

The International  
**JOURNAL**  
*of*  
SPORT & SOCIETY

Volume 1

Approaching the Summit: Understanding  
Motivations of Recreational Risky Behavior

Christopher L. Newman, Steven W. Kopp  
and Kenneth Bates

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPORT AND SOCIETY  
<http://www.SportandSocietyJournal.com>

First published in 2010 in Champaign, Illinois, USA by Common Ground Publishing LLC  
[www.CommonGroundPublishing.com](http://www.CommonGroundPublishing.com).

© 2010 (individual papers), the author(s)  
© 2010 (selection and editorial matter) Common Ground

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of citations, quotations, diagrams, tables and maps.

All rights reserved. Apart from fair use for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act (Australia), no part of this work may be reproduced without written permission from the publisher. For permissions and other inquiries, please contact  
<[cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com](mailto:cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com)>.

ISSN: 1835-7490  
Publisher Site: <http://www.SportandSocietyJournal.com>

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPORT AND SOCIETY is peer-reviewed, supported by rigorous processes of criterion-referenced article ranking and qualitative commentary, ensuring that only intellectual work of the greatest substance and highest significance is published.

Typeset in Common Ground Markup Language using CGCreator multichannel typesetting system  
<http://www.commongroundpublishing.com/software/>

# Approaching the Summit: Understanding Motivations of Recreational Risky Behavior

Christopher L. Newman, University of Arkansas, Arkansas, USA

Steven W. Kopp, University of Arkansas, Arkansas, USA

Kenneth Bates, University of San Diego, California, USA

*Abstract: This study has undertaken a qualitative approach in the context of mountaineering in the continental United States. We have explored the risky behavior associated with this extreme activity to understand participants' motivation for participation. We found two significant sources of motivation: an internal psychological drive and an externally-focused socio-psychological motive, both of which are key to understanding recreational risky behavior. The approach in this research is interpretive, specifically undertaking an ethnography to more fully understand the risk taking lifestyle. This approach captured richer, more detailed beliefs and attitudes toward mortality, death, self-esteem, motivation, and satisfaction in extreme sports not otherwise accessible through scales. Additionally, eight in-depth interviews were conducted approximately five months after a climbing expedition - which one of the authors participated in - took place. Findings, contributions, and implications are discussed.*

Keywords: Motivation, Extreme Sports, Risk Taking, Satisfaction, Mountaineering, Recreation, Psychology, Socio-psychology, Goal Setting, Mortality, Death

## Introduction

For two months, dozens of mountaineers had huddled at camps below the peak, acclimating to the thin air, practicing their ascent and waiting, waiting, for the moment... On the way up the last 2,000 feet, a Serbian climber fell to his death, and a Pakistani porter died trying to recover his body. And on the way back, a chunk of glacier splintered and came crashing down, sweeping at least four climbers on ropes to their deaths and leaving a handful of others trapped in the death zone above 26,000 feet — desperately cold, starved for oxygen and without ropes. Over the next few hours and days, some of those still left on K2 battled their way to safety, some fell to their deaths and others were simply lost forever in the cold wastes of the mountain (Bowley & Kannapell, 2008, p.1).

**I**T IS OFTEN said that the top of the world is no place for amateurs. With extreme drops in temperature, humidity, and barometric pressure – coupled with significant increases in wind speed and solar radiation – mountaineering is one of the most difficult physical and mental challenges on the planet (Windsor et al., 2009). In the presence of potentially crippling and fatal dangers – hidden crevasses, random rock falls, white-out blizzards, and unpredictable avalanches – it can be argued that mountaineering is one of the most *dangerous* recreational challenges that a human can undertake.

To put the levels of danger into perspective, it should be noted that the mortality rate for mountaineers in the United States is higher than the mortality rates of hang gliders, parachuters, boxers, mountain hikers, scuba divers, football players, and skiers combined (Hart, 1999; Reif, 1986; Wright, 1988). The mortality rate for the tallest peak in North America, Mt. Denali, is 3.08 for every 1000 mountaineers who register with the National Park Service to climb the mountain (McIntosh et al., 2008); and as of 2007, for every 13.2 successful summits of Mt. Everest, 1 climber has perished along the way (AdventureStats.com, 2009). For those select few that are able to reach the top of Everest, mountaineers must not only handle the harsh elements of mother nature on their way to a successful summit, but must also circumvent the death zone and a field of corpses left behind from failed attempts (Krakauer, 1996). By comparison, American football is one of the most violent and aggressive mainstream sports played today; but in 2008, there were only 7 football related deaths among the more than 1,800,000 active participants (National Center for Catastrophic Injury Research 2009). While injury is prevalent in many recreational activities today, few have the potential risk associated with mountaineering.

Despite the risks associated with recreational mountain climbing – more commonly referred to as mountaineering – participation in the sport has continued to increase over the years. An estimated 38 million people live above 8,000 feet (2439m), while an additional 100 million visitors travel to mountainous regions for recreation and work each year (Burthscher et al., 2001; Moore, 1987).

The purpose of this paper is to describe and report results of a study that examines the motives behind participation in this extreme sport. The research involved an ethnographic methodology, one in which the first author spent 5 days on Mount Rainier and eventually summited the mountain with 21 other mountaineers. Through this participation, the researcher was able to utilize notes, experiences, and personal relationships to develop and gather unique qualitative data that uncovers multiple drivers of this risky behavior.

## **Background**

Mount Rainier in Ashford, Washington is heralded by the climbing community as the most strenuous endurance test in the lower 48 states. It is the highest active volcano in the Cascade Range that extends from Mount Garibaldi in southwest British Columbia to Lassen Peak in Northern California. Rainier is also the most heavily glaciated peak in the lower 48 states, with 26 major glaciers and 35 square miles of permanent glaciers and snowfields (Anonymous, 2009).

Mount Rainier boasts a .031 mortality rate per 100 mountaineers, with 50 reported deaths over a 20 year span between 1977 and 1997 (Christensen & Lacsina, 1999), with at least one additional reported death as recently as June, 2008 (McNerthney & Mendoza, 2008). A total of 324 deaths have been reported on the mountain and in its surrounding national park since it was established in 1899, with the remains of 65 of those individuals to never be recovered (Wilson, 2000). The worst mountaineering accident on Rainier occurred in 1981, when eleven people died after a massive ice fall swept them into a 70-foot-deep crevasse. It has been identified as the worst climbing tragedy to date in American history (Hatcher, 2000).

We chose to investigate the socio-psychological and psychological aspects of risky behavior within the context of mountaineering for several reasons: (a) the high risk involved with

the activity, (b) the appeal to both climbers and non-climbers alike, (c) the steady increase in its popularity, and (d) the unique and interesting social culture established within the climbing community (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh 1993).

## **Method**

The present study employs an ethnographic approach. This methodology allows for the identification of themes, the advancement of a model, and the development of both hypotheses and managerial implications to be used for future studies (Majid, Chandra, & Joy 2007; Wallendorf & Belk, 1989).

All of the informants involved in this study were clients of a guide company, Rainier Mountaineering, Inc. (RMI), on one specific climb in May, 2009. The company's headquarters are located just outside Mount Rainier National Park, about 55 miles southeast of Seattle, Washington. All participants initially met at the headquarters the day before the expedition began. Initial introductions were conducted, small meetings were held, and important equipment checks were undertaken. Any equipment forgotten or not already owned by the climbers was available for rent on-site by RMI to ensure proper preparation. Later that evening, the climbers enjoyed their last night of sleep below the clouds for a long 5 days.

The following morning marked the initial 4.5 mile climb from Paradise (5,400 ft.) – the popular starting point for day hikes and eventual summit attempts - to Camp Muir, a snowy tent city nestled tightly into the edge of the mountain at 10,080 feet. It was here that the first author, 16 others clients, and 5 guides spent 4 nights and 5 days. Despite the fact that most clients had trained for at least 6 months prior to the climb by undertaking an assortment of cardiovascular and weigh training exercises, essential mountaineering skills that could only be taught on the mountain needed to be learned.

For the first 3 days, the guides meticulously taught the clients important mountaineering skills such as how to self-arrest, knot tying, setting up avalanche transceivers, and proper uses for an ice axe, to name a few. These days were equally important in acclimating the clients to the altitude, thereby assisting with the prevention of general altitude sickness and more severe altitude-related problems such as High Altitude Pulmonary Edema. By climbing to elevations higher than 8,200 ft., mountaineers make themselves susceptible to this condition in which fluid accumulates in their lungs and often leads to fatal respiratory failure (Roach & Schoene, 2002). The fourth day marked the summit attempt – a climb from 10,080 ft. to 14,410 ft. – while the fifth and final day marked the descent back down to Paradise and RMI headquarters.

This study recounts this unique experience in which less than 1% of the world's population has a first-hand account. The purpose of this research is to better understand the motives underlying recreational risky behavior. The current research makes theoretical contributions by revealing the motivations of people who voluntarily participate in a completely irrational activity.

Ethnography has been used as a methodology to explore a wide array of extreme sport subcultures from skydivers (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh 1993) to surfers (Quester, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2006) and adventure racers (Schneider et al., 2007). This ethnographic approach allowed for complete immersion within the mountaineering subculture. The first author was able to experience the frustrations associated with uncontrollable forces such as white-out

blizzards, as well as the disappointments associated with controllable forces such as physical ineptitude and inexperience. On the other hand, the author was able to build strong relationships with mountaineers from all over the United States and world, and most unforgettably, experience the thrills of standing on top of the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest point in the contiguous United States.

The key advantage of this ethnographic approach, especially in a risk-laden context such as mountaineering, is that it allows the interviewer to ask more detailed, context-specific questions. Consequently, more vivid and candid responses allow for more accurate, in-depth interpretations and thus better substantive and theoretical contributions. This approach guided data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data which was collected via field notes, photographs, videotapes, participant observation, casual conversations, and ultimately, formal depth interviews (Drenten, Peters, Leigh, & Hollenbeck, 2009; Wolcott, 1994). This interpretive approach has been used to explore other sporting cultures such as BMX riders (Rinehart & Grenfell, 2002) and participation in the Olympic Winter Games (Majid, Chandra, & Joy, 2007).

In-depth interviews took place over a three week period approximately five months after the climbing expedition took place. A total of 8 depth interviews were conducted (8 males). Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed by a third party, producing approximately 130 total pages of text. Each respondent was given a pseudonym to ensure privacy (Drenten et al., 2009). The interviewees ranged in age from 21 to 60, and varied in climbing experience from the most novice with less than 1 year of experience to the most practiced having 35 years. Table 1 provides some demographic and other information about the respondents.

All interviewees were participants in an expedition that included one of the authors of this paper. The semi-structured interviewing process that took place was informal and conversational in nature. The interviewer occasionally deviated from the script in order to get the respondents to elaborate on certain aspects of the climbing experience. The purpose of the interviews was to uncover motivation for risky behavior and to better understand how satisfaction is derived from the behavior. A sample of some of the questions that served as a guide for the interviews is provided in Table 2.

## **Findings**

During the processing of interpreting the data, two concrete themes emerged that help better identify motives for voluntary risky behavior: the psychological desire to test one's physical and mental limits, overcome adversity, and consequently set more difficult goals, as well as the socio-psychological desire to be a member of a select and elite group that garners social importance.

**Table 1: Interview Demographics**

Respondent's Given Pseudonym	Age	Geographical Location	Occupation	Years of Climbing Experience
Paul	60	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	Pathologist	Thirty Five Years
Joe	21	Bloomington, Indiana	Student	Four Years
Rick	39	Houston, Texas	Chief Financial Officer	Less Than One Year
Robert	60	Bonita, California	Retired	Five Years
Edgar	38	Seattle, Washington	Software Design Engineer and Tester	Less Than One Year
Eli	24	Las Vegas, Nevada	Mountain Guide	Six Years
Alan	26	Tempe, Arizona	Solar Panel Installer	Two Years
Jeremy	39	Houston, Texas	Attorney	Less Than One Year

**Table 2: Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

General Topic	Semi – Structured Interview Questions
Climbing Experience	How many years have you climbed? What mountains have you climbed? What is the highest elevation you have reached?
Significant Experiences	Tell me about your most significant mountaineering experience. (If not on Rainier) Tell me about your most significant moment on Mount Rainier. What specifically made this experience so memorable for you?
Danger Knowledge and Experiences	Have you ever heard stories of people who have been hurt or killed while climbing? Has anyone you know been hurt or killed while climbing? Do other people dear to you climb? How do you feel about their participation (or lack thereof) in this hobby? Did the Rainier climb seem dangerous to you? Why or why not?
Satisfaction	What do you enjoy about climbing? And, specifically, the Rainier expedition? Why do you mountain climb instead of enjoying other hobbies? Is danger an aspect of mountaineering that draws you to it?

### ***Psychological Motivation of Risky Behavior***

The present study identified a psychological motive for risky behavior. These individuals harbor an internal drive to overcome adversity by pushing their physical and mental limits; achievement of the original objective then psychologically motivates the participants to take the next natural step of setting even higher hurdles. These risk-takers derive a great sense of satisfaction from setting extremely high goals for themselves (e.g., summitting a treacherous mountain) and exhausting all their resources and skills to achieve those goals.

Eli (age 24), a mountain guide with over six years of climbing experience, gave some insight about the interesting personality types of the clients he interacts with on a daily basis.

**Eli:** I think people have an innate desire for adventure, looking to challenge themselves. I think a lot of people who are successful – and this is very broad generalization – but A type personalities that do great in the business world have that drive to really push themselves. So they're the same people who are going out and climbing Mt. Rainier next summer, will be trying to do an Ironman triathlon the year after that. So it's really a personality type of pushing themselves in every aspect of their life. And so yeah, it's not fun, it's hard for them, it's miserable and everything else, but just pursuing something that seems really difficult and accomplishing it. I think that on a whole we see a lot of similar personalities coming through.

When Eli was asked to recount his most significant experience in his mountain climbing career, he responded with an account of when he had pushed himself to the brink on a mountain in the North Cascades but still achieved his goal.

**Eli:** There was just a matter of probably being physically pushed as hard as I ever had before... I think this just comes back to that personality type and really finding out what your limit is, and that was definitely it for me, that kind of finding out what I was made of and what I could really do when I put my mind to it and what, actually getting to that breaking point...I was falling asleep if I wasn't breathing hard. I fell asleep several times walking when we were coming back...So I think finding out what your physical limit is and you know how hard you can really go and how long you can sustain that is probably one of the things that I remember the most right now.

Despite all the ambitious goals of reaching summits of mountains, all the respondents agreed on one thing: the definitive goal is to get off the mountain alive. Jeremy (age 39) spoke for nearly all the respondents when he said "...there's no mountain that I have to stand on top of so bad that I'm going to take irresponsible risks with my neck." Others were quick to not belittle the heralded accomplishment of surviving the inherent dangers of mountaineering – whether the summit was ultimately reached or not. Their admissions speak to the rigor of the task undertaken and the effort exerted to achieve the ultimate goal of survival in addition to the individual goal of getting to the top.

**Joe (age 21):** It's just grueling, and that appeals to me, because it gives you this sense of accomplishment that you conquered these just oftentimes horrendous conditions of cold weather, high altitude, physically demanding activities, and, you know, with all of those things being said, you don't ever see—you hardly ever see someone get off



the mountain without a smile on their face because you faced all of those, all of those trials and tribulations, and you survived! And it's one of those weird activities that survival is the game, so that's one of the goals, and, you know, it's...that's amazing, that you're doing something so tough that the pure act of making it off of the mountain alive is accomplishment—an accomplishment. So, I think that I don't know of anything that can push the human body much further than mountain climbing.

This psychological drive is also significant because it represents a desire to win the proverbial man-versus-nature struggle with little or no external assistance. The climbers desperately wanted to achieve their goals completely on their own as indicated by Alan (age 26) when he refused to use salt pills to assist with cramping. He adamantly stated, "There's no way I was going to take those... If there's any quick fix for altitude or anything like that, there's no way I would take anything." He elaborated on his firm stance by stating "I just want to do it *au naturel* and see what my body can do. I'm more interested in the science of my body than anything." There is a strong drive and sense of independence among the climbers that makes it possible for them to continually strive to achieve their goals.

The risk-taking personalities of the respondents seemed to allow only for temporary satisfaction after a goal is achieved. The climbers are constantly looking to hurdle the next obstacle, rarely dwelling on the past or living in the present. Their hunger to achieve "bigger and better" things constantly keeps them looking forward to other mountains and activities. Alan's (age 26) satisfaction with summitting Mt. Rainier was short lived, as he was more excited about the prospect of climbing Mt. Denali – a mountain nearly 6,000 feet higher than Rainier.

**Alan:** It [Mt. Denali] is bigger and better. I eventually want to climb the highest mountain in the world and I'm willing to take the necessary steps over the next years to get there, and Denali seems like a great next step in furthering my skill set and taking me to a different altitude...A part of doing bigger mountains, you got to see what your body can do and that's part of my goal too is to see what my body can do. So Denali's just the next step in the range of bigger mountains in the world.

The findings of this study have shown a strong psychological motive to overcome adversity by pushing one's physical and mental abilities to the brink, achieving his/her immediate goal, and setting more difficult goals to achieve in the future. This drive is also reflected in the respondents' everyday lives, as indicated by the exclusive nature of many of their career positions: a pathologist, a chief financial officer, a software design engineer, and an attorney.

### ***Socio-Psychological Motivation of Risky Behavior***

Membership of an elite and select group was also found to be a major driver of satisfaction for the mountaineers. Only about half of all climbers that attempt to summit Mt. Rainier actually make it to the top (N.P.S. 2008), creating a well-defined hierarchy within the small climbing community. When the total number of those who initially attempt the climb is compared to the general population, the minute group of climbers who have stood on top of the mountain is even more exclusive. The data suggest that this creates two separate social

groups: exclusivity of the climbers within the general population, and exclusivity of the summited climbers within the climbing community.

Many climbers stressed the importance of reaching the summit of the mountain, feeling it would be a reward for all their hard work and perseverance.

**Robert (age 60):** Whenever you're on these big mountains, that's the summit, that's like winning the championship, it's like winning the S.E.C. or it's sort of like a national title. I mean, that's, you made it to the top in spite of all the things that happened along the way. And everything that you worked out for and worked towards to get there, you know, it just makes it all worth it at the end...It's all going to be worth it once I'm at the top.

Those who reach the top of the mountain create a hierarchy of mountaineers, a smaller subgroup of "summitters." In essence, a system of ranking is created within the climbing community, determined by the success of the climbers.

**Edgar (age 38):** I've had a couple of people tell me I'm the first person they've met who's climbed Mt. Rainier. It's kind of a nice thing to have that status...I've got friends who have tried to climb it and they didn't make the top, and just realizing, I just did something that is hard and not everybody can do...My friend is jealous that I made it to the top and he didn't.

Exclusivity is further fostered within the climbing community through the elevations successfully reached, and consequently, the perceived levels of difficulty overcome. Jeremy (age 39) voiced these sentiments by saying, "...obviously the higher [the mountains] are, the more appeal they seem to have in the sense that you become a member of a more elite club the higher you go."

The climbing community has created the loftiest of benchmarks for its members surpassed by fewer than 350 people: climbing the Seven Summits. This entails climbing the highest mountain on each of the seven continents, a goal of one of the Rainier participants:

**Rick (age 39):** I want to find something to do that I can look back on in 20 years and I can be very proud of an accomplishment or series of accomplishments. We looked at a number of different options and finally came down to this idea of climbing the seven tallest mountains in the world and said, wow, if we could accomplish that, we would accomplish a significant goal...Most people just don't have the perseverance to achieve something that takes that long to accomplish. And that's why, I think, when you go out and you look at the people who have accomplished this goal, there are so few of them.

Again, another sub group is formed among the mountaineers – specifically within the group of those who have successfully summited certain mountains. This intra-community self-categorization supports the concept of a relationship between the selectivity of the group and the satisfaction derived from being a member of that group.

Satisfaction with being a member of an elite group within the climbing community was found to directly translate to the general population, as well. Traditionally, the prestige of large mountains has been expressed through novels, pictures, story-telling, and folklore. Famous mountain climbers have written books and have had books written about them.

Today, popular culture has advanced the legendary status of certain mountains and those who climb them. Many popular culture outlets have long glorified the danger, risk, and consequent deaths associated with mountaineering in such films as *The Eiger Sanction*, *Everest*, *K2*, *Into Thin Air* and *Deadly Ascent*. This romanticization of the mountain and mountaineering was evident across study participants:

**Jeremy (age 39):** It's just kind of mythical thing that you read about in books, right. And to me there's a wow factor to it. And then I think most people understand that doing something like that- it's hard, it's not easy. You don't just sashay up to the top of a serious mountain on an afternoon fun trip. I don't know what your thoughts are, but to me there is that wow factor to it. River rafting sounds fun, but whenever anyone asks what I did this summer and tell them, you know what, I climbed Mt. Rainier, everybody goes, wow.

Joe (age 21) expands upon the mythos of mountain climbing by relating it to the "proverbial struggle of man versus nature." He elaborates upon his metaphor by noting "the highest level of man conquering nature has been climbing the tallest mountains in the world."

The experience of such a novel undertaking is not readily available to the general population. The amount of time and preparation required to successfully train and execute detailed skill sets, coupled with the necessity of strength of mind and body, all create a sharp and distinct division between mountaineers and their non-climbing counterparts. The level of risk involved also makes membership of the climbing community more limited:

**Joe (age 21):** In my opinion, climbing mountains is the pinnacle of high alpine and outdoor activities – the pinnacle of high-risk outdoor adventures...It's exclusive, in that sense that not everybody has the will or abilities to climb a mountain and there's that level of potential risk involved [which] significantly limits the amount of people that can participate. So that's kind of an appealing factor.

Another limiting factor that separates the climbing community from the general population is age of the participant. Robert (age 60) took a significant amount of pride in that fact that he not only reached the summit of the mountain, but that he did so at his age. He noted, "Most of the guys that are 60, well, all my friends are playing golf. Or they'd rather be on the beach drinking one of those drinks with the umbrella on it and stuff."

Thus, membership in a select and elite group is a major motivator and satisfaction driver for pursuing this risky behavior. This socio-psychological motive allows the participant not only to garner additional respect and attention from the general population of non-climbers but also to separate himself from his fellow climbers and gain respect within the climbing community.

## Discussion

Recreational risk taking comes many forms of behavior: bull riding, sky diving, or racing cars. However, this study found that risky behavior does not always seek adrenaline-fueled immediate gratification. Mountaineers seem to be a much more goal-oriented class of extreme

sportsperson or athlete, undertaking very specific behaviors to serve certain psychological desires, as well as to gain exclusivity within certain social contexts.

Prior research has suggested that people are seen as living their lives in small and specialized networks of social relationships, and that there are external social structures beyond those networks that act as barriers of entry to outsiders (Mead, 1904; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Once an individual becomes a group member, he/she uniformly makes positive evaluations of - and shows greater commitment to - that group (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Hogg & Hardie, 1992). Individuals who refer to themselves as members of a certain social group have also been found to be more likely to participate in the group's culture in an attempt to further distinguish themselves from others outside the group (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Stets & Burke, 2000; Ullah, 1987).

The psychological and socio-psychological motives revealed through this research make significant theoretical contributions to the existing literature. This study showed that mountaineers are willing to risk life and limb to surmount these entry barriers. They understand the risks associated with the activity, push their physical and mental limits to overcome those risks and achieve their goals, and consequently set future goals to make those barriers around them even more formidable. This psychological drive to compete against both man and mountain is a major source of motivation to undertake risky activities; in addition, this drive enables a desired social status both within and between certain social groups.

Within the context of mountaineering, there are considerable barriers affecting the likelihood that an outsider might enter the social network. The existence of these barriers fosters a sense of exclusivity between climbers and non-climbers, while there is socio-psychological satisfaction for attaining status among other group members.

With the rising popularity of extreme sports, the field of research is significantly growing in the areas of risk-taking, motivation, and satisfaction. We feel that the results of this study help contribute to the existing sports literature and our understanding of risk-seeking motivation among certain consumers. While insights for general risk motivation may be garnered, this research primarily adds to an understanding of the specific psychological and socio-psychological factors that affect behavior within the context of mountaineering.

While there is much research still to be done, we feel that the substantive findings of this study are an important initial investigation into mountaineering culture and may prove to be useful for sport marketing managers. A number of initiatives can be taken to capitalize on the socio-psychological motives behind risky behavior. For instance, the desire for exclusiveness was a consistent theme throughout the respondents' narratives. To foster this aspiration for exclusiveness, special interest groups might be created to attract new mountaineers and maintain morale among existing members. These groups could be used to appeal to the desire for exclusivity by emphasizing perceived differences in social status between climbers and the general population, as well as creating and promoting competition among current climbers (e.g. the Everest Club or the Four-Mile Club). Publicly rewarding clients with awards or certificates could also potentially enhance the long-term satisfaction with a climbing experience. Having something tangible (beyond photographs) to display to others could be used as an indicator of social status and further separate an individual from the norm.

Beyond the desire for exclusivity, an impetus of hard work and personal achievement were found to be critical in the satisfaction of a mountaineering experience. This internal, psychological motivation presents a significant managerial opportunity. We propose that challenges should be issued to prospective risk takers, as well as current mountaineers, to

encourage the competitive natures of these consumers. Advertising and other promotional material should focus heavily on the difficulty of the experience offered and the challenges readily available for only those who are mentally and physically prepared. By setting goals for consumers - and helping them reach them - businesses will build better relationships with clients, create and maintain loyalty, and ultimately facilitate the creation of future goals for these ambitious consumers to achieve.

This study has undertaken a qualitative approach in the context of mountaineering in the continental United States. We have explored the risky behavior associated with this extreme activity to understand whether and how the participants' consumption satisfaction can be affected. We found two significant factors, an internal psychological drive and an externally-focused socio-psychological motive, both of which are key to understanding recreational risky behavior.

## References

- AdventureStats.com (2009). Retrieved December 7, 2009 from: <http://www.adventurestats.com/tables/everestExpeditionStats.shtml>
- Anonymous (2002). Mount St. Helens: From the ashes. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Retrieved on November 20, 2009 from <http://www.seattlepi.com/mountsthelens/rainierfacts.shtml>.
- Anonymous (2009). Mt. Rainier: Wild mountain landscape. Retrieved November 20, 2009 from <http://www.mt-rainier.org/>.
- Bowley, G. & Kannapell, A. (2008). Tragic toll after chaos on mountain. *New York Times*. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from <http://nytimes.com/2008/08/07/world/asia/07k2.html>.
- Burtscher, M., Bachmann, O., Hatzl, T., Hotter, B., Likar, R., Philadelphia, M., & Nachbauer, W. (2001). Cardiopulmonary and metabolic responses in healthy elderly humans during a 1-week hiking programme at high altitude. *European Journal of Applied Physiology*, 84(5), 379-386.
- Celsi, R.L., Rose, R.L., & Leigh, T.W. (1993). An exploration of high-risk leisure consumption through skydiving. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20(1), 1-23.
- Drenten, J., Peters, C.O., Leigh, T., & Hollenbeck, C.R. (2009). Not just a party in the parking lot: An exploratory investigation of the motives underlying the ritual commitment of football tailgaters. *Sports Marketing Quarterly*, 18(2), 92-107.
- Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (1997). Sticking together or falling apart: In-group identification as a psychological determinant of group commitment versus individual mobility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 617-626.
- Ethier, K. A., & Deaux, K. (1994). Negotiating social identity when contexts change: Maintaining identification and responding to threat. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67: 243-251.
- Firth, P.G., Zheng, H., Windsor, J.S., Sutherland, A.I., Imray, C.H., Moore, G.W., Semple, J. L., Roach, R.C., & Salisbury, R.A. (2008). Mortality on Mount Everest, 1921-2006: Descriptive Study. *British Medical Journal*, 337, a2654.
- Hart, A.J., White, S.A., Conboy, P.J., Bodiwala, G., & Quinton, D. (1999). Open water scuba diving accidents at Leicester: Five years' experience. *Journal of Accident and Emergency Medicine*, 16, 198-200.
- Hatcher, C. (2000). Ghosts of Rainier: Icefall in 1981 entombed 11 climbers. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Retrieved November 20, 2009 from <http://www.seattlepi.com/ghostsofrainier/fall302.shtml>.
- Krakauer, J. (1997), *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster*, New York, NY: Villard.

- Majid, K., Chandra, R., & Joy, A. (2007). Exploring the growing interest in the Olympic winter games. *Sports Marketing Quarterly*, 16(1), 25-36.
- McIntosh, S.E., Campbell, A.D., Dow, J., & Grissom, C.K. (2008). Mountaineering fatalities on Denali. *High Altitude Medicine and Biology*, 9(1), 89-95.
- McNerthney, C., & Mendoza, M. (2008). Day hike turns deadly on Rainier snowfield. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from [http://seattlepi.com/local/366492\\_hiker11.html](http://seattlepi.com/local/366492_hiker11.html).
- Mead, G.H. (1904). *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Moore, L. G. (1987). Altitude-aggravated illness: Examples from pregnancy and prenatal life. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 16(9), 965-973.
- National Center for Catastrophic Injury Research (2009). Retrieved December 7, 2009 from: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/nccsi/FootballAnnual.pdf>
- National Park Service (N.P.S.) (2008). Mount Rainier Annual Climbing Statistics. U.S. Department of the Interior. Retrieved December 4, 2009 from <http://www.nps.gov/mora>.
- Quester, P., Beverland, M., & Farrelly, F. (2006) Brand-personal values fit and brand meanings: Exploring the role individual values play in ongoing brand loyalty in extreme sport subcultures. *Association for Consumer Research*, 33, 21-27.
- Reif, A.E (1986). Risks and Gains. In: *Sports injuries: The unthwarted epidemic*. Littleton, MA: MA PSG Publishing Company.
- Roach, J.M. & Schoene, R.B. (2002). High Altitude Pulmonary Edema. In: *Medical Aspects of Harsh Environments*, Vol.2. Washington, DC: Ft. Belvoir Defense Technical Information Center.
- Schneider, T.A., Butryn, T.M., Furst, D.M., & Masucci, M.A. (2007) A qualitative examination of risk among elite adventure racers. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 30 (3), 330-356.
- Schouten, J.W. & McAlexander, J.H. (1995). Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(1), 43-61.
- Stets, J.E., & Burke, P.J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3); 224-237.
- Stryker, S., & Burke, P.J. (2000). The past, present, and future of an Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(4), 284-297.
- Ullah, P. (1987). Self-definition and psychological group formation in an ethnic minority. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 26: 17-23.
- Wallendorf, M. & Belk, R. (1989). Assessing trustworthiness in naturalistic consumer research. In E. Hirschman (Ed.), *Interpretative consumer research*, 69-84. Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Wilson, K.A.C. (2000). Ghosts of Rainier: A majestic tomb for 65 men. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Retrieved November 20, 2009 from <http://www.seattlepi.com/ghostsofrainier/rain.shtml>.
- Windsor, J.S., Firth, P.G., Grocott, M.P., Rodway, G.W., & Montgomery, H.E. (2009). Mountain mortality: A review of deaths that occur during recreational activities in the mountains. *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, 85, 316-321.
- Wolcott, H. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wright, J.R. (1988). Nordic ski jumping fatalities in the United States: a 50 year summary. *Journal of Trauma*, 28(6), 848-851.

## **About the Authors**

### *Christopher L. Newman*

Christopher L. Newman is a doctoral student in the Department of Marketing & Logistics at the Sam M. Walton College of Business at the University of Arkansas. His research interests include sports and special events marketing, services marketing, and promotion. His work has been included in national conferences such as the Marketing and Public Policy Conference, as well as the Society for Marketing Advances. Christopher received a B.B.A., Marketing from the University of Mississippi in 2005 and received a M.S., Marketing from the University of Alabama in 2007.

### *Steven W. Kopp*

Steven W. Kopp is Associate Professor in the Department of Marketing and Logistics at the Sam M. Walton College of Business. He received his PhD from Michigan State University. His primary research areas include the examination of the role of intellectual property in marketing strategy, consumer decision making with respect to “end of life” products and services (e.g. funerals), and other topics related to marketing and public policy. He is an avid distance cyclist.

### *Kenneth Bates*

Dr. Bates received his PhD from the University of Arkansas. His research currently examines the impact of nutrition knowledge, consumer motivation, and the exploration of mortality salience effects on consumer behavior.