

## Extreme Sports Not About Risk-taking: Study

13 Jul 2009

- 1 Those who think extreme sports are all about risk-taking are missing the point, according to a QUT researcher. Eric Brymer, a lecturer from the School of Human Movement Studies in the Faculty of Health, has been researching whether the element of risk was an important factor among participants in "extreme" sports such as waterfall kayakers, mountain climbers, big wave surfers and B.A.S.E. jumpers.
- 2 He said his research offered a different framework from the traditional understanding of extreme sport.
- 3 Dr Brymer found that, although the image of those who take part in extreme sports was that of risk-takers and adrenaline junkies, the opposite was true.
- 4 "I wanted to do this research because in my masters studies I was hearing about sensation seeking, risk-taking behaviour in extreme sports people, and it just didn't match what I knew from my background in kayaking and canoeing," he said.
- 5 "The people I knew were very careful, disciplined, determined and focussed, not at all reckless or risk-taking; for some people to get to a certain level of a sport, it takes 15 years dedicated training, which is not something you would associate with a thrill-seeker." In his study, Mr Brymer conducted interviews with extreme sportspeople aged from 30 to 73, to find out how they felt when they did the activity, and what their motivations were.
- 6 "What I found was that these people have a real love for these activities, and talk about a realisation about the power of nature, a sense of humility, and a real sense of peace," he said.
- 7 "They also said they felt a sense of relaxation and freedom, not in the socio-cultural sense but in the sense that they were so focussed and aware, it was like clearing the mind in meditation."
- 8 Dr Brymer said the participants, while unable to control nature, were educated about conditions, and were very careful to minimise potential risks.
- 9 "One thing that came up was that they realise people see them as risk-takers, but they do not see themselves that way at all, and they cited the road as a comparison, saying that crossing the road or driving was more risky," said Dr Brymer.
- 10 "On the road, you have no control of other factors such as other drivers, but in the natural world you are at a level doing these activities where your depth of knowledge is so vast that you can be in control, you understand the weather and the clouds, and

what will happen as a result, so you can plan for that."

- 11 Dr Brymer said while he was not denying some people in extreme sports may have become involved because they were attracted by the risk-taking aspect, most of the people he had come across did not see that as a positive thing.

"Risk is about uncertainty, about not having control, and these people see themselves as in control," he said.

- 12 "Some did mention times when they did feel the adrenalin and were in a risky position, but generally it is more about how lucky they were to survive it, and seeing it as a negative experience rather than something they are seeking."

- 13 He said the perception people had of extreme sports participants was brought about by not knowing enough about the sports.

- 14 "It is about not really understanding something. I compare it to looking for love - you are not searching for the risk of not being loved, but you are aware that there is risk involved: the risk of rejection, of not finding what you are looking for," he said.

- 15 "It is the same in extreme sports: while there is an awareness of risk it is not the reason most people are involved, but rather something they accept because they are looking for something deeper and more meaningful."

Source

**Queensland University of Technology**