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“A Strongman with a Wig”:
Mountaineering, Gender Dynamics, and Feminine Marginalization in the Club Andino Bariloche

Kaitlyn C. Sisco

The Club Andino Bariloche (CAB) is an Argentine mountaineering and winter sports club that was established in San Carlos de Bariloche in 1931. This paper provides a historical assessment of gender dynamics and mountaineering subjectivities in the CAB’s digital archive from 1931 to 2011. Specifically, I examine the CAB’s gendered ideologies of mountaineering as pertaining to: 1) the Andean landscape; 2) masculine protagonism; 3) feminine (in)action; and 4) transitional feminism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. I argue that a history of feminine marginalization marks much of the CAB expeditionary record, drawing attention to the gendered ideologies of masculine control over mountain space. For most of the CAB’s existence, male mountaineers have denigrated the accomplishments of women and appropriated images of femininity and sexual conquest to construct the Andes as a space of masculine power, status, and accomplishment. Though a greater mutual respect emerges in the 1980s, the CAB has historically considered mountaineering incomprehensible with femininity, effectively marginalizing manifestations of womanhood from the mountaineering world.

Keywords: Argentina, mountaineering, gender, feminism, nature, Patagonia, Andes
Introduction

The Club Andino Bariloche (CAB) is an Argentine mountaineering and winter sports club that was established in San Carlos de Bariloche in 1931. Over its history, the CAB has constructed mountain refuges, spearheaded ambitious explorations, and promoted mountaineering, skiing, and environmental education in schools (Wojtiuk 2023, 11). A recently established digital archive of CAB annual reports chronicles these activities, offering insight into the club’s configuration of gender, nature, and sport. This paper provides a historical assessment of gender dynamics and mountaineering subjectivities in the CAB’s archive from 1931 to 2011. Specifically, I examine gendered ideologies of mountaineering as pertaining to: 1) the Andean landscape; 2) masculine protagonism; 3) feminine (in)action; and 4) transitional feminism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The concept of gendered ideologies of mountaineering seeks to foreground CAB members’ perspectives within four areas: ideologies of nature, performances of gender, power dynamics, and an emergent alpine femininity.

Figure 1. Photo of the CAB’s Club Headquarters from Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1940-1949.
I argue that a history of feminine marginalization marks much of the CAB expeditionary record, drawing attention to the gendered ideologies of masculine control over mountain space. For most of the CAB’s existence, male mountaineers have denigrated the accomplishments of women and appropriated images of femininity and sexual conquest to construct the Andes as a space of masculine power, status, and accomplishment. Though a greater mutual respect emerges in the 1980s, the CAB has historically considered mountaineering incomprehensible with femininity, effectively marginalizing manifestations of womanhood from the mountaineering world.

Methodology

This article engages in a critical discourse analysis of gendered dynamics and mountaineering subjectivities in the CAB’s archive from 1931 to 2011. Specifically, I divide the CAB’s publications into two overlapping categories: the 1930s through 1980s and the 1980s through 2011. The first category refers to a period of feminine marginalization, while the latter category recognizes the emergence of an embryonic feminism. Complicated and multilayered, the CAB’s 1980s publications mark a key shift in the club’s language about women while maintaining some gendering elements from the past. Though this shift could have potentially occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, the CAB only produced three publications in the 1960s and one publication for the entirety of the 1970s—thus limiting the data. However, the club’s 1980s linguistic turn coincided with Latin America’s second wave of feminism (Posch 2023; Rivera Berruz 2023). This
assessment is made possible by Spanish-English translations (completed by the author) and the use of NVivo coding software to categorize and account for all the qualitative data from the archive. All translations and potential translation errors belong to the author.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of gendered ideologies of mountaineering is central to my analysis. I define “ideologies” as varied, structured “systems of belief, knowledge, and values... that legitimize a particular set of interests” (Pollock and Bernbeck 2016, 151). “Gendered ideologies” reference the reinforcement of gender binary expectations, dynamics, constructions, and standards in dominant heteropatriarchal frameworks (Tungohan 2021, 44). Expanding upon these definitions, I conceptualize gendered ideologies of mountaineering as the reinforcement and production of binary, heteropatriarchal logics in mountain environments and mountaineering spaces. The term gendered ideologies of mountaineering characterizes the CAB from 1931-2011 and relates to four components: 1) ideologies of nature; 2) performances of gender (e.g., masculine vs feminine performances); 3) power dynamics (i.e., the marginalization or valorization of certain actors); and 4) ideologies of transitional feminism.

This study focuses on bodies as sites of contestation and governance. To conceptualize the CAB’s historical valorization of male bodies over female bodies, I employ Anne Fausto-Sterling’s theories on gender subjectivity and social construction as well as Marcos Mendoza’s Patagonia-centered concept of “alpine masculinity.” Anne Fausto-Sterling offers a template for
understanding how subjects internalize and perform hegemonic values. Recognizing the body as a site of contestation and power, Fausto-Sterling challenges the division between gender and sex, or culture and biology, and contends that everyone is everything, nothing, and exclusively male/female simultaneously.

Fausto-Sterling (2000) argues, regarding the gender/sex dichotomy, that “labeling someone a man or woman is a social decision” and that “our beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place” (3). This means that bodies are complex and do not provide clear cut, non-problematic physical bases for sex, and the differences (or “knowledge”) that societies identify for bodily differentiation are enmeshed in cultural constructs of gender (Fausto-Sterling 2000, 4-5). As a result, bodies, gender, and sex are oversimplified, controlled, and framed according to dominant masculine-feminine narratives (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Martin 1991). Fausto-Sterling (2000) imagines this complicated and controlled relationship between socially constructed performances and natural behavior as a Mobius strip that “we move from outside to inside and back out again, without ever lifting our feet from the strip’s surface” (29).

Marcos Mendoza (2020) discusses these regulated gender performances in Argentine Patagonia, paying particular attention to spatial production and demonstrating how women are often alienated from the natural domain in the context of “alpine masculinity” (211). Alpine masculinity, defined as a dominant gendered subject that is sustained and advanced by the ecotourism industry in Patagonia, is “constituted in relation to other gender positions (women and non-alpine men), integral to the reproduction of capital and tourism consumption, and accorded
great symbolic value as a site of agency and social power” (211). Mendoza confirms that gendered positionalities are produced in ecotourism destinations due to particular bodies, “alpine men,” and body-environment relationships, with those “displaying robust physicality” being valued over others (2020, 211). The concept of alpine masculinity proves an essential and largely unavoidable component of the Patagonian mountaineering experience, even in the contemporary period.

Since Mendoza (2020) conceptualizes alpine masculinity from a contemporary perspective (1990s-present), this paper expands upon the term and extends it backwards in time. In particular, I extend performances of alpine masculinity into the early 20th century (from 1931) and highlight their various manifestations and relationships to nature across time. From the 1930s-1980s, alpine masculinity functions alongside nature conquest ideologies. From the 1980s-2011, it transforms into ideologies of nature conservation. The former period manifests in a conquest alpine masculinity style (e.g., hostilities to nature), while the latter period serves as a sport-style alpine masculinity (e.g., conservation, limiting mountaineering impacts on nature). Finally, I suggest that a counterpart to alpine masculinity—alpine femininity—is an emergent phenomenon. Therefore, I contribute to mountaineering scholarship by building upon Mendoza’s (2020) notion of alpine masculinity, extending its history, and proposing the additional concept of alpine femininity.

As individuals interact with and care for the environment, they do so in very gendered ways. Therefore, the gendered body can be understood as a vessel that produces, reflects, and rejects dominant female/male-nature frameworks. Relevant to this article, the CAB
and its publication authors act as governing bodies. The CAB has historically circulated and regulated environmental knowledge, behavioral expectations, and territorialized space since its founding in a growing tourism city (Wojtiuk 2023, 10). This circulated knowledge is especially pertinent to discussions of gender. Female bodies and male bodies are directed to self-regulate in different ways and perform traditional ideas of Argentine femininity and masculinity, respectively. However, when women self-regulate similarly to men, CAB authors must grapple with this perceived paradox. The digital archive suggests that when women have engaged with the environment successfully their femininity has been de-emphasized or marginalized to account for what is typically considered a masculine accomplishment.

Background

The Club Andino Bariloche (CAB) was founded in 1931 by Juan Javier Neumeyer, Reynaldo Knapp, Otto Meiling, and Emilio Frey (Wojtiuk 2023, 10-11). Situated in the Andean city, San Carlos de Bariloche, the CAB is adjacent to Nahuel Huapi National Park. The CAB’s initial aims included exploring local mountain territory, sharing proper landscape uses, conducting sports excursions, educating residents, and facilitating tourist projects (e.g., shelters, paths) (Wojtiuk 2023, 10-11). In terms of its influence in the area, “between 1930 and 1940, this Club played a fundamental role in the development of San Carlos de Bariloche,” where tourism, environmental relationships, and national park agendas were debated and actively reconsidered (Wojtiuk 2023, 11). The CAB’s relationship with Nahuel Huapi National Park (and its associated authorities) secured its official position and social status in
disseminating knowledge on regional topography, mountaineering excursions, and previously unknown geography (Wojtiuk 2023, 11).

The CAB’s preliminary challenges were related to limited infrastructure, communication, and class membership, as working- and lower-middle class populations sought to participate (Wojtiuk 2023, 11-12). The club’s own identity construction often occurred in tandem with that of Bariloche because of their overlapping advertisements and similar targeted audiences (Wojtiuk 2023, 12). This relationship extends into the present, where the CAB influences tourist, sports, and mountain recreational activities in the park as well as manages mountain shelters and campsites. These refuges and services “are popularly recognized as icons of outdoor recreation in the southern area of the park, and they also constitute hubs/connectors for many of the trails” (Wojtiuk 2023, 12).

Therefore, the CAB, the national park, and the mountain landscape are intertwined in their regulation and recognition of alpine sports knowledge.

The CAB’s significance in Bariloche is steadfast due to its historical presence in the territory and territorialization of space through adventure activities, shelters, and educational institutions (Wojtiuk 2023, 12). Along with the National Parks Administration of Argentina (APN), the CAB remains a “key actor” involved in territorialization, city production, and tourism/recreational development in Bariloche (Wojtiuk 2023, 15). Its ever-growing commitment to environmental conservation marks much of its contemporary operations—contributing to regulations and administrative debates (Wojtiuk 2023, 16). Its current concerns are
reflected in the archive, especially in the final 2006-2011 publication.

**Gendering the Landscape, 1931-1980s**

The first component of the CAB's gendered ideologies of mountaineering involves representations of the Patagonian landscape. Considered “untouched wilderness,” an unexplored frontier, and pristine “nature,” the lands of Argentine Patagonia have been historically informed by dominant (and untrue) environmental narratives about emptiness (Bandieri 2011, 29-30). The CAB’s early to mid-20th century publications reflect these conceptualizations by narrating a gendered, often feminized, Andean landscape and articulating the environment in terms of sexual conquest. Commonly, the land is described with Spanish linguistic markers of femininity (words ending with the feminine “a” instead of the masculine “o”), the word “ella” [she], or references to a woman directly (“La Vieja”). For instance, one mountaineer in 1951 describes the religious significance of mountains and says: “She [ella] depresses the weak in spirit and elevates the strong” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1951, 116). Other times, the CAB even directly questions the gender and sex of the landscape:

The mountain, the hill, the mountain range... Do the mountains have sex? We felt that the present welcomed us softly, as if wanting to shelter us with its slopes. She seemed to be one more member of the ascension, and in a way she was. (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1982, 6)

The above excerpt articulates an overt gendering of landscape and, more specifically, a noticeable feminization of it. The CAB author asks if mountains, hills, and mountain ranges have sex or gender
and follows this question with feminine endings (“a”) to describe mountains, their “soft presence,” and relationship with the climbers. This personification is noticeable throughout most of the archive and sets the stage for related articulations of alpine masculinity.

Feminized natures are key expressions of CAB authors’ gendered ideologies of mountaineering. Concepts like “she-land” describe this environmental feminization in Patagonia and aid in characterizing its spatial configuration as a “heteropatriarchal matrix” and highlighting its histories of patriarchal gender ideologies (Núñez 2015, 1-2). She-land defines Patagonia as a region “anchored in a predetermined discrimination of ‘land’ as a ‘woman’” that have facilitated sexist characterizations of territory, configurations of masculine control over subordinated populations, and justified violent territorial projects (Núñez 2015, 4-5). She-land metaphors often connect women to feminized landscapes and have contributed to the denial of a feminine presence in both labor and mountain spaces in Argentine Patagonia (Núñez et al. 2020, 1). In other words, female landscape metaphors facilitate female subalternity in Patagonian territory.

In the CAB and other mountaineering clubs across the world (especially in the early 20th century), men are often presented in tandem with feminized natures as they heroically triumph over untouched terrain (Posch 2023; Moraldo 2020). Nature feminization works on two levels. By presenting the landscape as feminine and the mountaineer as stereotypically masculine, female mountaineers are pushed from the landscape and sport. In twentieth-century Argentina and Chile, the Patagonian landscape was characterized as a savage and dangerous woman in need of
civilization (and military advance), and this “feminized territory had limited ability to make decisions about its own interests” (Núñez 2015, 4–5). Other scholars have underscored the CAB’s feminization of nature in the 1930s–1950s, describing authors’ notions of Patagonian nature as clean, virginal, and “an obscene challenge” (Núñez 2015, 5). Throughout the archive, this gendered and exclusionary language is employed by CAB authors and reflects both state agendas and broader mountaineering culture.

Language of Sexual Conquest

For much of the CAB’s expeditionary record, the Patagonian landscape is painted by broad, stereotypical brushstrokes of femininity. This environmental gendering is paired with language of sexual conquest. As male mountaineers navigate the Patagonian terrain under the CAB’s influence, they discuss their climbs and environmental engagements with sexual overtones. Alongside descriptions of feminine landscapes, male CAB authors recount their experiences “penetrating,” “attacking,” and “conquering” “virgin” land. For example, 1933 club members report several attempts to climb the notoriously difficult mountain, Cerro Tronador:

Several attempts were made in order to dominate Tronador, as different routes were followed, but none of them had the glory of hollowing out their traces on the virgin/virginal summit and the question remains. Who will plant the flag that for the first time will flame on Tronador? (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1933, 19)

In the above instance, various elements are placed together: articulations of environmental virginity, language of domination,
expectations of glory, and symbolic displays of nationality. Other instances of sexual conquest are manifested in discourses about the importance of men engaging in places where “men have never penetrated before him” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1938, 44) and requests for members to “penetrate with us and you will feel the irresistible attraction of the unexplored” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1966, 47). These narratives reveal the entanglement of sexual conquest within gendered ideologies of mountaineering. Individuals internalize sexually-charged ideas about conquering landscapes and concretely outline them as individual authors in the CAB’s annual publications. As a result, male members assert their power over the feminized land and construct spaces of masculine power.

Individual authors’ use of sexual conquest language (e.g., attraction, penetration, conquer, virgin) proliferates within the CAB archive, especially in its earlier period (1930s–1980s) and reflects stereotypical male-female roles in broader contexts. These stereotypical metaphors effectively marginalize women from mountaineering and equate femininity with being subdued. Socially constructed beliefs about gender influence the mountaineering ideologies found in the CAB and beyond. CAB authors, like those in other institutions, rely on stereotypical male/female notions of sexual conquest to recount much of their mountaineering endeavors (Martin 1991, 486). This means that sexually-charged ideas about triumph intertwine with historical she-land metaphors (i.e., feminized nature) in Patagonia. Early CAB authors imagine the landscape as a virgin woman in need of subjugation by male figures (mountaineers, the state). They articulate themselves working to “dominate the virginity” of
“untouched” terrain and call—or challenge—other mountaineers to do the same (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1933, 3). For early CAB authors, being the “first to penetrate” the unknown is a notable goal (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1953, 43).

Such metaphors accomplish female marginalization by creating a narrative where male mountaineers (“isolated men”) are assumed to be the only mountaineers, while femininity exists in defeated and sexually denigrated landscapes (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1953, 71). Traditional gendered ideologies of mountaineering—referencing a triumphant male over a conquered female—mirror historical representations of male-domination found in other contexts and are not unique to the CAB (Martin 1991, 498).
However, CAB authors’ sexual narrations of geography have concrete impacts on “the lives and material opportunities of women” in Patagonia (Núñez 2015, 11). The feminine landscape becomes subordinate to the “domination” of masculine mountaineers, and female mountaineers (which exist in limited numbers) are assigned the role of the subaltern. This assigned role justifies inequalities in mountain spaces and beyond (Núñez 2015, 14).

Mountaineering Subjectivities and Configurations of Gender, 1931-1980s

Gendered ideologies of mountaineering also refer to the constitution of mountaineering subjectivities. Throughout the archive, individual CAB authors disseminate ideas about who qualifies as an alpinist. In the club’s early framework, the term mountaineer inherently refers to men because it is associated with conquest of the landscape. Therefore, CAB authors’ configurations of gender and interpretations of success are presented in tandem with the valorization of certain kinds of bodies, namely those of alpine men (Mendoza 2020, 211). This valorization is even directly stated at times, with male CAB authors highlighting “the greatness of being men” in a masculine protagonist sport (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1979, 89). In this way, women are overlooked as valuable actors of mountaineering subjectivity, and men are elevated as the main characters.

Masculine action and protagonism are common themes throughout mountaineering texts. Especially in early 20th century publications, women are underrepresented in the CAB and elsewhere. When mentioned, women are often accompanied by
gendered language and what Posch has called “objectification, trivialisation, and stereotyping” in a different context (2022, 82). For instance, when a male CAB author outlines mountaineering archetypes, female climbers are mentioned alongside stereotypical descriptions: “shrill” voices, motherhood (i.e., childlessness due to dangerous activities), accompaniment of “young, strong males,” and “fussy” questions (e.g., “Dear, please clean your shoes!”) (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1982, 63). These discourses, while shared for humorous purposes, represent deeper understandings of who is perceived as inherently belonging to mountain spaces (Posch 2022, 85-6).

The CAB’s gendered language is important because, different from other sports, mountaineering events need to be validated. This validation is because mountaineering is often conducted “without an audience and thus relies heavily on communicative events that construct what constitutes a mountaineering event” (Posch 2022, 85). These linguistic choices serve as reminders that mountaineering is politically subjective and impacts who is considered a mountaineer in the space. The CAB archive endorses mountaineering as a gendered sport and confirms that, especially before the late 20th century, mountaineering is “a form of primarily masculine encounter with the body and nature” (Posch 2022, 86).

As standard in other Alpine Clubs (e.g., New Zealand, Austrian, Swiss, and German), men are referenced in club publications at a greater frequency than women (Posch 2023, 247-8). This frequency indicates that masculine action in mountain spaces is both more common and followed more closely than female climbs. In the CAB, the number of female CAB authors and the number of references to women increases across time, especially beginning in
the 1980s. Women’s mountaineering subjecthood becomes more acknowledged in the late 20th century, while masculine protagonism shifts to account for women’s growing traction in the mountain environment (Posch 2023, 247). However, other voices remain absent. LGBTQIA+ mountaineers are not explicitly mentioned in the CAB archive, meaning that their covert entrance into mountaineering reflects heteronormative protagonism in alpine clubs as well.

**Valorization of Male Bodies: Alpine Masculinity and Alpinist Psychology**

Discourses about “true” mountaineers populate the archive. Specifically, there are various articles, penned by different CAB authors, discussing the “Psychology of the Mountaineer” that identify manhood as the key component of mountaineering subjectivity (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1953, 71). In general, many climbers claim that an alpinist identity requires engagement with danger and circumventing that danger. Others promote goals of making the “impossible possible” and undertaking the “fight to conquer nature” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1953, 71). However, for much of the twentieth century, CAB authors have asserted that, in mountaineering psychology, “what we value at a much higher price is the development of our manliness” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1939, 60). This early form of alpine masculinity championed male bodies alongside promotions of risk-taking (Mendoza 2020).

These male-centered discourses mediate ideas about mountaineering and who qualifies as a mountaineer. The valorization of male bodies and accomplishments is even expressed in death, where female departures are conceptualized differently
than those of males. Oftentimes, male deaths are framed in terms of dedication and individualized love for mountaineering, while female deaths are described as sacrifices for their male counterparts. This skewed reality is demonstrated in the excerpts below, where the CAB’s Aid Commission reports finding the bodies of missing climbers, Mr. and Mrs. Link, on Mount Aconcagua:

In slow march, always tirelessly searching for the missing climbers, we arrived at 3 pm at the entrance of the final chute. About 200 meters of difference in slope separates us from our goal. We had climbed only about sixty meters from the base of the chute, when Páez, who in those leading moments, exclaimed in a broken voice: 'There is a body there!'. This scream, although expected from one moment to the next, electrified us and we remained motionless, with a bitter sense of sadness. Indeed: a bundle dressed in white and green could be seen a few steps away from us; His legs, twisted, seemed to hang almost above us and prevented us from seeing the face. We approached, taking off our balaclavas with respectful and instinctive gestures. It was the corpse of the ill-fated Juan Jorge Link, of the great Link, who now lay near the summit he had loved so much and who considered it to be the only mountain worthy of climbing...(Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1947, 33-4).

Upon finding Mrs. Link nearby, the commission offers a different interpretation of death:

We crawled about fifty meters more and soon a cry was heard again: ‘There is another lump!’. With the consequent emotion, we headed toward where another body was seen. And we recognized Mrs. Link. ¡Poor thing! She had paid her
tribute, not to the mountain she feared, but to the love of her husband. Piously, we discover ourselves before her, paying our simple homage. (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1947, 34)

In the above excerpts, Mr. Link, deemed “the great Link,” is glorified in his death. In their recounting, CAB members cite Mr. Link’s mountaineering passions and describe his death with “respect” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1947, 33-4). Only referenced by her husband’s last name, “Mrs. Link” receives no individual attention or support from the CAB authors. In contrast to her husband, Mrs. Link is described as a woman to be pitied (e.g., “poor thing”) for her role in the event. Though she climbed the same mountain as her husband, Mrs. Link is not portrayed as a passionate climber. Instead, she is described by her “fear” of mountains, with her death being considered a “tribute...to the love of her husband” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1947, 34). Such characterizations minimize Mrs. Link’s mountaineering capabilities while assigning the climb to Mr. Link.

The Link expedition reveals how the CAB’s gendered ideologies of mountaineering are tied to both feminine marginalization and masculine glorification. Mr. Link, and men more broadly, are conceptualized as strong, passionate mountaineers who sacrifice their lives for the sport, while Mrs. Link, and other women, are perceived as extensions of their husbands. Instead of expressing their sacrifices alongside agency, women’s mountaineering deaths are downplayed and enshrined in fear (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1947, 33-4). In the Link expedition, masculine climbers are glorified, and feminine climbers are estranged from the sport. Instead of being considered a mountaineer herself, Mrs. Link—
unnamed and underappreciated for her abilities—is disassociated from the climb. Her presence is framed as an auxiliary role to support her husband on his climb. In this way, the CAB marginalizes women from mountaineering.

Women are not considered mountaineers in the CAB’s early gender framework. Similar distinctions between men and women pepper the CAB archive until the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In the above Figure 3, these sexist discourses are visually depicted. A woman is illustrated in cartoon form with items of significance: a purse, a camera, and a flower in her back pocket.

Figure 3. Cartoon Depiction of a Woman from Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1980-1989.
These items accompany her somewhat sexually suggestive position. Mirroring the CAB’s conventional expressions of alpine masculinity, the above rendering further alienates women from mountaineering subjectivities. Instead of being presented as climbers with grappling hooks, ropes, and crampons (as CAB men have been portrayed), women are fashioned as fragile tourists, non-participant photographers, and sexualized beings of the mountain. Consequently, both men and women are impacted by the CAB’s normative understandings of mountaineering. These gendered understandings are internalized and affect how CAB members interact with the environment and how they are positioned in publications (mountaineers vs. non-mountaineers).

**Power, Status, and Accomplishment**

Other forms of gendered regulation are demonstrated linguistically as the CAB outlines women’s accomplishments. Like Fausto-Sterling suggests, women inhabit complex, societally deviant positions. Since sex and gender are socially constructed, these positions fluctuate and are not entirely governable. Often to the CAB’s surprise from the 1930s to 1980s, women and young girls display success in the mountaineering world. The CAB deals with this perceived deviation by connecting power, status, and accomplishment with masculinity. Therefore, femininity is placed in diametrical opposition to not only masculinity but mountaineering more broadly. The CAB has constructed perceived gender inconsistencies differently across time. Throughout the 20th century, women’s mountaineering endeavors are largely devalued or received as rare and unusual events. For instance, in a 1954 bulletin synthesizing annual mountain competitions, the
CAB describes women’s participation as “always an effort, especially for the weak sex” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1954, 7). More historic feminine accomplishments are given limited attention. When including information on the first Argentine woman to climb to the top of Mount Everest, Mercedes Sahores, the club reserves a paragraph or so for the event, while the first Argentine expedition on Everest, largely conducted by male mountaineers, is given more than ten pages (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 2006, 83 and 92). This space difference qualifies male vs. female mountaineering endeavors in the CAB and beyond, favoring male climbers.

Other substantial female climbs are noted, but limited. In the early 1980s, a seven-year-old girl, Miriam Cavegano, is highlighted for her upcoming attempt to climb Cerro Manaslú in the Himalayas with her parents. Diverging from the Link expedition, the author of Miriam’s article reports Miriam’s name and expresses surprise that she will “only” be allowed to reach the second camp instead of the summit (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1984, 27). Young boys of the same age were expected and encouraged to conduct similar climbs, so the author’s inclusion reveals an imminent feminist turn in the CAB. However, the fact that women have the ability to climb with standard equipment (backpacks) at all is still considered a feat at times: “It is incredible that even women (no more than 50 kg in appearance) have such an energy and adaptation to height to carry ‘skyscrapers’ behind their backs” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 2006, 161). Such condescending additions work to marginalize women from mountain climbing in the CAB or, at minimum, frame their climbs as surprising. Therefore, women’s achievements are included throughout the CAB’s
publications, but noted alongside displays of feminine devaluation. This consistent devaluation by CAB authors works to facilitate male power and status over mountain spaces by trivializing women’s accomplishments in comparison to those of men.

**Feminine Marginalization and Masculine Control Over Mountain Space, 1931-1980s**

The CAB’s gendered ideologies of mountaineering also include more complex forms of gender-based denigration. In particular, feminine marginalization is employed as a method to explain, mock, and grapple with women’s successes in the mountaineering world. Considered incongruous with the CAB masculine norm, accomplished female mountaineering is reconfigured by CAB authors to maintain dominant and gendered narratives. Specifically, successful mountain activities performed by women are reimagined through male regulation and highlighted as displays of masculinity. In this way, masculinity is foregrounded alongside femininity’s marginalization, and masculine qualities are superimposed onto women to account for their accomplishments and maintain the status quo.

**Linguistic Transformation: Women Reconfigured**

A key example of feminine marginalization is demonstrated in a 1982 excursion to Cerro Schweitzer, where both men and women climbed together. Authored by a male climbing participant, the text refers to the woman as a “niña” [little girl] and a seductor in the climb’s preliminary stages (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1982, 54). Early in the journey, the male author even sustains an injury and worries about slowing down the climb and becoming the
new “woman of the group” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1982, 55). However, as the woman proves her climbing ability, the author forms a different interpretation of her gender. Calling the woman a “brute beast” and “the pseudo-woman,” the male CAB author says:

We left four: three men and one woman. This last detail encouraged me: if the weaker sex was present how could I not make the journey. Silly of me! It was distant to suppose at this moment that the sweet girl would be un forzudo con peluca [a strongman with a wig], closer to the sands of the Roman Colosseum than to those of an Atlantic beach. (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1982, 54)

In the above excerpt, the woman is discursively reconfigured as a masculine subject. Instead of maintaining her feminine qualities and initial description of a stereotypical “sweet girl,” the male climber articulates a gender transformation to reconcile the female climber’s superior abilities to the CAB’s gender norms. The male author suggests that, instead of being a woman, the female climber’s success and strength must be attributed to her manliness. Moreover, she must actually be a “strongman with a wig” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1982, 54). Therefore, the female climber’s femininity is invalidated, and her skilled mountaineering is conflated with masculine mountaineering.

The gendered ideology of mountaineering operating among CAB members delineates those who belong in mountaineering and others who only belong under certain conditions. As indicated, those conditions of belonging are largely associated with acquiring some form of alpine masculinity, meaning that the mountain environment has been constructed by mountaineers, globally and
in the CAB, as a space of masculine control. In the above example, the unnamed woman must navigate mountaineering spaces historically associated with men. The terms “sweet girl” and “weaker sex” are juxtaposed against “strongman” to assert masculine abilities in climbing contexts. Therefore, any skill the female climber possesses is inherently attributed to masculine power—reinforcing a male/female binary and the power of alpine masculinity.

The Patagonian Andes’ spatial configuration around alpine masculinity serves to marginalize women from the mountain environment. In this context, “women struggle against gender barriers in alpinism, facing sexism, skepticism about their abilities, and paternalistic attitudes that deny their very presence in the Andes” (Mendoza 2020, 218). These realities are historical and thus apparent throughout the CAB’s publications. Though articles are written by individual authors, many CAB members (especially in the 1930s-1980s) articulate women’s presence similarly: in terms of their limited (e.g., weaker) or surprising abilities.

These articulations marginalize women from mountaineering and contribute to alpine men’s “near monopoly over the exclusive vertical space” (Mendoza 2020, 220). By framing women as additions into the climb in lieu of actual climbers, the CAB (and other mountaineering clubs) create gendered ideologies related to female inaction. In other words, female mountaineers are invisibilized and, when perceived, are seen as having limited capacity for protagonism in the mountain landscape. This masculine monopoly over the framing of women’s place in the sport means that, even in recent years, women have comprised only a small fraction of the mountaineering population in Patagonia (Mendoza 2020, 218).
Feminine marginalization is also demonstrated in what the archive lacks. With a few exceptions, women’s voices and writings about their own mountaineering experiences are largely absent from the CAB’s publications. This absence aligns with gendered ideologies of mountaineering on a global scale (Posch 2022; Posch 2023). Women’s voices are noticeably absent in the CAB archive because of women’s general marginalization from mountaineering.
environments and the gendered spaces that accompany them. Therefore, masculine voices are overtly valued and displayed as “true” representations of Patagonian alpinism. Without more active inclusion of feminine perspectives on the sport (and inclusion of femininity in mountaineering spaces more broadly), more progressive notions of gendered ideologies of mountaineering will remain limited.

**Gendered Ideologies of Transitional Feminism, 1980s-2011**

The 20th century is defined by feminine marginalization in the mountaineering world. However, in the late 20th century and early 21st century, greater mutual respect towards women, their mountaineering accomplishments, and subtle strides toward alpine femininity emerged. This emergence coincided with CAB authors’ continued feminization of the landscape and the recycling of gendered language for more feminist and conservationist causes. It is in this period that the counterpart to alpine masculinity materializes. I suggest that alpine femininity, or the increasing ascribed value to feminine climbs and mountain performances, is an emergent phenomenon that challenges masculinity’s hegemonic role in mountain spaces in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The CAB’s alpine femininity and continued feminization of the landscape, but for different purposes (i.e., conservation or conquest) across decades, is perhaps what makes the CAB interesting to consider compared to other alpine clubs. For instance, CAB authors renegotiate human-environmental relationships in the 1980s-2010s by departing from traditional...
conquest logic and replacing it with gendered narratives of protection:

Nature assimilated Man to channel her messages. The stubborn wisdom of Mother Nature found a worthy ally and presents him as one of her best spokesmen. (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1982, 7)

Man must not fight against nature, but adapt to her, understand her, respect her cosmic rhythm and try to catch the power she contains. (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1988, 4)

We recognize ourselves as children of nature, not her owners. We belong to her, and we must respect her. Thanks to the gift of reason, we will realize things like these. It is a knowledge that she herself gives us so that we can cultivate and develop them for a universal good, as older brothers of other species. (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1993, 36)

In the above excerpts, the Patagonian landscape is still conceptualized in feminine form, just as it was in the 1930s-1980s period. However, from the 1980s to 2011, the club’s gendered language is recycled for a different purpose: conservation, not conquest.

Other CAB articles in the early 21st century include women’s voices at a limited, but growing, capacity. One article titled “Afanassieff por las chicas” [Afanassieff for the girls] articulates a clear separation from masculine climbing and conquest logics of the past by engaging in new kinds of feminism and subtle critiques of masculine power. A route on Mount Fitz Roy, Afanassieff, was
climbed in 2010 by female mountaineers: Milena Gómez and Doerte Pietron. Describing their experience, the CAB author, Milena Gómez, states that even two “girls”/“babes” (“Dos chicas! Si, dos miniïtas”) reached the top of Mount Fitz Roy (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 2006, 55). The female climber, Milena, says:

I also learned to climb with another woman. It is a very nice feeling because you speak the same language. This is said without raising any flag of feminism, but because of the feeling of taking charge and feeling more responsible. Will climbing with a man sometimes make you feel ‘protected’? Although there are no demons or dragons on the mountain, they are inside you, so I feel that no one is going to be your hero, you can face the fears yourself, with your partner. (Club Andino Bariloche 2006, 55)

In this way, an embryonic, somewhat denied, feminism is articulated alongside more nuanced perspectives on the purpose of mountaineering and mountaineering subjectivities. Specifically, the author articulates mountaineering’s promotion of self-actualization, protection, and enjoyment for women—a clear departure from earlier descriptions of women’s climbs (only for the purpose of their husbands) and a marker of the emergent alpine femininity. Moreover, the author challenges the idea that one must be masculine to be a successful and fulfilled climber. This pushback is demonstrated in ironic phrases like “Dos chicas! Si, dos miniïtas” and “You can face the fears yourself,” which modifies past terms of mockery and remakes them into valued self-identifiers (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 2006, 55).

In Milena’s above statement, she intentionally deviates from traditional, gendered ideologies of mountaineering and offers a
glimpse of the CAB’s growing future with a new cornerstone: alpine femininity. Asserting herself as her own “hero,” Milena directly resists the notion that a female must climb with a male in mountain spaces. She even declares her preference to climb with other women. Such articulations offer subtle critiques of masculine power and challenge male monopoly of alpine space. Moreover, they confirm that, as opposed to female marginalization or absence in the mountaineering world, women’s presence and power intersect with success.

Figure 5. Photo of a Female Expedition in Latin America from Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1987 (Revista 16)

Other gendered ideologies of transitional feminism are featured in the CAB archive. In 1987, a CAB author dedicates over one page
to an “Expedición Femenina Latinoamericana” [Latin American Women’s Expedition] on Aconcagua (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1987, 38). According to the author, the 1987 female expedition is the second one on record and is considered “completely successful” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1987, 38). In Figure 5, this expedition is depicted visually, with female climbers—“las chicas”—being highlighted for their participation. This expedition, a celebration of female climbing, asserts alpine femininity’s place in the CAB and mountaineering more broadly.

Starkly contrasting from earlier representations of female mountaineers, the CAB author underscores the “challenging” nature of the female expedition on Aconcagua because it is “the highest mountain on the American continent” and “the longest mountain range length on the planet” (Club Andino Bariloche Anuarios 1987, 38). The author even interviews one of the expedition members, a 17-year-old girl named Betty Slipek, and praises her for her impressive feat. Opposing previous descriptions of “the weaker sex,” the female expedition report disrupts masculine control over mountain space by respecting women’s accomplishments, asking standard interview questions on their climbs, and giving women the space to share their own experiences (e.g., direct quotes). Although the archive concludes in 2011, it is possible that new forms of bodily valorization, gender dynamics, and perceptions of mountaineering have emerged in the CAB since its last publication, likely amplifying the early feminisms demonstrated above.
Conclusion

This paper has historically assessed gender dynamics, mountaineering subjectivities, and perceptions of femininity in the CAB’s archive by categorizing its publications into two periods: 1) the 1930s through 1980s and 2) the 1980s through 2011. The first category refers to a period of feminine marginalization, while the latter category recognizes the emergence of an embryonic feminism. The CAB’s 1980s publications mark a key shift in the club’s language about women while maintaining some gendering elements from the past.

I argue that a history of feminine marginalization marks much of the CAB expeditionary record, drawing attention to gendered ideologies of mountaineering. For most of the CAB’s existence, mountaineers have been decidedly earmarked as masculine figures, and male mountaineers have denigrated the accomplishments of women and appropriated images of femininity and sexual conquest to construct the Andes as a space of masculine power, status, and accomplishment. Though the CAB has historically marginalized manifestations of womanhood from the mountaineering world, a greater mutual respect emerges in the 1980s alongside an emergent alpine femininity. In the early to mid-20th century, the CAB’s feminization of the landscape is considered a weak trait, but by the late 20th century and early 21st century, it is reconceptualized as a strength, embodied by Mother Nature, that must be respected and protected. This respect is then extended to female mountaineers and climbs.

This paper contributes to larger fields of scholarship on gendered spaces in Patagonia and mountaineering clubs more generally. By analyzing the CAB’s publications, we can gain insight
into gendered ideologies of mountaineering and its manifestations across time, regions, club members, and specific publications. The concept of gendered ideologies of mountaineering is hinged to four components: 1) ideologies of nature; 2) performances of gender; 3) power dynamics; and 4) an emergent alpine femininity. Therefore, this paper also importantly expands upon the concept of alpine masculinity (Mendoza 2020) by extending its historical reach to the early 20th century, tracing its various manifestations (conquest vs. conservation logic), and offering the conceptual counterpart of alpine femininity. Through an analysis of gendered ideologies of mountaineering, this article contributes to climbing-specific scholarship in the Southern Andes and connects it to gendered performances in alpine clubs in other regions.
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