylistic (relating to literature) - the way in which language is used to express ideas.
- Sex (biological) (noun) – either of the two main categories which humans and other living things are divided in to, based on their reproductive functions.