ABSTRACT

BEYOND THE SUMMIT: TRAVERSING THE HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE OF ANNIE S. PECK’S AND FANNY BULLOCK WORKMAN’S HIGH-ALTITUDE ASCENTS, 1890-1915

by Jennifer A. Ernie-Steighner

On May 16, 1903, Annie S. Peck, a professional mountaineer from the United States, ventured the open-waters of the Atlantic in her quest for the tallest mountain of the Western Hemisphere. Nine years later, on June 5, 1912, her contemporary, Fanny Bullock Workman, made final preparations for an upcoming excursion to the Siachen Glacier of modern-day Pakistan. While following patterns of Victorian female travel, Peck and Bullock Workman displayed distinctive bodily performances of impressive athletic endurance that pushed the bounds of the emerging “New Woman” in terms of physicality and professionalism. Consequently, Peck’s and Bullock Workman’s lives demonstrate that female mountaineers were very much a part of a Western discourse obsessed with debates of proper gender roles and women’s rights during the dawn of the twentieth century.
Beyond the Summit: Traversing the Historical Landscape of Annie S. Peck’s and Fanny Bullock Workman’s High-Altitude Ascents, 1890-1915

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To Ryan, avec l’amour
So often have I been asked how I ever came to undertake the extraordinary task of high mountain climbing, and what is the use of such an ascent as I have made that I am convinced that the general reader, for whom this work is designed will find the story of my actual experience of greater interest if these mysteries were unfolded.
—Annie S. Peck, “Forward” in *A Search for the Apex of America* (1911)

When, later, woman occupies her acknowledged position as an individual worker in all fields, as well as those of exploration, no such emphasis of her work will be needed; but that day has not fully arrived, and at present it behoves women, for the benefit of their sex, to put what they do, at least, on record.
—Fanny Bullock Workman, “Note” in *Two Summers in the Ice-Wilds of Eastern Karakoram* (1917)
Preface

Waking to a sunny, humid morning in Kathmandu, Nepal on June 5, 1912, Fanny Bullock Workman took a moment of silent reflection to prepare for the journey ahead. After nearly twenty years of relatively continuous travels on bike through Western Europe and India and, most recently, on foot through modern-day Pakistan, Bullock Workman was embarking yet again, this time on a second trek to the Siachen Glacier in the High Himalaya. No doubt, given her love of adventure, she felt excitement course through her as she stared out her hotel window to the busy, dusty streets of Kathmandu. Past experience must have told her this venture would be neither easy nor safe. She was the female leader of a team made up entirely of men at a time when high mountaineering was overwhelmingly viewed to be a male endeavor. Furthermore, once leaving the comfort of Kathmandu, Bullock Workman looked forward to narrow trails covered in yak dung, a limited water supply, and an existence without any of the comforts familiar to an American woman of her class and race.

Nine years earlier U.S. mountaineer Annie S. Peck had also awakened to a foreign land beckoning her with its promise of mountaineering adventure. And, much like Bullock Workman, her first waking thoughts were permeated by feelings of both exhilaration and apprehension. After leaving New York City by boat on May 16, 1903, Peck ventured into the
open-waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the mosquito infested terrain and waterways of the Amazon, and the diseased seaports of South America to finally arrive at La Paz, the governmental capital of Bolivia, on July 22. Once situated in La Paz, Peck prepared to climb Mount Sorata, believing in its potential as the highest peak in the Western Hemisphere. This attempt was incredibly ambitious. Well aware of the various measurements of the peak’s estimated height, from 21,000 to 25,000 feet above sea level, as well as the perils of high-altitude climbing, Peck doggedly pursued her goal alongside an all-male and less-than-compliant crew. Given the ninety-mile trek required from La Paz to the base of Mt. Sorata as well as possible weather impediments, such a shortened time frame made a successful summit attempt highly unlikely. This was an insulting and painful blow to a woman who had spent the previous five years meticulously fundraising and organizing an expedition with little help from her eventual climbing companions.

Figure 2: Annie S. Peck setting out on her 1903 voyage to Mt. Sorata accompanied by two anonymous Swiss guides and a scientist.

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3 Ibid., 34.
Given such difficulties, how did Bullock Workman and Peck find themselves in the middle of Nepal and Bolivia respectively on these particular summer mornings? More specifically, what historical factors permitted and led women climbers to undertake such excursions abroad? And, what can a study of U.S. female mountaineers during the turn of the nineteenth century teach us, not only about Victorian women’s international travels and mountaineering, but regarding the broader cultural developments of Western Europe and the United States as they pertained to gender identity and women’s rights?
Chapter 1
“Ordinary Tourists,” Expert Travelers, and Repetitive Climbers

I am really beginning to think that the traveller—properly so called—the person who writes a book and gets his FRGS etc, is a peculiar sort of animal only capable of seeing a certain set of things and always seeing them the same way, and you and me are not of this species somehow. What are we to call ourselves?
— Mary Kingsley, in a letter to Lady Ethel Macdonald (late 1800s)

Situating the mountaineering careers of contemporaneous U.S. climbers, Fanny Bullock Workman and Annie S. Peck, alongside the actions of numerous Victorian lady travelers, and within the highly gendered culture of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, offers thought-provoking answers to these significant questions. Specifically, an analysis of Bullock Workman and Peck reveals that female climbers who traveled abroad from approximately 1890 to the start of World War I followed four general patterns of Victorian female travel.

First, both women were well educated and came from wealthy, white, American households, providing them with the intellectual tools necessary for a well-received high-mountaineering career. Second, the existence (or absence) of a husband greatly impacted the financial viability and professional success of their climbing expeditions. Third, Workman and Peck discovered a passion for travel and mountaineering after being introduced to such activities by relatives, lovers, or close friends. Finally, both women’s early climbing experiences and later mountaineering careers were shaped by their nationality. While previous scholarship has often argued that women like Bullock Workman and Peck were singular in their achievement and lifestyle, this thesis demonstrates that they, and similar women, were definitely a product of Victorian upper-class society at the turn of the nineteenth century.

At the same time, however, Workman and Peck challenged the hegemonic culture of which they were a part. Through bodily performances of impressive athletic endurance and explicit verbal and photographic displays of feminism, Peck and Workman pushed the bounds of the emerging “New Woman” of the early 1900s (in terms of physicality and politics), arguing for gender equity in the workforce as well as women’s suffrage. While the exact implications of such feminist activity cannot be easily ascertained, the actions themselves prove female international mountaineers were very much a part of a Western discourse obsessed with debates of proper gender roles and women’s rights. Furthermore, this outspoken and often visible feminism served to solidify their professionalism and fame within the climbing, geographical,
and mainstream societies of the day, calling us to question the lack of scholarship pertaining to Bullock Workman, Peck, and their contemporaries.

“What Are We To Call Ourselves?”

This analysis and its premises raise a relatively basic, yet essential question—how does one define “travel” and “mountaineering” during the time period under consideration? In this case the best place to find reliable and temporally authentic definitions is within the terminology utilized by the women travelers themselves and their Victorian male counterparts. Thus we commence with one of Bullock Workman’s commentaries, printed April 1913 in the Royal Geographical Societies’ monthly publication—The Geographical Journal. Responding to Col. H. H. Godwin-Austen’s February critique of her spelling of the Baltoro Glacier and Saltoro Valley in her previous Journal article, “Some Notes on my 1912 Expedition to the Siachen or Rose Glacier,”4 Bullock Workman quipped: “The writer [Col. Godwin-Austen] refers to ‘travelers [the Workmans] having a limited knowledge of Oriental languages, dependent on interpreters, who range from Bombay cook-boys to Kasmiris.’ I would add that I do not class myself with such travelers. I have had many years’ experience in Himalayan exploration, and have acquired a capacity and means of inquiry into the proper spelling of native names which places me quite beyond the ordinary Kashmir tourist.”5 Clearly Bullock Workman perceived a distinctive and value-laden difference between a knowledgeable, experienced traveler and an “ordinary” tourist. The term “tourist” implied an utter lack of wisdom about the visited region; in contrast, Bullock Workman’s self-described “many years’ experience” with exploration in the Himalaya and thus accumulated regional knowledge signified a more mature and dignified manner of travel. Indeed, it seems being deemed an “ordinary Kashmir tourist” insulted her to a much greater degree than Col. Godwin-Austen’s primary criticism of her misspelling, which she quickly brushed off in the same publication as “purely a typographical error” induced by the “stress of work at the time.”6

Three decades earlier, while reminiscing about her famous Alpine excursions in her travel narrative High Life and Towers of Silence, Elizabeth Le Blond also hinted at the distinction between serious female travelers such as herself and the common Alpine tourist. In a

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4 This article was published in the December 1912 edition of The Geographical Journal.
6 Ibid.
rather humorous tone she discussed U. S. tourists whom bought socks from salesmen with “broken English and insinuating manners”\(^7\) after being convinced the socks would prevent slippage while walking during their hiking tours.\(^8\) She depicts these swindled and comically pathetic tourists, “sitting all in a row pulling wool socks over their fancy, high-heeled boots and shoes” and then, as Rebecca A. Brown beautifully paraphrases in *Mountaineering on High*, “returning from their destinations” with mutilated socks “‘hanging in draggled fringes’ around their ankles.”\(^9\) While not as explicit as Bullock Workman in her value judgment of such tourists, the imagery and tone utilized leaves little doubt as to Le Blond’s assessment. Heightened by an air of British superiority, Le Blond found the behaviors of such tourists fundamentally different from her own, primarily in their repeated displays of ignorance. As a highly skilled female traveler and mountaineer of the Alps, Le Blond easily understood the ridiculousness of placing socks over common Victorian footwear to prevent slippage on the mountains’ rugged and icy terrain. She therefore purposefully and successfully distanced herself from these “ordinary” U.S. tourists through an entertaining and carefully moderated sense of humor. While laughing at her narrative, one almost misses the superiority inherent within it. Though presented in a different rhetorical package, Le Blond cares to as great a degree as Bullock Workman to be seen as different from the common upper class Western European and American tourists of the day.

Modern geographers Morag Bell and Cheryl McEwan solidify this nineteenth and early twentieth century understanding of “traveler” vis-à-vis “tourist.” In their 1996 paper, “The admission of women Fellows to the Royal Geographical Society, 1892-1914; the controversy and the outcome,” Ball and McEwan explain, “during the early years of the twentieth century many women were no longer traveling solely as tourists; they had scientific skills which they incorporated into their travels, the results of which were [often] reproduced in their


\(^8\) In *Women on High* (2002), Rebecca A. Brown elucidates that the Alps, as one 1861 female traveler observed, emerged as the “‘playground of England’ by the middle of the nineteenth-century (pg. 34). Due to an increasing passion for natural history, “Romantic notions of the redemptive value of unspoiled nature,” and the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, Western European and United States tourists hiked “village to village, enjoying the spectacular Alpine scenery” while “relishing the time away from their increasingly squalid cities” (pg. 14-15). Consequently, Le Blond and other women Alpinists, would have come across a wide variety of inexperienced trekkers looking forward to the fresh mountain air, renewed corporeal and mental strength from physical activity, and relaxing in the new hotels and inns built for their convenience.

Again the distinction between tourism and traveling is a matter of expertise—women tourists voyaged abroad with a lack of scientific skills. Conversely, the early twentieth century female Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) utilized methods of geographical, botanical, anthropological and sociological study during their excursions and in their resulting publications. While Bell and McEwan’s explanation fits the timeframe of the mountaineering careers of women such as Bullock Workman and Peck, Le Blond’s previous narrative demonstrates that this timeframe can be broadened, if not into the early parts of the 1800s then certainly into the last quarter of the century.

Though Le Blond, and other women travelers of her time, often did not rely upon scientific measurements to the same degree of their later traveling sisters, they still distinguished themselves from regular tourists by their “expertise” of foreign regions due to years of traveling experience. Whether climbing Alpine peaks like Le Blond, navigating through the rapids of West Africa’s Ogowe River like Mary Kingsley, or living with Buddhist monks in Tibet like Alexandra David-Neel, Western women explorers of the 1860s, 70s, and 80s could and frequently did view themselves as different from tourists in their depth of wisdom concerning visited lands. This holds true even for Kingsley, the renowned late nineteenth century English explorer of West Africa, who expressed doubts of being a “properly so called” traveler. In a letter to Lady Macdonald, Kingsley confided: “I am really beginning to think that the traveller—properly so called—the person who writes a book and gets his FRGS [Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society] etc, is a peculiar sort of animal only capable of seeing a certain set of things and always seeing them the same way, and you and me are not of this species somehow. What are we to call ourselves?”

The unexpressed issue for Kingsley was not one of expertise as a traveler, but one of gender. She was not a traveler in the same sense as her male contemporaries. Like numerous

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11 In her well-known monograph, *Spinsters Abroad* (1989), Dea Birkett mentions that Lady Macdonald was the wife of the Commissioner General of the Oil Rivers Protectorate, a man with whom Kingsley had traveled by boat during her second venture to West Africa in 1895 (pg. 73).
women of her day Kingsley had been denied access to academic training in the sciences and thus she experienced fieldwork while abroad quite differently from male travelers. In a 1897 letter to her historian friend Alice Stopford Green she argued that though “‘white men who make a theory first and then go hunting travellers’ tales for… support… may say what they please of the pleasure of the process,’” she developed more authentic anthropological studies by relying solely on “‘getting a mass of facts and watching them.’” She believed a lack of academic theory allowed her to view West African individuals and societies without the possible distortion of prior presuppositions. In this way, Kingsley’s question to Lady Macdonald, “‘What are we to call ourselves?,’” was not a denial of the title of “traveler,” but a further claim of her exceptional knowledge as a female traveler. She, and fellow women travelers of the latter part of the 1800s, not only maintained a higher degree of expertise than everyday tourists, they also gained a level of knowledge unique, and valuable in its uniqueness, from that of contemporaneous male explorers. Consequently, “traveler” in this context may be defined in relation to both “tourists,” and male travelers. The travelers in this thesis were Western female explorers with a heightened and specialized knowledge of foreign places. Their gender differentiated them from male explorers whom often received greater academic training in the sciences and thus emphasized scientific measurements (alongside athletic feats) at the expense of mentioning the day-to-day lives of locale peoples in their published travel narratives. Furthermore, continuous years of venturing to unfamiliar parts of the globe set women travelers apart from the less-well seasoned “tourists” whom maintained highly limited knowledge of foreign regions, peoples, and languages.

The term “mountaineering” (and by default “mountaineer”) also developed through an emphasis on expertise, in this case vis-à-vis leisure hikers. Unlike the increasingly popular pastime, particularly for British men and women, of Alpine “walking” or “pedestrian tours” during the mid-1800s, “mountaineers” defined themselves as climbers who trekked mountains not on random occasions, but regularly for a multitude of reasons ranging from personal passion to scientific study. Similar to women travelers, the nineteenth and early twentieth century climbing community classified themselves by a high level of knowledge garnered through years of experience, in this case, on the slopes of ranges such as the Alps, Andes, Himalayas, and, in

13 Ibid., 172.
14 Ibid., 54 & 173.
the United States, the White, Rocky, and Sierra Mountains. For, as journalist Rebecca A. Brown notes: “A. F. Mummery, one of the first great British alpinists of the nineteenth century, answered that a mountaineer is ‘any man who is skilled in the art of making his way with facility in mountain countries.’ His contemporaries also considered a true mountaineer one who climbed year after year; simply making a few ascents was not enough.” Following suit, the women climbers included in this analysis referred to themselves and each other as mountaineers in recognition of their impressive climbing resumes, as well as their remarkable athleticism. Furthermore, for women like Bullock Workman and Peck, mountaineering was much more than an all-consuming pastime, it became a career. These women were indeed anything but the ‘ordinary walking tourists’ of Victorian society.

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15 Brown, Women on High, 5.
Chapter 2

“Well-to-do Professionals,” Mountaineering Clubs, and Victorian Lady Travelers

Think of the people who are presenting their compliments, and requesting the honor, and ‘much regretting;’ of those that are pinioned at dinner tables, or stuck up in ballrooms, or cruelly planted in pews; aye think of these, and so remembering how many poor devils are living in a state of utter respectability, you will glory the more in your own delightful escape.

—Bullock Workman quoting McCormick in Two Summers in the Ice-Wilds of Eastern Karakoram (1911)

Although distinct from contemporary vacationers and male explorers, late nineteenth and early twentieth century lady travelers were products of Victorian society and culture. Born into relatively privileged Western European or U. S. families these women were often positioned economically, socially, and intellectually for a life conducive to travel. Indeed, Fanny Bullock Workman’s and Annie S. Peck’s familial, educational, and national backgrounds serve as cases in point.

Born on January 8, 1859 into an affluent and well-respected Worcester, Massachusetts family, Bullock Workman, “like many of the early English and European mountaineers,” benefited from a “background of wealth and privilege.”16 As the beloved second daughter and youngest child of Elvira Hazard Workman and Alexander Hamilton Workman, Massachusetts’s future governor, no expense was spared in her fine upbringing. Bullock Workman spent her early years at home, educated by private tutors and immersed in the lifestyle of the country’s elite.17 Though little written detail remains concerning the everyday experiences and comforts of her youth one can easily imagine a vibrant, assertive, and somewhat spoiled child, dressed in the finest Victorian clothing, reciting the ABC’s to her proud parents.

Annie S. Peck also came from a background of relative privilege. Born in Providence, Rhode Island (a town and state founded by her ancestor, Roger Williams) on October 19, 1850 to George Bacheler Peck and Ann Power Smith, she was the youngest of four surviving children and the couple’s only daughter. Due to her father’s prosperous law practice and dealings in

16 Ibid., 189. Domosh Mona and Joni Seager’s Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World (New York: Guilford Press, 2001) also discusses the correlation between wealth and travel on page 110.
anthracite coal, Peck came of age attending the best primary and secondary schools New England offered, ultimately graduating with honors from the University of Michigan in 1878 and 1881, with a Bachelor’s Degree in Greek and Classical Studies and a Master’s Degree in Greek. Though Peck became one of the first female professors in the United States, teaching Latin at Purdue University and Smith College during the 1880s, little detailed documentation of her childhood and young adulthood exists.

Fortunately remnants of Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s refined upbringings reveal themselves through photographs and personal correspondences. Pictures taken during Bullock Workman’s adult years, such as the one below, show an irrepressibly confident woman with a countenance indicative of “the very rich.” They also demonstrate her love of traditional upper-middle class Victorian attire. Regardless of place and activity Bullock Workman refused to wear anything but the most respectable and conservative dress. During her earliest travels on bike through Spain and India she faced unbearably hot, humid days of strenuous cycling wearing “long-sleeved white blouses trimmed by neat ties, floor-length skirts, a hat often with a veil and sometimes a striped parasol in hand.” Little changed during her later trips in the Himalayas. While scaling icy glacier-systems marked by scores of unseen and deadly crevasses Bullock Workman continued to wear full skirts, only raising their hems to her mid-calf by the final years of her climbing. Even after the more practicable knickerbockers came into vogue and she

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18 The timing of Peck’s graduations from the University of Michigan is quite significant. The University’s doors remained closed to women until 1870, only eight years prior to her first degree. Consequently, unlike Bullock Workman, Peck arguably pushed not only the physical bounds of mountaineers, but also the educational attainments of U.S. women during a crucial time in the country’s history. By the dawn of the next century, Peck’s educational achievements, though still relatively rare, represented a growing shift in women’s education as more and more females pursued collegiate and professional degrees.


21 Ibid., 104-105.

22 Knickerbockers were a type of trouser similar in style to the Turkish pant included in Elizabeth Smith Miller’s bloomer costume. Traditionally baggy at the hips and thighs, they came close to the skin at mid-calf where the ends of each pant-leg were covered by high socks. Though traditionally worn by boys and men during the 1800s, by the end of the century a growing number of American female athletes, particularly bicyclists, wore knickerbockers during physical activity. By 1915, many female mountaineers also discarded skirts for the more practical
experienced a near-death fall into a crevasse due to tripping over her long skirt,\textsuperscript{23} Bullock Workman remained devoted to the proper feminine clothing of her young womanhood. It seems she was quite proud of her socio-economic background, even at the expense of her personal safety. Always dressing the part of a refined Victorian lady, she left no question as to her social status even while trekking on the treacherous slopes of the Himalaya.

\textbf{Figure 3: Studio Photograph of Fanny Bullock Workman, Taken Between 1890 and 1910}\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} Photograph scanned from a larger image included in Miller, \textit{On Top of the World}, 102; The original is housed at the Library of Congress, which dates the picture from between 1890 and 1910. Though the exact date of the photo remains unknown, the estimate seems a good one as it was taken by a London Photography Company and the Workman’s did not spend extensive time in Europe until they moved to the region in 1888.
Much like Bullock Workman’s studio photographs, Peck’s personal correspondences reveal her prestigious background. Most interesting in this regard are letters Peck kept pertaining to her long-time romantic friendship with Dr. Elisha Benjamin Andrews—a well-known historian, economic professor, and eventual President of Brown. Ignored by previous scholars, the couple’s abundant correspondences movingly testify to a significant and bittersweet thirty-year relationship. Though their friendship never developed into an official courtship and marriage, with Dr. Andrews eventually marrying another woman named Ella Allen in 1870, both Peck and Dr. Andrews seemed profoundly impacted by their acquaintance, sending explicit love letters to one another until his death in 1917.

![Image of Dr. Elisha Benjamin Andrews](http://www.brown.edu/Administration/President/links/presidents/andrews.html)

**Figure 4: Studio Photograph of Dr. Elisha Benjamin Andrews, taken during his Presidency at Brown from 1889-1898.**

Drafting a letter approximately fourteen years after Dr. Andrews died, Peck divulged in scribbled cursive the following: “I should have been far happier as the wife of Dr. E. Benny A.

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26 While the above discussion of Peck’s and Dr. Andrew’s relationship is regrettably limited due to the topical interests of this thesis, their romantic friendship deserves a much closer examination and analysis. Their relationship challenges all past scholarship pertaining to Peck as, unlike previously believed, she did not remain unmarried due to a feminist choice. Indeed, Peck in no way conflated her lack of marriage with her feminism. If anything, Peck’s and Dr. Andrew’s shared interest in women’s equality likely helped to solidify their long-time friendship as both worked for the betterment of “the weaker sex” (with Peck using climbing as a feminist and suffragette platform and Andrews opening the “Women’s College” while President of Brown). Interestingly, no scholarship concerning the life and career of Elisha Benjamin Andrews is known to acknowledge his relation with Peck, raising questions of how such an absence effects such analyzes as well.

who told me 30 years too late that he had always loved me. I said, ‘Why didn’t you speak.’ He replied, ‘Your father would never have let you look at me!’ He [Dr. Andrews] was poor, too modest, and unfortunately married a very ordinary girl from the same country town who was no proper helpmate.”

Whether Peck actually sent a finished letter to the same effect remains unknown. What is certain are the statement’s potent implications. After an extraordinary life as a renowned lecturer, mountaineer, and traveler, Peck remained fixated on her relationship with Dr. Andrews. Moreover, she regretted never marrying him, seemingly at the expense of her intellectual and climbing accomplishments. Whether Peck’s father truly would have rejected a marriage proposal from Dr. Andrews lingers as mere speculation. Yet the fact that such a response seemed viable, at least to Andrews, solidifies Peck’s privileged familial background. Many fathers would have eagerly accepted a marriage proposal from a successful scholar and teacher such as Dr. Andrews, regardless of his modest, rural background. Only men of high socio-economic and class status, such as George Bachelor Peck, had the tenacity and financial freedom to possibly view such proposals unfavorably.

Language Fluency as Cultural and Social Currency

Daughter to a family whose fortune arose from the manufacture and trade of gunpowder, Bullock Workman not only lived a pampered childhood, but much like Peck, was also privy to further educational opportunities denied to her less-wealthy female counterparts. Following the trend of young U. S. and European upper class women Bullock Workman first attended a finishing school, Miss Graham’s Finishing School in New York City, during the mid 1870s to prepare for the social and cultural life of a Victorian lady. Being the first prolonged stay away from home, it would prove to be the shortest-lived both in time and distance from her place of birth. In 1877, after graduating from the Miss Graham’s Finishing School, Bullock Workman traveled further from her family, spending two years studying French and German in Paris and Dresden respectively.

In 1884 Peck also ventured to Europe, initially to study German and music in Hanover, Germany and, the following year, as the first female student at the American School of Classical Studies in Greece. Having already mastered Greek during her studies at Michigan, she spent the

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28 Annie S. Peck to Mr. Peabody, 1931 (exact date unknown), Annie S. Peck Papers, Manuscript Collection, Brooklyn College Library, Brooklyn.
two year sojourn studying Greek archeology and further developing her skills in other Western European languages such as Italian and French.  

Unbeknownst to Bullock Workman and Peck, this schooling prepared them intellectually for their eventual mountaineering careers. Many of the earliest and most highly regarded mountaineers resided and began their careers in Europe, particularly in the Alps, and arguably the most prestigious geographical societies of the time resided in London and France. Consequently, Bullock Workman’s fluency in German and French and Peck’s fluency in Greek, Italian, Spanish, German, and French, allowed both women to better transverse the multi-lingual social landscape necessary to well-respected climbing careers.

Being multi-lingual proved a significant strength given the common European distaste for what was perceived as Americans’ rashness, rudeness, and even ignorance in exploration abroad. Similar to Le Blonde’s humorous account of U.S. hikers’ attempts in the Alps, many European mountaineers and geographical Fellows met U.S. climbers and travelers with an air of European superiority stemming from a belief in Europeans’ “greater” climbing and scientific skills. By the end of the 1900s, Western European climbers saw themselves being motivated, at least ideally, by altruistic goals of mapping the world’s topography and, quite literally, pushing the heights of human endurance in the name of science. Mid to late nineteenth century U.S. mountaineers on the other hand were often viewed by Europeans as inexperienced late-comers to an already well-established physical and intellectual pursuit who selfishly hoped to use their mountaineering exploits in promotion of individual fame. Bullock Workman, in particular, certainly came across her share of criticism in this realm, yet little doubt remains that her language skills helped to buffer her against, at the very least, initial European disdain. For, as Luree Miller notes in her survey of female Tibetan explorers, Bullock Workman’s fluency in French and German enabled her to “travel and lecture without the language barrier that separated most Americans from European life.” Furthermore, Peck’s eventual fluency in Spanish as well as other Western European languages buffered her against potential criticisms of her competency as an international traveler. Unlike critics of Bullock Workman’s limited knowledge of “Oriental languages,” no geographical Fellow could deny Peck’s ability to communicate with

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locales while on her South American excursions and thus her ability to gain intimate knowledge of the continent. Consequently, Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s language skills helped them pass unscathed into the exclusive doors of the mountaineering world and, in Peck’s case, further establish her professionalism within a social setting often blatantly critical of women as well as Americans.

Other Victorian lady travelers also depended upon knowledge of foreign languages. Much like the prestigious geographical societies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the majority of female travelers, both mountaineers and otherwise, were Europeans. Consequently, these women did not face the same potential national stigmatism in the climbing community or in geographical societies as did their American counterparts. Similar to Peck, however, they often preferred to know the language of regions they visited. French explorer Alexandra David-Neel’s trek to Lhasa is a powerful example of just such a journey. After over a quarter of a century studying Buddhism, traveling throughout Nepal, visiting monasteries in Tibet, and heeding the Dalai Lama’s advice to learn the Tibetan language, David-Neel decided to attempt to reach the forbidden Tibetan city of Lhasa in 1923. At the age of fifty-five and posing as a small Tibetan peasant woman going on a devotional pilgrimage, David-Neel became the first European to set foot on the Forbidden City’s grassland plain. Though the trek was dangerous and numerous Europeans, both male and female, had previously failed to reach Lhasa, David-Neel succeeded because she possessed something which they did not—a complete fluency of Tibetan. Indeed, by the time of her trek she had such an authentic command of the language that local Tibetans mistook her “for a Ladaki from western Tibet” who was “a bit confused by the local costumes but set on getting what she wanted.” Interestingly, by reaching Lhasa David-Neel did get what she most wanted—she situated herself among the most prominent Orientalists of Western Europe.

In actuality, along with the Dalai Lama’s encouragement, this goal was the original instigator behind her learning Tibetan. During a letter David-Neel sent to her husband years earlier, Luree Miller paraphrases: “She reminded him [her husband, Philippe Neel] that she was in a singular position as a woman and a militant practicing Buddhist. Orientalists in the West would be severely critical of her writing. She wanted above all to be completely accurate and

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31 Ibid., 167.
32 Ibid., 176.
document her findings thoroughly so that she could return home ‘a person of some importance in the world of Orientalists.’”\(^\text{33}\) A similar want to be authentic in her understandings of foreign people can be seen in the anthropological work of Kingsley. To many people’s amazement Kingsley also learned local languages of the African people with whom she most often came into contact in an effort to better understand them. In these cases, expertise in another language was just as significant to David-Neel and Kingsley’s journeys abroad and international careers as it was for Bullock Workman and Peck.

**The Question of Marriage**

Marrying surgeon William Hunter Workman in 1881, Bullock Workman began a sturdy and egalitarian relationship with a man as confident and determined as she. Born into an affluent Massachusetts family much like his future bride and twelve-years her senior, Hunter Workman made quite the propitious match as an independently wealthy graduate of both Yale and Harvard.\(^\text{34}\) During years spent together living in Europe, bicycling through Spain and India, climbing in the Himalayas, and co-publishing eight travel narratives, the couple became, in Hunter Workman’s own words, an equal partnership. Writing in third-person and with his usual tone when describing his confident wife, Hunter Workman explained in the early 1900s, “… their lives and activities were inseparably united and they shared equally all the excitements, hardships, and the dangers of the adventurous life that followed, in meeting which Mrs. Workman was by no means the less courageous and determined.”\(^\text{35}\)

In time this marriage not only developed into a successful partnership, but also became pivotal to Bullock Workman’s success as a female international mountaineer. On the most basic level, their union provided a degree of economic stability integral to Bullock Workman’s forthcoming mountaineering lifestyle. As numerous scholars have noted, during the 1800s and early 1900s mountaineering and travel required a great amount of money and leisure time. This was true to such an extent that “[i]n the sport’s early years [before the 1850s], many in the

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 149.

\(^{34}\) Maurice Isserman and Stewart Weaver, *Fallen Giants: A History of Himalayan Mountaineering from the Age of Empire to the Age of Extremes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 51.

\(^{35}\) Miller, *On Top of the World*, 104.
general public considered it a reckless and unjustifiable waste of time, the practice of rich, thrill-seeking eccentrics.\textsuperscript{36} Regardless of supposed eccentricities, many Victorian lady travelers including Elizabeth Sarah Mazuchelli and Alexandra David-Neel came from affluent families and were, like Bullock Workman, supported later in life by wealthy and willing husbands.

To her frustration, Peck on other hand faced the financial demands of her mountaineering lifestyle without the beneficial monetary support of a husband. The majority of Peck’s family denied her financial support after she received her A.M. from Michigan, likely finding her nontraditional mountaineering career and feminist viewpoints disturbing.\textsuperscript{38} Consequently,

\textsuperscript{36} The above photo was originally included in the Workman’s travel narrative, \textit{The Call of the Snowy Hispar: A Narrative of Exploration and Mountaineering on the Northern Frontier of India}, published in 1910. One can also find the image in Miller, \textit{On Top of the World}, 107 and the recent unabridged reprinting of the Workman’s travel narrative, which was published in 2005 by Adamant Media Corporation.

\textsuperscript{37} Brown, \textit{Women on High}, 5.

\textsuperscript{38} Dr. George Peck, Annie’s oldest brother, was the only family member to support her climbing career both emotionally and financially. George, much like Annie, remained single throughout his life, working as a physician.
unlike her married counterparts, Peck was continually mired in a cycle of fundraising and lecturing. She often raised enough financial support to partake on her next climbing excursion (with limited scientific tools) only to find herself poor once the journey ended and thus having to begin the exhaustive process of speaking engagements and prolific letter writing to potential sponsors over again. Peck was not alone in this wearisome process. As Marion Tinling explains in *Women Into the Unknown*: “… lack of money limited [Victorian] women’s opportunities for travel. The early male explorers had wealthy patrons; later they were sponsored by geographical societies. Both sources of support were long denied to women.”

Indeed Peck never received funding from geographical societies, though she became Fellow of the RGS in 1917, and only gained financial support from *Harper’s* after she had climbed seriously for approximately ten years and summated numerous substantial mountains including the Matterhorn and Mt. Sorata.

Peck expressed her annoyance at the situation in a confidential letter to a friend on October 3, 1917. She wrote, “…had I been a beloved wife in high position instead of having to fight my way alone in the world I should have been a more tactful person myself, cultivating social graces and with my gentler side better developed in a genial atmosphere.” Once again suggesting regret as to never being married, Peck’s letter implicitly evoked the common financial troubles unmarried mountaineering women of her time faced. They often “fought their way alone” in a world not yet structured to support, at least monetarily, their climbing dreams.

*“Trampling” as a Social Activity*

In addition to providing Bullock Workman with financial stability, Hunter Workman introduced his wife to the challenges and thrills of mountaineering, beginning with trips to the popular White Mountains located in New Hampshire. During the first eight years of marriage, the happy couple went on intermittent “trampling” trips to the White Mountains. Though the

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40 For a first-hand summary of Peck’s climbing career and struggle for funding please refer to: Peck, *A Search for the Apex of America*, ix-xii.
41 Annie S. Peck and Mrs. Lincomb, 3 October 1917, Annie S. Peck Papers, Manuscript Collection, Brooklyn College Library, Brooklyn.
42 During the mid to late 1800s many climbers referred to their actions as “trampling.” Though today the term trampling (and the athleticism it most often implied) would in the majority of cases be considered hiking rather than the highly technical abilities required of mountaineering at high-altitudes, late-nineteenth-century climbers and leisure hikers did not make a clear distinction when using the two terms. Thus, “trampling” could imply
range is quite conservative in height compared to those of their later adventures, with its peaks reaching an average of only 4,000 feet, these excursions allowed Bullock Workman to experience firsthand the rewarding exertion of climbing.

Similarly, Peck learned to enjoy outdoor activities and climbing as a young girl during summer vacations with her family in the Adirondacks and White Mountains. Although scholars primarily attribute Peck’s mountaineering zeal to her first glimpse of the Matthorn in 1885, she viewed her life chronology differently. Peck felt she was introduced to the fundamentals of climbing by her family, particularly, her mother. During an 1809 New York Times interview concerning her remarkable mountaineering ability Peck recalled: “My mother believed in bringing up her children in healthy surroundings, in giving us plain food, in getting us to bed at early hours, and in not keeping us from healthy play. To that I owe much, I think.” Just as Bullock Workman’s husband introduced her to the joys of “trampling,” Peck’s mother helped her garner the fundamental skills conducive to her later mountaineering career.

While few known records exist of Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s own thoughts concerning their first hiking trips the words of Canadian climber Mary Crawford likely echoed their own sentiments of these occasions. In 1909 Crawford, “one of the most adamant advocates of mountaineering for women,” answered the question, “Should women climb mountains?” stating: “[Mountaineering] is for women one of the new things under the sun and every fresh mountain is a delight. Ennui has no place in the vocabulary of a woman who climbs, the words which rout it are enthusiasm and exhilaration. Diseases of the imagination cannot be discovered anywhere on a mountainside, where Nature asserts herself so grandly to the consciousness and with such insistence that the ‘ego’ and its troubles sinks out of sight.” Although it is doubtful Bullock Workman and Peck would have employed Freudian rhetoric in describing their early climbing, the social life they witnessed emerging on the new trails of the White Mountains exemplified Crawford’s powerful words.

Mountaineering as well as basic hiking and “trammers” could refer to professional climbers and “walking tourists.” For a further discussion of this terminology please refer to Brown, Women on High, 4-5.


45 Brown, Women on High, 41.

By the late 1800s many elite U.S. men and women found healthful exercise, mental reinvigoration, and camaraderie within the country’s rapidly growing mountaineering community. Much as in Britain and Europe in general, this community developed out of mountaineering clubs. The first of these clubs, The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) founded in 1876, served as a model for future U.S. mountaineering clubs such as The Sierra Club established in 1892, the Mazamas of Portland, Oregon begun in 1894, the Mountaineers of Seattle started in 1907, and the Colorado Mountain Club originating in 1912.\textsuperscript{47} Developed “during a time of tremendous public interest in leaving the cities and enjoying the fresh air and sublime landscape of the mountains,” the AMC catered to and retained a membership of “well-to-do professionals” first from Boston and then from other regions of the Northeastern United States such as New York, New Haven, and Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{48} Relying upon the improved transportation provided by railroads established earlier in the century,\textsuperscript{49} AMC members and non-members alike flocked to the White Mountains during the summer looking forward to outdoor adventure and social interaction with people similar to themselves both in race and class. Thus, the place of Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s first climbing experiences can be seen not as a product of random selection, but as a result of their affluent New England backgrounds. Given William Hunter Workman’s status as an established surgeon and George Bacheler Peck’s social positioning as a successful lawyer, it was conceivably only a matter of time until both families heard through professional acquaintances of the White Mountains’ allure.

\textit{The Implications of Nationality}

Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s nationality also fundamentally shaped their first climbing excursions. Unlike the prominent clubs of Europe, American clubs maintained a respectable female membership either after a few years of existence or, in numerous cases, from their inception.\textsuperscript{50} The AMC in particular boasted an impressive female membership from its beginning; consequently Bullock Workman and Peck likely met numerous women while hiking

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\item[48] Brown, \textit{Women on High}, 121.
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in the White Mountains, helping to solidify what would become a life-long and explicit belief in women’s equal abilities to men.\textsuperscript{51} These club women, and individuals both within and outside of the American mountaineering community, were as Crawford claimed filled with “enthusiasm and exhilaration” not only for women’s mountaineering adventures, but also for their often supported and hailed position in the AMC. Although men held the majority of leadership positions, club women “organized and hosted outings, lectured at club meets, contributed to papers on botany, geology, and natural history, and led subgroups “ of the AMC.\textsuperscript{52} Moreover, by its second decade, AMC hiking excursions saw women outnumbering men on the trails. For example, “In July 1886 it was reported that on Mount Washington ‘about two-thirds of the [approximately one hundred] members present were ladies, and they showed equal endurance and enthusiasm on the walks with men.”\textsuperscript{53} This increasing female attendance was as much a part of late Victorian society and culture as was Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s mountaineering careers and Crawford’s careful utilization of Freudian thought. Stemming from a growing public discourse concerning the “proper” roles of women and a newly emerging ideal of the feminine as both domestic and athletic, American climbing clubs opened themselves to female membership and the ideal that mountaineering was indeed “one of the new things under the sun” which women should be permitted to enjoy. Or, as AMC member Moses Sweetser once put it, “In these days of advocacy of female suffrage and woman’s rights it need hardly to be stated that American ladies can accomplish nearly everything which is possible to their sturdier brethren.”\textsuperscript{54}

The significance of this female presence was also acknowledged outside of the country’s borders. Emily A. Thackary, an English woman, recognized the unique position of women within the AMC and its implicit challenge to traditional British notions of gender in the August 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1889 publication of the \textit{White Mountain Echo}.\textsuperscript{55} She noted: “In the conservative masculine mind, particularly in Europe, it has been a mooted point whether a woman could climb, camp out

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\item Mazel, \textit{Mountaineering Women}, 8-9 and Brown, \textit{Women on High}, 140.
\item Brown, \textit{Women on High}, 122.
\item Ibid., 122-123.
\item Moses F. Sweetser, \textit{The White Mountains, A Handbook for Travellers} (Boston: James Osgood, 1881), 35. (One can find this source also cited in Brown, \textit{Women on High}, 121.)
\item As historian Kimberly A. Jarvis explains, the \textit{White Mountain Echo} was a local New Hampshire newspaper “devoted to the sights and goings-on of the White Mountains tourism season.” (Kimberly A. Jarvis, \textit{Franconia Notch and the Women Who Saved It}, Revisiting New England: The New Regionalism Series, Darren Ranco, Siobhan Senier, Adam Sweeting, and David H. Watters, Series Eds., (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2007)). According to Brown, the newspaper also “served [specifically] as the bulletin board for the AMC” throughout the last quarter of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. (Brown, \textit{Women on High}, 122.)
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and ‘rough it,’ with any pleasure to herself or comfort to the ‘lords of creation.’ But to-day in America, things are greatly changed; mountain-tramping has become a ‘fad’ among ladies and they are greatly encouraged by their brothers, their cousins and their uncles.”56 Her observation reverberated the emerging ideals of the “New Woman,” developing in the United States and Europe during this time, and made explicit the connection between U.S. women’s initial climbs and their nationality. Thackary’s comment also revealed a general connection between female mountaineering and women’s personal relationships. It seems Bullock Workman and Peck were not alone in experiencing their first delightful moments of climbing alongside relatives, lovers, or close friends.

In actuality, numerous Victorian lady travelers were introduced to mountaineering or traveling in general by family members, including not only male relatives such as brothers, cousins, and uncles, but also mothers, fathers, grandparents, husbands, and sisters. While some women were presented to international travel or mountaineering in a literal sense much like Bullock Workman and Peck through physical engagement in the activity, numerous others were shown the world of travel or climbing in a figurative sense through the reading of books and investigations of “exotic” artifacts. This was particularly true for European and Australian women. In her well-received monograph, Spinsters Abroad (1989), Dea Birkett explains: “The family histories, from which women were so often excluded, could nevertheless provide images of travel they would later appropriate as their own. Mary Kingsley built up her own dreamscape from the tales in her father’s library, recreating the exotic worlds described in their pages until they became as real to her as the stifling domestic sphere of her daily existence.”57 Similarly, during occasions visiting her grandmother, the Australian traveler and writer Mary Eliza Blackwell Gaunt spent hours gazing upon the treasures her grandfather brought home from his journeys as a sailor with the East Indian Company, imagining a foreign world she wished to one day visit.58

As the following discussion therefore demonstrates, Bullock Workman, Peck, and other Victorian lady travelers encountered similar social and cultural factors during their life-journeys. While variations in their experiences resulted from differing marital statuses and national backgrounds, females who traveled abroad during the late nineteenth and early twentieth

57 Birkett, Spinsters Abroad, 23.
58 Ibid.
centuries constructed their traveling dreams within (not in spite of) the changing Western world in which they were born, came of age, often married, and eventually satisfied their adventurous spirits. Whether trekking to Lhasa like David-Neel, venturing into mainland Africa like Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt, traversing the Himalayas like Fanny Bullock Workman, or climbing in the Andes like Peck, women’s travel and mountaineering were fostered by “the crosscurrents of the very Victorian culture [they often] defied.” Though one must not expand this realization into a denial of women’s historical agency, it reminds us that the factors moving Victorian female travelers and mountaineers abroad were more nuanced than simple personal eccentricities. These factors were the tangible and complex remnants of the historicity of such women’s lives.

59 Brown, Women on High, 7.
Chapter 3
“Virgin Peaks,” Female Athleticism, and Professional Mountaineering

“There are very few mountains that it is advisable for ladies to try and climb.”
—John Cameron in Mazamas (December 1905)

“That women’s sphere should be prescribed by men, that men know better what is womanly and what we are capable than do we ourselves, has not seemed to me logical or proper.”
—Annie S. Peck in the New York Times (February 28, 1915)

While discussing the assumed anatomical limitations of female bodies, renowned suffragette and women’s rights activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued in 1850, “We cannot say what the woman might be physically, if the girl were allowed all the freedom of the body, in romping, swimming, climbing, and playing ball.” A seemingly obvious argument in a post Title IX world, Stanton’s statement embodied a novel and radical reconceptualization of women’s bodies and physical abilities during the mid nineteenth century. Emblematic of a later cultural shift in gender understandings (particularly as they related to athletics), her contention relied upon two significant lines of thought that would permeate U.S. discourse well into the twentieth century. The first conflated athleticism with women’s rights. In this case, the right for female bodies to be perceived, at least potentially, as physically strong and capable. Within this logic, females’ participation in differing forms of athletics such as climbing held the potential to disprove presumed female frailty and thus to solidify women’s rights to be culturally recognized as physically capable. The second built upon this framework, implying the existence of an untapped female potential due to gender discrimination, what was then termed “sex-antagonism.” These lines of thought not only outlined the primary gendered discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also the material realities of gender discrimination that U.S. women, particularly climbers, endured in their daily lives. Furthermore, Bullock Workman and Peck relied upon such ideas to frame their eventual mountaineering accomplishments in terms of gender equality and female athletic ability.

As products of American and Western European society, Victorian lady mountaineers such as Bullock Workman and Peck traveled a deceptively thin line between acceptable femininity and gender nonconformity. They were at once part of the impressive female growth in athletic participation at the end of the nineteenth century, particularly within American

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60 Ibid., 41.
mountaineering clubs, and yet culturally deviant in the extent of their athleticism. This ambiguity, and its resulting potential for feminist activism, can be attributed to the emerging “New Woman” of the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Until the late nineteenth century, women faced a strictly prescribed sedentary lifestyle upheld by the cultural ideal of female submissiveness as embodied by a pale and delicate physique. Consequently, women climbers of the early to mid 1800s found little social and cultural support for their actions. For, as historian Stephani Twin elucidates: “…even the mildest female exercise regimens won little public approval. Hard work, ambition, diligence, and perseverance were considered unfeminine and so were women who displayed them.”

With the emerging twentieth century, however, things began to change. Due to a combination of factors including social reform movements, industrialization, U.S. westward expansion, and the American civil war, women in the United States and Western Europe began to challenge their gendered positions in society. This was particularly true for middle and upper-middle class white women who participated in many of the reform movements of the mid-to late nineteenth century. Finding a public voice and experiencing further sexism within movements such as those for universal enfranchisement and temperance, they often questioned the limited domestic sphere to which they were accustomed. Combined with a growing cultural interest, particularly in the United States, in the benefits of outdoor and athletic activities upon the body, Western society began to celebrate a “New Woman” who was athletic and increasingly independent.

University of Chicago Professor William Thomas’s sociological text, Sex and Society (1907) serves as a case in point. Discussing “the adventitious character of woman,” Thomas argued:

…the detached condition of woman ha[s] much to do with the emergence of the adventuress and the sporting-woman. Human nature was made for action;… The mere superinducing of passivity, as in the extreme case of solitary confinement, is sufficient to

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61 Mazel, Mountaineering Women, 7. Contemporary scholarship refers to this Western gender ideal as the “Cult of True Womanhood,” which held the most cultural sway, specifically in the U.S., from approximately 1820 to the late 1860s. Along with female frailty and submissiveness, the “Cult of True Womanhood” also emphasized piety, purity, and domesticity. Combined, these gender ideals defined the newly emerged middle-class family of the century and supported a distinct class identity for middle-class men and women.


produce insanity; and the emotion of dread, or passive fear, is said to be the most painful of emotions, because there is no possibility of relief by action. Modern woman is in a similar condition of constraint and unrest, which produces organic ravages for which no luxury can compensate…. It is no wonder that more of them do no lose their minds…

Relying on a contemporaneous, hegemonic view of women as highly susceptible to hysteria and other nervous and psychological disorders, Thomas’s argument supported the increased female athleticism of the time. Printed within a larger and highly misogynist work, the above quote also serves as a potent example of the extent to which the ideal of the “New Woman” had permeated dominant American culture, even sexist arenas, by the early 1900s. Finally, Thomas’s contention hints at the discourse before utilized by Stanton, which conflated physical activity with improving women’s bodies. While Thomas in no way hoped to promote gender equality, his argument ultimately located the “cure” for women’s mental distress within athletics. Accordingly, Thomas explicitly linked physical activity with the development of women’s psychological health and, in doing so, implicitly recognized a female potential for mental stability.

Similarly, numerous mountaineers of the late 1800s and early 1900s maintained that climbing provided women relief from their mental as well as physical disabilities. “Take the woman whose usual occupation is a sedentary one,” wrote Crawford in 1909, “… and who is constantly giving out to others her nervous energy. Put her on the train and send her to the mountains…. And so she starts out, gains confidence with every step, finds the dangers she has imagined far greater than those she encounters and arrives at last upon the summit to gaze out upon a new world…. a point of view which now makes upon her mind its indelible impression.” Once again connecting physical activity with improved female mental health, Crawford, much like Thomas, acknowledged the potential for women’s psychological stability. Furthermore, she positioned mountaineering as the ultimate form of beneficial exercise. Climbing did not solely heal nervous disorders. Rather it was a holistic activity that allowed a woman “to know herself as never before—physically, mentally, [and] emotionally.”

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65 Crawford, “Mountain Climbing for Women,” 85.
66 Ibid.
Women’s Inherent Physical Ability

While the language utilized by individuals such as Thomas and Crawford supported female athleticism and often female climbing specifically, it also continually mired women within a framework that presumed a female predisposition to ill health. Accordingly, the feminist potential of such a discourse lingered latent in the writings and arguments of many late nineteenth and early twentieth century proponents of the “New Woman.” A basic conflation of athleticism with women’s physical health ignored the common root of Victorian sexism—the presumed biological inferiority of women as displayed by women’s supposed propensity for mental and physical disease.

Within this cultural context, the published writings and actions of Bullock Workman and Peck posed a relatively novel and impressively potent threat to presuppositions of female frailty. For, unlike individuals such as Thomas and Crawford, Bullock Workman and Peck built upon the ideal of the “New Woman” to implicitly argue that women were not simply made healthy through climbing, but were inherently physically fit. A seemingly minor distinction, this variation proved to be significant. It supported their and other women’s participation in strenuous physical activities such as high-mountaineering, during a time in which doctors, as well as other professionals, often utilized the language of female disease to confine women to “feminine” sports such as non-competitive swimming, biking, tennis, golf, and leisure hiking. Furthermore, it undermined an essential component of late nineteenth and early twentieth century gender discrimination, rejecting the assumption of female biological inferiority as demonstrated by a propensity for disease.

Refusing to accept and, in many cases, to explicitly address the Western presumption of females’ predisposition to illness, both Bullock Workman and Peck utilized descriptions of their ascents to portray female bodies as inherently healthy. Bullock Workman’s co-authored travel narrative, In the Ice World of the Himálaya (1900), which she wrote in tandem with her husband, serves as a paradigmatic example. First describing the goals of her writing, Bullock Workman explained, “For the benefit of women, who may not yet have ascended to altitudes above 16,000 feet but are thinking of attempting to do so, I will here give my experiences for what they are worth.”

With this basic introduction Bullock Workman began to develop a novel approach to

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67 Fanny Bullock Workman, In the Ice World of the Himálaya: Among the Peaks and Passes of Ladakh, Nubra, Suru, and Baltistan (London: T. F. Unwin, 1900), 182.
conceptualizing women’s athleticism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike climbers such as Crawford, she did not initially conflate a female interest in climbing with improving health. Rather, she presented women’s attraction to mountaineering as a product of simple personal curiosity, legitimate of its own accord and not requiring further discussion. Thus, through a discursive silence surrounding supposed female predisposition to illness, Bullock Workman began dismantling contemporaneous assumptions of inherent female weakness. She embodied a new view of female athleticism and outdoor activity in which women participated in and promoted physical exercise without the cultural disclaimer of needing to improve their and other women’s physical and mental health. Her introduction accepted that women, like men, could mountaineer solely out of personal interest and, as her proceeding writing would emphasize, because they were, contrary to popular consensus, inherently healthy. This was a particularly prescient viewpoint. It would take approximately another sixty years of climbing achievements and resistance to male patronage, until women mountaineers in general no longer felt compelled to ‘excuse’ their climbing through reference to improving their health.\(^{68}\)

Bullock Workman built upon the subversive potential of her discursive silence surrounding the topic of female illness by emphasizing her own physical vigor. In the process, she positioned female bodies as inherently healthy and strong. Proceeding with a description of her bicycle journeys in Southeast Asia and initial climbing experiences in the High Himalaya, Bullock Workman explained: “I had been told by people in England and also in India, that I should not be able to cycle more than one cold weather in the plains, and certainly should not be fit for much in the mountains after a long season of exposure to the sun at lower altitudes.”\(^{69}\) Unlike individuals had advised, however, Bullock Workman found that “[a]s a matter of fact, [her] hardest and highest mountain work was accomplished after two seasons, of six months each, cycling in Ceylon, India, and Java.”\(^{70}\) Accordingly, Bullock Workman attributed potential female frailty to other peoples’ erroneous expectations, rather than to her (and by deduction, other women’s) experienced physical reality.

Bullock Workman further highlighted the inherent capabilities of women by emphasizing her lack of preparatory athletic training. Self-described as “doing little walking” and “lying around inactive on decks of steamers” prior to her ascents, Bullock Workman concluded, “It will

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\(^{69}\) Bullock Workman, *In the Ice World of the Himálaya*, 183.
\(^{70}\) Ibid.
thus be seen that, in starting out, I was in no special training for mountain work.” Though a startling assertion, of interest here is not whether Bullock Workman indeed had “no special training for mountain work” or, as was likely, a genetic predisposition to high-altitude acclimatization, but rather what ideological purposes this sentence served during a time in which her actions went well above and beyond those of the “everyday” athletic woman.

Numerous scholars contend that comments like the one above primarily functioned to reduce, and thus make less culturally subversive, the athletic achievements of women travelers and climbers. This argument, however, ignores the ways in which Bullock Workman, Peck, and other lady climbers consciously used complex self-presentations to prove women’s inherent physical health and athletic ability. Maneuvering within a culture that conflated female exercise with a need to improve women’s naturally weak bodies, Bullock Workman recognized that accentuating not only her physical achievements, but also—and most importantly—her limited preparation for climbing shattered the sexist presumptions underlying the hegemonic ideal of the “New Woman.” If, as dominant Western society so potently claimed, female bodies were naturally weaker and prone to illness vis-à-vis men, Bullock Workman should not have been able to partake in extreme climbing alongside her husband without prior training. Hence, Bullock Workman’s emphasis on her lack of training functioned to solidify the truth, proved by her successful climbs in the Himalayas, that she was athletically capable. It moved her athletic ability from a space of rare female competency (gained through repetitive training) to one of natural and inherent health. Bullock Workman did not need to train for mountaineering, because she did not need exercise to be healthy; she was healthy prior to any physical and outdoor activity. Regardless of the veracity of such a claim, it had significant ramifications beyond the lives and actions of women mountaineers. Seeing as Bullock Workman did not need special training to climb safely at altitudes of over 21,000 feet, other women “who may not yet have ascended to altitudes above 16,000 feet,” were in no way separated, in their potential climbing ability, from Bullock Workman. Ideally, they too could venture the awe-inspiring heights of the Himalayas.

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71 Ibid., 182-3.
72 This argument is mentioned briefly in multiple historical accounts of Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s climbs, the best example of which can be found in: Mazel, Mountaineering Women,104. An impressively thorough and theoretical discussion of this argument may be found in: Sara Mills, “Chapter 3: Foucault and Constraints on the Production of Text,” in Discourse of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism (New York: Routledge, Inc., 1991), 67-107.
Peck successfully challenged the late-Victorian notion of women’s predisposition for ill health as well. Unlike Bullock Workman, however, she did so not only through her writings, but also her climbing attire. Soon after Peck ascended the impressive Alpine peak—the Matterhorn—in 1895, lecture placards proclaimed her the “Queen of the Climbers” and the Singer Sewing Machine Company gave away a picture of Peck, dressed in full mountaineering costume, with each sewing machine sold. Not only was her ascent made public nearly instantly, as she was the third known woman to successfully summit the Matterhorn, but “her costume created almost as much of a sensation as her climb.” Dressed in a hip-length woolen tunic, felt hat, and knickerbockers, Peck proudly defied the proper female dress of the time. For, as Tinling eloquently explicates, “The audacity of [Peck’s] choice of costume can be judged by the fact that

Figure 6: The photograph of Peck included with each Singer Sewing Machine sold after her ascent of the Matterhorn in 1895.

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73 Tinling, Women Into the Unknown, 12.
74 Ibid.
75 Photograph scanned from a large image included in Brown, Women on High, 142.
on the very day newspapers in the country carried her modest cable announcing her triumph, a woman was being prosecuted in Arkansas for appearing on the streets in bloomers.”

Undeniably, Peck’s distinctive dress visually challenged cultural gender norms that celebrated the slim, hourglass figured woman whose body was literally restrained by her corset and voluminous skirt. Overlooked by previous scholars, however, are the fundamental ways in which Peck’s attire concretely challenged the late nineteenth and early twentieth century discourse of female frailty and propensity for illness. Arguing that traditional female clothing was the real cause of women’s seemingly inherent physical weakness, Peck dressed in pants and sweaters not to primarily “play” with visual signifiers of gender, but to allow her safe mobility during climbing. In the process, Peck proved that women were inherently healthy and capable of strenuous exercise once dressed in attire appropriate to athletic activity.

The ideological groundwork for Peck’s climbing attire developed well before she began her mountaineering career. As early as 1851, female climbers debated both the literal and figurative limitations of feminine clothing. Building upon Sarah Grimke’s 1837 assertion that “as long as we [women] submit to being dressed like dolls, we never can rise to that station of duty and usefulness from which [men] desire to exclude us,” numerous women mountaineers argued that the restrictive nature of tight corsets and large skirts prevented successful female “trampling.” Mrs. G. W. Nowell, an avid Boston climber and wife to a founder of the Appalachian Mountain Club, exemplified this viewpoint. An outspoken proponent of lady’s dress reform, Mrs. Nowell declared in 1877: “Our dress has done all the mischief. For years it has kept us away from the glory of the woods and the mountain heights. It is time we should reform.” Citing her own near-death fall into a ravine, due to the catching of her skirt upon a rock, Mrs. Nowell went on to conclude that many ladies climbed slowly, “not always from physical weakness, but from skirt entanglements.”

Approximately thirty years later, Peck also argued that feminine dress (whether the traditional long dresses of the time or the modified ankle-length skirts proposed by climbers such as Mrs. Nowell) limited her athletic ability and were potentially dangerous. In the process, she

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76 Ibid.
77 Brown, Women on High, 127-128.
78 Ibid., 127.
concretely situated female weakness outside of the body. Writing in her 1908 travel narrative, A Search for the Apex of America, Peck elucidated:

A skirt… however short and light, anything depending from the waist or shoulders, is some hindrance to movement and of noticeable weight. I had not an ounce of strength to spare for superfluities, neither do I consider that an abbreviated skirt would add to the gracefulness of my appearance, or if it did, that this, upon the mountain, would be of the slightest consequence: while in rock climbing the shortest skirt may be an added source of danger.  

In attributing women’s physical limitations to late-Victorian feminine attire, rather than to women’s biology, Peck challenged the hegemonic discourse of an inherent female predisposition to illness. Her words and actions supported a world in which women could not only climb to impressive altitudes, but also heal their physical weaknesses (if they experienced any) through a simple change of clothes.

Peck’s argument found tangible support in the everyday experiences of Victorian ladies. During a time in which corsets exerted as much as seventy pounds of pressure on women’s midsections, often making breathing laborious and damaging internal organs, and voluminous skirts made even non-athletic movement difficult, many women suffered from health problems caused by their restrictive clothing.  

For, as numerous physicians of the late nineteenth century were discovering, female attire could be a serious “hindrance” and “added source of danger” during a woman’s lifetime. Furthermore, many of Peck’s mountaineering contemporaries, including Bullock Workman, experienced climbing accidents due to their feminine attire. Though a skilled mountaineer, Bullock Workman’s refusal to wear “unladylike” costumes put her in a number of precarious positions, the worst of which took place in 1899. Climbing among the snowy terrain of the High-Himalaya in modern-day Pakistan, Bullock Workman accidentally tripped on the hem of her skirt, causing her to fall “shoulder deep into a crevasse.” Fortunately, after much “strenuous efforts on her part and hauling on that of the guide,” Bullock Workman made it out of the crevasse successfully and, besides shaken nerves, unscathed.

80 Peck, A Search for the Apex of America, 339.
81 Brown, Women on High, 21-22.
82 Bullock and Hunter Workman, In the Ice World of the Himálaya, 120. This event is also mentioned briefly in: Armitage, Women’s Work, 224-225 and Middleton, Victorian Lady Travelers, 85.
Although not always deadly, such events exemplified the truth of Peck’s words. Women were physically capable to the extent to which their attire was conducive to strenuous activity. Thus, demonstrations of weakness on the part of a woman could be attributed to a source other than presumed biological shortcomings. In this way, Peck, and lady climbers like her, symbolically discarded the notion of female frailty and predisposition for illness through the literal discarding of their feminine garments. In hindsight, given the extreme landscape traversed by Victorian lady climbers, it is astonishing more life-threatening accidents did not occur. If anything, the limited amount of these situations further attested to the truly remarkable competency and inherent athletic abilities of late nineteenth and early twentieth century female mountaineers.

Figure 7: The published sketch of Fanny Bullock Workman being helped out of a crevasse after tripping on her dress, as printed in In the Ice-World of the Himálaya (1900).  

83 Ibid., photograph published adjacent to pate 120.
Significantly, Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s deconstruction of the dominant discourse surrounding the “New Woman” supported their (and other women’s) strenuous climbing during a time in which the language of female ill health was utilized to inhibit women from such activities. Just as Thomas and Crawford equated female infirmity to a sedentary lifestyle, late-Victorian culture also attributed female illness to “excessive” exercise and outdoor activity. Adhering to the common assertion that “‘a woman who has once over[exerted] herself seems to be more or less an invalid for life,’”85 male athletes, college educators, and doctors often further gendered the diagnoses of overexertion through the forms of illness they attributed to it—frail minds, harmed nervous systems, and debilitated uteruses. 86

85 Mazel, Mountaineering Women, 10.
86 Brown, Women on High, 40.
In response, various fin-de-siècle exercise handbooks consciously promoted moderate female exercise and, while the exact boundaries of acceptable and non-acceptable exertion often remained vague, the proscribed gender roles proposed were unambiguous. Advising present and future hikers about female trekking, climber John Cameron argued in the December 1905 publication of the Mazamas87: “‘There are very few mountains that it is advisable for ladies to try and climb. Where there is a road or the way is open and not too steep, they may attempt it; but to climb over loose rocks and through the scrub-spruce for miles, it is too difficult for them.’”88 Accordingly, moderation within mountaineering primarily consigned women to hiking on well-paved paths, previously established by men, and at lower elevations where gentle slopes are predominant.

Therefore, the extreme athleticism and explorative nature of professional female mountaineers were highly opposed during the emergence of the “New Woman.” Whilst relatives, lovers, and friends often encouraged upper-middle-class women like Bullock Workman and Peck to day hike in the White Mountains or partake in guided Alpine treks, they fervently discouraged such women’s high-altitude climbing. Undeniably, Bullock Workman, Peck, and their contemporaries did nothing in moderation. They were genuine explorers, often traveling over uncharted, dangerous terrain consisting of not only loose rocks but also glacial ice and deep crevasses. Equally disturbing, they braved extremely steep mountain slopes at strenuously high-altitudes, frequently of over 18,000 feet, to attain their goals of a high-peak summit.

Responding to this hostile atmosphere, Bullock Workman and Peck skillfully presented their “excessive” climbs and, in the case of Peck, climbing attire, within a significantly divergent discursive landscape. They accepted the contemporary trend of increasing female athleticism of which they were very much a part, while rejecting its conflation with women’s presumed predisposition for illness. Thus, they negated the very diagnoses used to equate their “extreme” mountaineering with permanent female invalidism—“frail minds, harmed nervous systems, and debilitated uteruses”—by abolishing the discursive bridge that connected female exercise with issues of health. Once women’s health in no certain way connected to athletic activity, and women were understood to be inherently healthy, arguments that utilized a language of illness to restrict women’s exercise became unintelligible. While the overall success of this discursive act

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87 The Mazamas was the official bulletin of the Oregon Mazamas Climbing Club (founded in 1894).
88 Brown, Women on High, 40.
remains vague, Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s continual efforts to engage with the language underlying the “New Woman” proves lady climbers were very much a part of a Western discourse obsessed with debates of proper gender roles and identity. Furthermore, one finds their language reiterated in numerous personal correspondences, newspaper editorials, journal articles, and other printed materials. So much so, that by the end of Peck’s life, obituaries concluded that “[h]er strenuousness and her determination… were her greatest qualities.”89 And, on June 2, 1910, the president of the RGS carefully modified his claim that Bullock Workman was the most accomplished climber of her sex, commenting, “Whether I ought to make that limitation or not I am rather doubtful.”90

“An Easy Day for a Lady”

During the turn of the nineteenth century, women’s entrance into the professional mountaineering and geographical communities of Europe and the United States most threatened dominant gender norms and the superiority of professional male climbers. Women mountaineers’ lack of athletic moderation certainly disturbed their families and caused a degree of social alarm, yet if kept outside the public doors and actions of the professional mountaineering community, the subversive potential of their “extreme” athleticism remained limited. Women might encourage close female friends to challenge traditional boundaries of exertion and, as was the case with Bullock Workman and Peck, argue for women’s inherent athletic ability, but without an audience and public platform from which to voice such opinions their arguments ultimately posed little threat to hegemonic definitions of mountaineering as intrinsically male. Ultimately, Mummery’s popular conclusion that a climber was literally “any man who is skilled in the art of making his way with facility in mountain countries,” could remain unchallenged. Only once women such as Bullock Workman and Peck positioned themselves as professional climbers within an increasingly confined professional mountaineering community, did their actions lucidly question this androcentrism and the time period’s broader sexism.

Much as female travelers of the late 1800s defined themselves vis-à-vis tourists, turn of the century mountaineers distinguished themselves from novice and leisure hikers through a

combination of four factors—repetitive climbing experience, high-altitude trekking, scientific observation, and genuine exploration. Overlooked by previous scholars, this self-definition developed in tandem with and in response to mountain climbing as an upper-middle class leisure activity. As mentioned previously, by the 1890s a respectable variety of mountaineering clubs and organizations maintained increasing female and male memberships, especially in the United States. Moreover, in Western Europe professional mountaineers such as Le Blond experienced the escalation of guided Alpine hiking. Accordingly, the professional mountaineering community, composed of a much smaller faction of primarily male climbers, confined its ranks to not simply skilled, repetitive climbers of high-altitude ranges, but to individuals who utilized their climbing for scientific study and geographical exploration.91

This redefinition of professional mountaineering was, at least partially, a response to the increasing female presence on mountain slopes. Intimately tied to the interests of the RGS, the professional mountaineering community’s male majority likely echoed the sentiments of RGS Fellows such as Admiral Halliday Cave who, in 1892, argued, “I should be very sorry to see this ancient society governed by ladies.”92 Given the disparity in Victorian men’s and women’s educational levels as well as financial independence, restricting the domain of professional mountaineering through reference to scientific measurements, which required a background in physics and geometry, and genuine exploration, which required ample finances to travel abroad, served to maintain the sport’s androcentric underpinnings.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, however, women such as Bullock Workman and Peck resolutely asserted their right to join the ranks of professionals in various fields including high mountaineering. Combining their strenuous and repetitive climbing with meticulously recorded and published scientific and explorative observations, Fanny Bullock Workman and Peck staked claims to the increasingly elusive title of “professional mountaineer.” In the process, they not only argued for their right to be recognized as competent climbers and for women’s equality in the professions generally, but also challenged the hegemonic definitions of male and female sexuality.

91 While no previous scholars explicitly outline this definition of mountaineering one finds persuasive evidence in many early twentieth century publications of The Geographical Journal. One particularly useful example, as it relates science and exploration to gender, may be found in: “First Exploration of Huh Lumba and Sosbon Glaciers: Discussion,” The Geographical Journal, Vol. 27, No. 2 (February 1906): 141-144.
92 Bell and McEwan, “The admission of women Fellows to the Royal Geographical Society, 1892-1914; the controversy and the outcome,” 297.
Gaining respect as a professional climber was no easy feat for Victorian ladies. As *Alpine Journal* editor, J. P. Farrar, conceded in 1925, “some unconscious feeling, let us say of the novelty of women’s intrusion into the domain of exploration so long reserved to man, may in some quarters have existed.” In reality, more than an “unconscious feeling” of novelty permeated the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of the male climbing community during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Realizing they could not prevent some women from pursuing high-altitude ascents, many male climbers hoped to deny women a professional status by ignoring and not rewarding their achievements. The prestigious Alpine Club for example, a domain of accomplished European and American mountaineers since 1857, denied women membership for over a hundred years, finally opening its doors to female climbers in 1976. During the 1870s, the Club went so far as to make a mockery of women’s growing entreaties to be recognized by the society. It announced that a female beagle was its newest “honorary member”. In response, the dog’s owner, famed Alpinist Meta Brevoort, coolly concluded that her dog was “the first lady ever admitted into that exclusive body.” Following suit, the Club’s publication, the *Alpine Journal*, refused to publish any articles of female authorship until Margaret Anne Jackson’s well-received winter traverse of the Jangfrau in 1887 demanded the journal’s attention. Similarly, the RGS, a significant source of financial, intellectual, and social support for professional climbers, denied membership to women until 1913, claiming that, in the words of Lord Curzon, “[w]e contest in toto the general capability of women to contribute to scientific knowledge. Their sex and training renders them equally unfitted for exploration.”

The professional climbing community also attempted to minimize the accomplishments of lady mountaineers by (re)inscribing femininity upon women’s physical actions and the mountains ladies climbed. Underlying these efforts was a semantics that “mountaineer” intrinsically signified a “male (i.e. masculine) climber” and “mountaineering” signified “male (i.e. masculine) athleticism.” Accordingly, the (re)inscription of femininity upon the actions of lady mountaineers by (re)inscribing femininity upon women’s physical actions and the mountains ladies climbed. Underlying these efforts was a semantics that “mountaineer” intrinsically signified a “male (i.e. masculine) climber” and “mountaineering” signified “male (i.e. masculine) athleticism.”

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96 Ibid., 107.
97 Bell and McEwan, “The Admission of women Fellows to the Royal Geographical Society, 1892-1914; the controversy and the outcome,” 298. This article presents a thorough analysis of the RGS debate over women Fellows and is a useful reference for primary documents concerning the RGS during the dawn of the twentieth century.
98 For an introduction to the concepts of “signifier” and “signified” in the study of linguistics please refer to: Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, Eds. in collaboration
and objects of women’s climbs functioned to exclude women from the professional field of mountaineering. For, if “mountaineer” and “mountaineering” implied maleness and masculinity, any individual and act equated with femininity and, by deduction, femaleness were left outside the domain of a professional field equated with the former. Mummery exemplified this linguistic act in his 1896 travel narrative, *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucuses*. He famously quipped, “all mountains appear doomed to pass through three stages: An inaccessible peak—The most difficult ascent in the Alps—An easy day for a lady.”\(^9\) The implications of this statement were two fold. In moving from “an inaccessible peak” to “an easy day” of climbing, the object of women’s ascents—the Alps—became feminized. The mountains came to embody feminine traits, particularly that of sexual passivity. Presumably, only a passive object, unthreatening and metaphorically “open” to being “conquered” posed little challenge to the physical prowess of a climber. Furthermore, through minimizing the physical challenge posed by the Alps, Mummery implicitly reduced the athletic ability of the women who climbed them. “An easy day” of mountaineering implied minimal physical and mental exertion on the behalf of women.

Consequently, professional male mountaineers like Mummery can be seen working linguistically not only to prevent female professionalism, but also to protect the “masculinity” of their occupation and, in the process, their sexual identities. As sports historian Allen Guttman explains: “The clear supposition behind the attempts to restrict women to gentle exercise and graceful motion, was that vigorous sports are essentially masculine…. With the onset of puberty, boys were expected to display prowess as a symbol of virility and dominance; girls were expected to do just enough calisthenics to remain healthy while they developed the domestic skills and feminine wiles needed to attract potential husbands.”\(^10\) Within such a cultural framework, women’s high-altitude climbing threatened, in a very concrete sense, the gendered sex roles of dominant Western society. Female mountaineer’s assertive athleticism disproved the “innate” sexual passivity of women and called into question the presumed impressive sexual prowess of men. Only after the objects of women’s climbing desires were made submissive, could such women’s athleticism yet again embody the ideal of female sexual passivity.

To prevent the re-inscription of femininity upon their climbs, Bullock Workman and Peck often emphasized the “virginity” of their peaks. While previous scholarship finds this focus on virginity antithetical to Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s feminism, when placed within the sexual milieu of late-Victorian culture, it becomes an integral part of their professionalism and resulting feminism. For instance, describing her “search for the apex of America,” Peck explicated, “My… thought was to do a little genuine exploration, to conquer a virgin peak, to attain some height where no man had previously stood.” Accordingly, Peck supported the professionalism of her climbs by focusing her energies on the summits of “virgin” peaks. Unlike Mummery’s Alps, Peck’s Andes were unspoiled by the previous “trampling” of men and, most significantly, numerous women. As a result, the object and, thus, physicality of Peck’s climbs remained masculine. Though Peck was female, she ascended mountains in their first “stage” of development as “inaccessible peaks.” She did not follow in the footsteps of earlier male climbers, as did women in the Alps, nor was she part of a larger female constituency climbing in the Andes. Her actions were as masculine in character as possible and, thus, the denial of her professionalism became increasingly difficult. Peck was a climber achieving the most difficult of tasks—the conquering of virgin summits. In the sexual undertones of the professional mountaineering community, virgin peaks did not give up their status easily, even to a lady. They were dangerous and extremely difficult mountains to climb and, consequently, required the impressive athletic prowess and stamina of a truly “masculine” mountaineer. Hence, Peck was culturally situated to fulfill her feminist goal of promoting women’s professionalism. “[B]eing always from earliest years a firm believer in the equality of the sexes,” Peck wrote, “I felt that any great achievement in any line of endeavor would be of advantage to my sex.” Positioning her mountaineering career within the masculine ideal of the professional climbing community allowed Peck to sustain the “great achievement” of her climbs, and therefore prove women’s ability to succeed alongside men in the professions.

Climbing unexplored terrain posed numerous risks for the social reception of lady climbers as well. Oftentimes, it reinvigorated efforts on the part of male climbers to ignore the mountaineering accomplishments of women. Reminiscing about her public receptions, particularly in Europe during the 1910s, Bullock Workman concluded:

101 Peck, *A Search for the Apex of America*, x-xi. The italics were included in the original text.
102 Peck, *A Search for the Apex of America*, xi.
Had I confined my work to climbing in the Alps, Tyrol, or Norway, or even fifth-class ascents in India, I should doubtless have been vociferously praised by ‘the man on the street’ and patted on the back for my womanly climbs by the average male mountaineer, but as I went beyond these ladylike accomplishments and became a Himalayist, I was bound to run the gauntlet of what, there is no denying, is an often present sentiment in these advanced times—sex antagonism…. On more than one occasion at Geographical and Alpine Congresses women confrères have seen fit to greet me not at all, or with sarcastic comment, while men who might be supposed to be interested in Himalayan subjects have, unavoidably, absented themselves from my lectures.  

Likewise, while fundraising for her 1908 excursion to Mount Huascaran, Peck found, to her dismay, that numerous potential sponsors ignored “the fact that [she] had, with little inconvenience, already surmounted over 18,000 feet” during her 1904 summit of Mount Sorata. Consequently, she struggled to find financial assistance as sponsors erroneously argued that she was ignorant and thus incapable of high-altitude mountaineering.

Victorian lady mountaineers like Bullock Workman and Peck confronted this disregard for their achievements through publishing meticulous descriptions and visual representations of their scientific observations and explorations. The Workman’s 1917 map of the Siachen Glacier serves as case in point. Published in the couple’s final travel narrative, Two Summers in

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**Figure 9:** The Workman’s published map of the Siachen Glacier, with a special focus placed on the map’s title: “The Siachen or Rose Glacier... Explored by the Fanny Bullock Workman Expedition 1912.”

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104 Peck, “Foreword,” *A Search for the Apex of America*, xi-xii.
the Ice-Wilds of the Eastern Karakoram, the map presented a detailed survey of the previously little-explored Siachen Glacier and was supplemented with three pages of diagrams and tables demonstrating the scientific measurements used to develop the survey.

![Diagram of Triangulation of the Siachen Glacier](image)

**Figure 10**: The “Diagram of Triangulation” included in the Workman’s 1917 travel narrative. This was one of several pages highlighting the Workman’s scrupulous scientific measurements of the Siachen Glacier.  

These details left little question as to the authenticity of the Workman’s geographical observations and triangulations. Furthermore, in accrediting the map to “the Fanny Bullock Workman Expedition” of 1912, the couple conflated female mountaineering with leadership, science, and genuine exploration. This held ramifications for women’s professionalism generally, as well as Bullock Workman’s climbing career in particular. “The object of placing my full name in connection with the expedition on the map,” Bullock Workman summarized, “is… solely that in the accomplishment of women, now and in the future, it should be known to them and stated in print that a woman was the initiator and special leader of this expedition. When later, woman occupies her acknowledged position as an individual worker in all fields… no such emphasis of her work will be needed; but that day has not fully arrived, and at present it

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105 Fanny Bullock and William Hunter Workman, *Two Summers in the Ice-Wilds of the Eastern Karakoram*, image placed adjacent to Fanny Bullock Workman’s “Note.”

106 Italics added for emphasis.
behoves women, for the benefit of their sex, to put what they do, at least, on record.”  This goal was not lost on the minds of professional male climbers such as RGS Fellow Thomas Holdich. Praising Bullock Workman’s scientific explorations of the Nun Kun in 1908, Thomas concluded that her accomplishments proved “it [was] almost time that a great society like this [the RGS] ranked ladies and men together on precisely the same plane of geographical research.”

While it would be another five years until the RGS took seriously Thomas’s suggestion, the fact that it was made in response to Bullock Workman’s published scientific observations demonstrates the degree to which women mountaineers influenced the often hostile, and ever-stubborn male climbing community of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In asserting the inherent health of female bodies, claiming the summit of “virgin peaks” as their own, and publicizing their scientific skills, lady climbers such as Bullock Workman and Peck solidified their right to participate in strenuous activity and to be recognized as professionals in careers of their choosing.

Conclusion

Writing to the New York Times on May 8, 1912, Peck defended the Women’s Suffrage Movement, proclaiming:

Well, some of us [women] are a bit tired of having prescribed to us what we deserve or require…. We object to having our sphere decreed by others…. A fair field and no favor is all we ask in our work, in the professions, but we are handicapped and shall be until we have had political equality about fifty years. Then we shall begin to know, when they have had a free development, what women really are like and of what they are capable.  

The same year, Bullock Workman stopped to have her photograph taken while she stood on the Silver Throne Plateau of the Siachen Glacier at a height of approximately 21,000 feet. Wearing her familiar feminine attire, she held in her hand a newspaper that read: “Votes for Women.”

![Image of Bullock Workman holding a newspaper with the headline “Votes for Women.”](image)

Figure 11: The published photograph of Fanny Bullock Workman holding a newspaper with the headline “Votes for Women” in 1912.\(^\text{109}\)

Though Bullock Workman made little comment in her 1917 travel narrative about the above photograph included in its pages, the implied message was clear. For both Bullock Workman and Peck, feminism and professional mountaineering went hand in hand. They saw female enfranchisement as another step in the fight towards women’s autonomy and professionalism, a

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fight that they had long waged on the slopes of the Himalayas and Andes respectively. Furthermore, their hard-won fame as professional mountaineers solidified for Bullock Workman and Peck an audience for their political statements (now of suffrage as well as female athleticism). This was true to such a degree that the RGS, which had for so long shunned female climbers, recognized Peck at the end of her life as “one of the most ardent mountaineers that ever lived,” concluding, “Her whole life was a protest against the old-fashioned view of the position of women.”

Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s lives thus testify to the complex and imbricative nature of the past. Such women were simultaneously mountaineers and suffragettes; products of late-Victorian society and subversives of it; women athletes and “masculine” climbers; feminists and “conquerors of virgin peaks.” Their blurred identities challenged conventional wisdom of the time that called for statements of “either/or,” as well as contemporary scholarship that often calls for the same. Indeed, the complexity of Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s positionings within late-Victorian society and culture reveals the diversity of Western women’s lives generally during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While many upper-middle-class ladies cared for their households, entertained guests, and sat “pinioned at dinner tables,” female mountaineers ascended high-altitude peaks in the name of science, exploration, and gender equality.

Much as Peck argued that “[w]e object to having our sphere decreed by others,” contemporary historians must refuse to settle for simplistic representations and basic narratives of such women’s climbs. Accordingly, Bullock Workman’s and Peck’s relation to the “New Woman” of the early twentieth century requires further critical analysis as it lucidly demonstrates the limitations often imposed on women climbers. While the “New Woman” encouraged increased female participation in leisure hiking and mountaineering clubs, it opposed the “extreme” climbing of professional lady mountaineers. Consequently, as the next generation of female mountaineers asserted their professionalism during the 1920s and 30s, they too became engaged with questions of women’s athletic ability and the issue of “sex antagonism” that Bullock Workman and Peck knew so well. Indeed, as late as the 1960s, women such as Arlene Blum—a prominent international mountaineer of the mid-1900s—were denied participation in many climbing expeditions on account of their sex. Though well-qualified, Blum was excluded from a 1969 excursion to Afghanistan because, as the expedition leader commented, “one

woman and nine men would seem to me to be unpleasant high on the open ice, not only in excretory situations, but in the easy masculine companionship which is so vital a part of the joy of an expedition.”\(^{112}\)

Furthermore, the language permeating late nineteenth and early twentieth century Western culture, particularly as it was (re)presented within the professional climbing community, calls for a queering of the history of mountaineering. Mountain climbing must be seen not only as a physical activity, but also as a value-laden metaphor for late-Victorian conceptualizations and embodiments of sexuality. A metaphor that both normalized gender roles and, as seen with Bullock Workman and Peck, potentially destabilized them, as well as defined the boundaries from within which lady climbers constructed their feminism.

Finally, Peck’s private life, particularly the meanings and consequences of her intimate relationship with Dr. Elisha Benjamin Andrews, demands further study. Though the image of Peck as an early model of the “emancipated” woman is often appealing, personal comments she made that she would have been far happier as the wife of Dr. Andrews deserve recognition and analysis. It is time we attempt to know Peck on her own terms. For, in studying how lady mountaineers “ever came to undertake the extraordinary task of high climbing, and what is the use of such an ascent,” historians must strive first and foremost to recognize the subjectivity, personal aspirations, and discursive negotiations of individual Victorian lady climbers. Only then may scholars truly begin to traverse the historical landscape of Annie S. Peck’s and Fanny Bullock Workman’s mountaineering careers, looking beyond their summits to the actions and social and cultural factors that led them abroad in search of ever-higher peaks and vertically in search of themselves.

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