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**Learning Through Narratives of Experience: Exploring Mount Everest Climbers' Cognitive
Dissonance from an Ethnomethodological Perspective**

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Learning Through Narratives of Experience: Exploring Mount Everest Climbers' Cognitive
Dissonance From an Ethnomethodological Perspective

by

Shaunna Burke

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For Ben

Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to explore how Mount Everest climbers experienced cognitive dissonance in their natural setting. This study also set out to explore the role of self-concept and feelings in Mount Everest climbers' experiences with the phenomenon. Guided by the ethnomethodological (Garfinkel, 1967) school of thought, Aronson's (1968, 1992) self-consistency revision of Festinger's (1957) original cognitive dissonance theory and the Resonance Performance Model (Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2002) were used as conceptual guides. The research methodology included a narrative (Sparkes, 2002) multicase study (Stake, 1995) approach involving multiple in-depth interviews captured on video and participant observation captured by field notes. Six climbers attempting to scale Mount Everest comprised the case studies; five men and one woman. Data were collected over an entire climbing season and one month after the participants returned home from the mountain. Guided by Gergen and Gergen's (1983) strategy for analyzing the structure and content of narratives, data analysis occurred on three levels. First, for each participant the researcher developed a background profile. Second, a narrative case study analysis was performed to explore how the participants experienced cognitive dissonance. The third level of data analysis entailed a cross-case study analysis to explore the patterns of similarity and difference between narratives or themes expressed.

Cognitive dissonance was routinely experienced by all six of the participants to socially organize behavior and produce a sense of order from within the Mount Everest culture. That is, whenever the participants interpreted a discrepancy between their behavior and their own standards for competence and morality, which derive from the conventional morals and prevailing values of the society to which they belonged, they experienced feelings of psychological discomfort which lead them to try and reduce or eliminate it through a process of self-justification. Specifically, this process of reducing cognitive dissonance involved the climbers reconstructing the past in such a way that restored their pre-formed notion of self. Through language and reasoning, which were part and parcel with the situated activities of climbing the mountain, the climbers arrived at an interpretation of their day-to-day activities that not only appeared normal, natural, and real, but also felt good to them. The climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance, which were defined by an ongoing reconstruction of meaning, allowed them to make sense of self-discrepant acts as they strived to achieve not only a sense of cognitive and affective self-consistency but also shared knowledge.

The findings in the present study provide support for Aronson's (1968, 1992) self-consistency perspective of cognitive dissonance. More importantly, the study's most notable contribution to the existing body of work on cognitive dissonance is not the empirically based confirmation that Mount Everest climbers do indeed experience dissonance when their self-concept is involved, but an explanation of *how* the processes underlying the phenomenon are experienced in the minds of these climbers when under extreme physical and psychological duress. Using an ethnomethodological narrative case study approach, this study afforded a unique way of understanding how cognitive dissonance is internalized in the subjective consciousness of climbers.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 1 |
| Description of the Problem | 1 |
| Leon Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance | 3 |
| Aronson's Self-Consistency Perspective | 7 |
| Resonance Performance Model | 8 |
| Emergence of the Problem | 9 |
| A Story of Cognitive Dissonance | 10 |
| Purpose of the Study | 16 |
| Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Discourses | 17 |
| High Altitude Mountaineering Background | 17 |
| Definition of High Altitude Mountaineering | 18 |
| Styles of Climbing | 22 |
| Types of Mountaineering Expeditions | 24 |
| Typical High Altitude Mountaineering Objectives | 27 |
| Mount Everest History | 28 |
| Sherpa Culture | 33 |
| Everest Climbing Routes | 36 |
| Psychological Research | 36 |
| Personality Types | 37 |
| Psychological Functioning in High Altitude | 38 |
| Mental Strategies of Elite Everest Climbers | 40 |
| Narcissism and Regression in the 1996 Everest Disaster | 40 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Autobiographies of High Altitude Climbers | 42 |
| <i>Into Thin Air</i> , by John Krakauer | 42 |
| <i>The Naked Mountain</i> , by Reinhold Messner | 46 |
| <i>Touching My Father's Soul</i> , by Jamling Tenzing Norgay | 48 |
| <i>Climbing High</i> , by Lene Gammelgaard | 51 |
| <i>Addicted to Danger</i> , by Jim Wickwire | 52 |
| <i>Everest: The West Ridge</i> , by Tom Hornbein | 54 |
| Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework | 57 |
| Aronson's Self-Consistency Perspective | 58 |
| Dissonance Resulting From Effort | 60 |
| Self-concept | 62 |
| The Resonance Performance Model | 65 |
| Research Questions | 71 |
| Chapter 4: Methodology | 72 |
| Qualitative Method | 72 |
| Ethnomethodology | 73 |
| Core Principles | 74 |
| Ethnomethodology as Method | 76 |
| Case Studies | 77 |
| Case Study Participants | 78 |
| Case Study Data Gathering Methods | 80 |
| Narrative Inquiry | 84 |
| Narrative Data Analysis | 86 |

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Data Analysis Procedures | 90 |
| Narrative Truth | 91 |
| Narrative Representation | 93 |
| Researcher as Instrument Statement | 94 |
| Chapter 5: Findings | 100 |
| Personal Case Study Profiles | 101 |
| Janette | 101 |
| Nate | 104 |
| Gordie | 107 |
| Sayeed | 111 |
| Steven | 113 |
| Allan | 116 |
| Case Study Findings | 119 |
| The Onset | 119 |
| Camp 2 | 135 |
| Preparing for the Summit Climb | 151 |
| The Countdown | 158 |
| The Return to Base Camp | 175 |
| The Aftermath | 178 |
| Cross Case Study Findings | 190 |
| Self-Concept | 190 |
| Feelings | 196 |
| Effort | 199 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Consequences of Decisions | 202 |
| Pre-Decision Conflict | 202 |
| Post-Decision Dissonance | 204 |
| Ongoing Post-Decision Dissonance | 206 |
| Chapter 5: Discussion | 212 |
| Cognitive Dissonance from an Ethnomethodological Perspective | 212 |
| The Documentary Method | 214 |
| Reducing Cognitive Dissonance | 214 |
| The Role of Feelings | 217 |
| The Role of Behaviors | 220 |
| Reflexivity | 225 |
| Indexicality | 229 |
| Membership | 232 |
| Limitations | 236 |
| Chapter 6: Conclusion | 238 |
| Contributions to Literature on Cognitive Dissonance | 239 |
| Contributions to Literature on Mountaineering | 242 |
| Contributions to Literature on Education | 243 |
| Implications for Future Research | 244 |
| Sport and Physical Activity and Education | 245 |
| Cognitive Dissonance Theory | 246 |
| References | 251 |
| Appendixes | 265 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|-----|
| Table 1. Examples of Rhetorical Strategies Used in Published Autobiographies | 43 |
| Table 2. Demographic Profile of Mount Everest Climbers | 79 |
| Table 3. Steps in Constructing a Well-Formed Narrative | 88 |
| Table 4. Sources of Psychological Discomfort and Dissonance Reduction Methods | 191 |
| Table 5. Cross-Case Study Narrative Themes | 192 |

List of Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1. Photos of Climbing Equipment | 19 |
| Figure 2. Resonance Performance Model | 66 |
| Figure 3. Interview and Observation Location | 82 |

List of Appendixes

| | |
|---|-----|
| Appendix A. Alternative Perspectives of Cognitive Dissonance Theory | 265 |
| Appendix B. Glossary of Terms | 266 |
| Appendix C. Examples of Common Frameworks used in Dissonance Research | 268 |
| Appendix D. About Alpine Ascents International and Mountain Madness | 270 |
| Appendix E. Researcher Preparation | 273 |
| Appendix F. Consent Form Interview Guide | 274 |
| Appendix G. Interview Guide | 277 |
| Appendix H. Steps in Developing a Participant Profile | 280 |

INTRODUCTION

Description of the Problem

At elevations of 8,848 meters above sea level, which is roughly the maximum height reached by commercial airliners, climbing the highest peak on the planet is often considered one of mankind's greatest challenges. It is a physical and psychological test of epic proportions. Climbers perform in an environment where oxygen is sparse and survival is tenuous. Consequently the demands on the physical body and mind are great. From a physical standpoint, due to a lack of oxygen in the air, at 8,000 meters above sea level, climbers' hearts frantically pound, even at rest; the lungs expel more carbon dioxide, disrupting the bloods' pH balance; the kidneys release more water to correct the bloods' acidity, causing dehydration and; hallucinations may make climbers see phantom companions or hear orchestras (Roach, Wagner, & Hackett, 2003). Psychologically, climbers are faced with thoughts of death that relentlessly lurk in the fringes of focal attention. They are aware that they can succumb, at any point on the mountain, to a variety of life-threatening hazards such as acute mountain sickness, snow avalanches, falls into crevasses, or dangers due to poor weather. According to Jonas, Greenberg, and Frey (2003), the awareness of death has a substantial horrifying influence on people's cognitive functioning as humans are driven by "an instinctive desire for continued life" (p.1181). Interestingly, climbers voluntarily place themselves in the dangerous and taxing environment of high altitude mountaineering for personal reasons.

Every season the ratio between the number of climbers attempting the peak of Mount Everest and the number of climbers who die is about one in thirty (Athearn, 2005). Despite the odds, since the early 1920s more and more climbers have been exploring human boundaries by risking their lives on the slopes of the world's tallest peak (Shoham, Rose, & Kahle, 2000). In particular, there has been an increase in the number of less-skilled adventurers who are tempting

fate on the highest peak on the planet (Elmes & Barry, 1999). According to Elmes and Barry, novice climbers seem to have an obsession with Everest and take extreme risks to reach the top. In a review of the literature, previous studies have largely ignored how high altitude climbers make sense of their reality when under extreme physical and psychological duress. For instance, how climbers draw on the common-sense knowledge of their society to produce a sense of order as disasters unfold around them is still not fully understood by professionals or the public. Take, for example, the circumstances of the infamous incident that transpired on Mount Everest during the spring of 2006, which caught the world's attention. David Sharp, a British mountaineer, was left to die 450 meters below the summit on May 15th as some 40 climbers passed him on their own attempts to reach the 8,848-meter peak making no attempt at a rescue (New York Times International, May 28, 2006). This story shocked people around the world because at its core it was a moral issue – failure to give priority to the life of another human, rather than to one's own personal goals violated the prevailing morals and conventional values of society (The Gazette, May 31, 2006). The question that has not been addressed by researchers or the media surrounding such issues is: How do climbers socially organize and make sense of behavior when violating important elements of their self-concept including the most fundamental and important of collective morals?

The purpose of this study was to use an ethnomethodological narrative case study approach to explore Mount Everest climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance as they engaged in the activities of their daily lives while attempting to scale the mountain. This is an important topic of inquiry because it is known that climbing Mount Everest is an activity that is conducive to experiencing inconsistent cognitions that characterize the dissonance phenomenon - climbers willingly place themselves in the stressful and demanding environment even though they know that it threatens their instinctive drive for continued life, is bad for their physical health, and requires tremendous levels of physical and psychological exertion. According to Krakauer (1997b) climbing Everest is an intrinsically irrational act – a triumph of desire over

sensibility. This section will begin by introducing the reader to the original theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and will then proceed to briefly present the two conceptual frameworks that were used to guide the purpose of the present study including a rationale for why they were chosen. What inspired the present doctoral study will subsequently be highlighted. Finally, this section will conclude with a description of the purpose of the present study.

Leon Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance

The origin of cognitive dissonance theories is frequently attributed to the writings of the American social psychologist Leon Festinger. Festinger (1957) described the experience of cognitive dissonance as resulting from a need for psychological consistency that follows a “non-fitting relation among cognitions” (p. 3) that exists between pairs of elements. Elements refer to cognition, which are defined as the things people know about themselves, about their behavior, and about their surroundings. In effect, an element of cognition is knowledge. According to Festinger (1957), an element represents knowledge about oneself including actions, feelings, wants or desires, etc., and knowledge about the world in which one lives. For him, these elements of cognition mirror one’s reality. In other words, elements of cognition correspond, for the most part, to what a person values, believes, and actually does. Festinger believed that pairs of cognitive elements exist in irrelevant, consonant, or dissonant relations:

Cognitive elements are in an irrelevant relation when they have nothing to do with one another, consonant relation if, considering these two alone, one element follows from the other, and dissonant relation if, considering these two alone, the obverse of one element follows from the other. (Festinger, 1957, p. 260)

Dissonant relations among cognitions create a state of psychological discomfort that motivates the individual to reduce the dissonant state in a drive-like manner – much like he or she would try to reduce hunger, thirst, or pain (Aronson, 1999). Situations and information that create inconsistency within the individual are avoided.

Festinger and colleagues found that reducing dissonance usually occurs by either: (a) changing one or more of the elements involved in dissonant relations so they are no longer inconsistent, (b) adding new cognitive elements that are consonant with existing cognition to outweigh the dissonant beliefs, or (c) decreasing the importance of the dissonant element(s) (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956). People generally differ in their preferred mode of dissonance reduction. Similarly, people differ in their ability to tolerate dissonance. According to Festinger (1957), people with low tolerance for dissonance should show more psychological discomfort in the presence of dissonance and should display greater efforts to reduce dissonance than persons who have high tolerance.

Dissonance is common whenever individuals make decisions, are exposed to information inconsistent with a prior belief, and act in ways that are discrepant with their beliefs and attitudes (Festinger, 1957). The amount of dissonance a person experiences varies depending on the importance of the cognitive elements involved. If the elements involved are valued greatly by the person, then the amount between the two dissonant elements will be grand (Festinger, 1957). It is likely that the cognition elements involved in the arousal of dissonance will be important to, or valued by, high altitude climbers because of the dangerous and life threatening nature of the act. For instance, climbers often make rash-survival oriented decisions that have a direct impact not only on the life of the person making the decision, but also on that of other climbers who are in close proximity. Thus, Mount Everest climbers' magnitude of cognitive dissonance is likely to be great and therefore so is the pressure to reduce the dissonance. According to Festinger, whenever dissonance is aroused, attempts to reduce it are observable. Efforts at reducing dissonance, however, are not always successful. In this instance, individuals are left in a state of psychological discomfort (Festinger, 1957). It is these circumstances under which dissonance, once arisen, persists that need to be investigated to further our understanding of the theory (Festinger, 1957).

The research methodology most often employed in testing predictions derived from Festinger's original dissonance theory is that of induced-compliance (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). In the confines of the laboratory, induced-compliance is concerned with the reduction of dissonance after a person acts in a way that contradicts their way of thinking (e.g., saying 'not A' when one thinks A) or acts in a manner that opposes their driving force (e.g., not playing with an attractive toy). According to Harmon-Jones (2000), if the justification for acting in the above mentioned dissonance arousing scenarios is just barely sufficient to induce the behavior, then persons are likely to experience dissonance. The reduction in dissonance is usually represented by changing the belief or attitude to correspond more closely to what was said or performed. There are limitations to this laboratory-based research in that the dissonance is artificially created to make it easier to assess its manifestation and reduction. In a review of the literature, no studies conducted in real life settings were found. Devine, Tauer, Barron, Elliot, & Vance (1999) suggest researchers expand their methodological tools in the examination of dissonance to gain a more thorough and complete testing of the theory. Although much has been learned about the theory of cognitive dissonance in the confines of the laboratory, exploring the phenomenon in a real life setting that by its very nature appears to be conducive to experiencing cognitive dissonance may be valuable to furthering our understanding of the theory. In a transcript of remarks made by Leon Festinger in a symposium discussion 30 years after his theory was first published, he shared:

I think we need to find out about how dissonance processes and dissonance reducing processes interact in the presence of other things that are powerful influences of human behavior and human cognition, and the only way to that is to do studies in the real world. (Festinger, 1999, p. 385).

A major contributor to the field of social psychology, Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance has generated hundreds of studies, from which much has been learned about the "determinants of attitude and beliefs, the internalization of values, the consequences of

decisions, the effects of disagreement among persons, and other important psychological processes” (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999, p. 2). It has also taught us about the learning process and how teachers can use this phenomenon to create “teachable moments” (Hansen, 1998). All the more, Festinger’s theory has influenced the development of several alternative accounts of the dissonance phenomena (see Appendix A for a summary). Some of what Festinger wrote in 1957 remains central to the revisions, however, each version of the dissonance phenomenon has been adapted to include new assumptions that have changed or replaced older ones. Three modified versions of the theory that have impacted the field of psychology include Aronson’s (1968/1992) version of Self-Consistency, the perspective of Self-Affirmation (Steele, 1988), and the New Look position (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). In summary, the aforementioned perspectives of cognitive dissonance (Aronson, 1968/1992; Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Festinger, 1957; Steele, 1988) are similar in that dissonance is equivalent to a drive-like arousal state that is psychologically uncomfortable and that inevitably creates pressure to undergo cognitive changes. Several key components, however, differentiate these perspectives thereby adding new dimensions to our understanding of the dissonance phenomenon.

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) has wide applications to a variety of situations. For instance, researchers have shown that dissonance arousal and reduction occur as smokers try to deal with the plethora of information that demonstrates that smoking is bad for you (Festinger, 1957). Other researchers have found mammoth rationalizations among Nazi doctors and their recollections of their murderous work in the concentration camps of the late 1930s and 1940s (Lifton, 1986). While cognitive dissonance has been studied in many contexts, there is a clear absence of research in the area of sport and physical activity, particularly in high altitude climbing. According to Aronson (1968), attitude-discrepant behavior and the cognitive dissonance aroused by it are common, daily experiences. It is not surprising therefore, that its manifestations may be observed in a wide variety of cultures including high altitude mountaineering.

The present study set out to deepen our understanding of cognitive dissonance theory by exploring for the first time Mount Everest climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance in their natural setting. Using an ethnomethodological approach, this study pushed the methodological boundaries of dissonance research by exploring the phenomenon as real things were happening to real people in the real world. Aronson's self-consistency perspective of Festinger's original dissonance theory will be briefly described next.

Aronson's Self-Consistency Perspective

According to Aronson (1968), cognitive dissonance theory makes its strongest predictions when an important element of the self-concept is threatened, typically when a person performs a behavior that is inconsistent with his or her sense of self. "The arousal of dissonance always entails relatively high levels of personal involvement and, therefore, the reduction of dissonance requires some form of self-justification" (Aronson, 1999, p. 109). In a review of published autobiographies, climbers appear to be driven by a need to experience a sense of congruency between their self and their behavior. According to Lester (2004), examples of major themes that permeate the mountaineering literature include contact with a more authentic self, assertion or expression of self, and self-control. Because the self appears to be at the heart of climbers' experiences scaling mountains, Aronson's (1968, 1992) perspective of self-consistency based on Festinger's (1957) original dissonance theory was used in the present study to explore the Mount Everest climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance.

Most of the work of cognitive dissonance researchers over the last 50 years, including studies using Aronson's self-consistency perspective, has focused on the motivational characteristics of dissonance arousal and reduction (Aronson, 1968; Beauvois & Joule, 1996; Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). In a review of the cognitive dissonance literature, research exploring the underlying processes involved in people's experiences with the phenomenon is non-existent. The primary focus of the present study was on

how Mount Everest climbers experienced cognitive dissonance under the varying circumstances of their environment using Aronson's self-consistency perspective.

Resonance Performance Model

There appears to be an affective component involved in individuals' experiences with cognitive dissonance, however, very little is known about the role of feelings in dissonance processes. Elliot and Devine (1994) believe that people 'feel' a sense of psychological discomfort following a contradicting relation among cognitions however there is little empirical evidence that confirms this view point. Because climbers appear to be motivated to feel a certain way about themselves it is possible that they engage in various strategies to reconnect with desired self-relevant feelings when they are not experiencing them. Most research exploring the cognitive dissonance phenomenon focus on the cognitive component involved in the arousal and reduction of dissonance (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Festinger, 1957; 1959; Girandola, 1997; Steele, 1988). Because of its focus on feel and strategies that enable people to reconnect with desired feelings when they are not experiencing them, the Resonance Performance Model (RPM, Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2002) was used in the present study to explore the role of feelings in people's experiences with cognitive dissonance.

Resonance is a process that empowers people to live their life in a way that allows them to feel the way they want to 'feel' on a daily basis (Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2002). In this holistic process, individuals identify the way they want to 'feel' on a daily basis. They then establish preparation strategies that will allow them to feel the way they want to feel as consistently as possible. Individuals also recognize potential obstacles that might get in the way of their sought out feeling and formulate strategies that will help them reconnect with it. Experiencing the way one wants to feel can give a new and perhaps clearer lens to our understanding of how cognitive dissonance is produced from within. According to Davidson and Cacioppo (1992), how people feel plays a substantial role in the human experience and is essential

for our understanding of various phenomena, including athletic excellence, life engagement, and subjective well-being and their interrelationship. It may also help us gain insight into how climbers' make sense of their reality when faced with attitude-discrepant situations.

An exploratory type of inquiry was adopted to investigate the Mount Everest climbers' stories of experience with cognitive dissonance as they made their way up and down the mountain, during the spring 2005 season. According to Sparkes (2004), when we tell stories about our lives to ourselves and to others, we "provide a structure for our very sense of selfhood and identity" (p.398). Using an ethnomethodological approach, which is concerned with 'how' the experience of everyday life is internalized in the minds of individuals, this study set out to capture how cognitive dissonance was produced from within including how the climbers made sense of their daily experiences, struggles, and learning on the mountain.

Emergence of the Problem

The present doctoral study was inspired by my background as a high altitude climber and Jon Krakauer's (1997b) book *Into Thin Air*, which is one man's gripping account of what happened that fateful day in May 1996 when numerous climbers lost their lives in a brutal storm on the slopes of Mount Everest. Based on my personal experiences reaching the summit of Mount Everest, this section is my interpretation of what may have transpired in Krakauer's mind before, during, and after the disaster unfolded. It will begin with a story that was written by me and which is based, in part, on Krakauer's personal tale. It will begin by describing the psychological discomfort the author likely experienced after his return from the mountain and will then proceed, by going back in time, to recount some of the critical events that may have led to that significant moment when dissonance was created. The outcome of the event and a brief explanation based on an analysis of rhetorical performances (i.e. language representation) of how dissonance may have occurred in the mind of Krakauer will be subsequently provided. The purpose for including the following story in the present study is to introduce the reader to the

world of high altitude mountaineering and to the cognitive processes that may take place as climbers strive to reach their goals.

A story of cognitive dissonance, by Shaunna Burke

Katmandu - May 16th, 1996

It was eleven o'clock at night and the streets of Katmandu were empty. He sat in a chair by the window of his hotel room staring into the quiet night desperately trying to make sense of the events that had taken place over the last couple of days. He found himself frantically wishing that things had turned out differently and wondered why his life had suddenly taken such a dreadful turn. Feelings of intense guilt fused his every waking moment. He wanted the feeling to go away, but vivid images of the morbid event kept seeping into his conscious mind like the waters of a flooded river breaching the walls of a weakened levy. He longed to escape his reality, even if it was just for only a short time. He knew that if he did not get a handle on the situation his guilt would drive him crazy. So he decided to do something he rarely ever does. It was the only thing he could think of doing to temporarily ease the emotionally searing pain of his present situation and walked out of the hotel in a frantic search for narcotics. He instinctively knew that it would take years before he could make his peace with what had unfolded that day before his very eyes.

Camp 4 - May 9th, 1996

It was eight o'clock at night when Jon Krakauer, along with a small group of climbers from around the world, were huddled together in arguably the most isolated and exposed place on the planet. At 8,000 meters the South Col of Mount Everest is a flat, desolate patch of rock and ice that acts as the last staging camp for an attempt at the summit of the world's highest peak.

Ensnared in a thin nylon cocoon their tents acted as a domed refuge against the elements but did little to combat the true pressures of the environment. An environment that combines the external pressure of the death zone where the body desperately tries to adjust to the lack of oxygen in the air before it is killed. It tenuously holds on to life at an elevation where the atmospheric pressure is only 30% of that at sea level. The heart frantically pounds at 120 times per minute while resting, muscles atrophy, the bloods ph balance has been altered, and the body and brain is dehydrated and hypoxic causing climbers to frequently hallucinate. It is a war of attrition that cannot be won, only survived. The internal pressure may not be as graphic but it is no less daunting. This internal pressure is the climber's expectations. Carried deep in the psyche of the climber like an emotional backpack, climbers will do just about anything to achieve their goal. With each painful step up the mountain their need to succeed intensifies. In some cases the psychological baggage that climbers carry up the mountain becomes heavier to lift than any single piece of climbing equipment and can stop them dead in their tracks.

In their tents the climbers rested, hydrated, tried to eat, and focused on what was to come. Their thoughts and emotions were a mass of contradictions. They ranged from the temperate images of their loved ones back home, warm, dry, and safe to the dramatic feel of their atrophied bodies including the distressing sight of the pain and fatigue that was drawn on the faces and seared into the eyes of their fellow climbers. They were at once excited, scared, awed, and strangely dulled as a by product of the hypoxic gauze that covered them.

This sensory shroud clouded their reality to an almost dream-like state and altered their perception of the world around them.

It was on this stage that one of the Mountaineering's most infamous plays was about to begin. As the curtain rose on eve of May 9th, 1996 the aforementioned climbers made last preparations before taking on their roles in a tragedy of Shakespearean proportions. They were oblivious to what the future held and stepped out of their tents wearing the costume of guarded optimism and purpose. As they began the ascent toward the summit of the world's tallest peak, they all believed it was to make an appointment to meet a blessed fate. Instead, the rendezvous took a darker turn as the actors discovered that their journey took them not into climbing's heaven but into hell and that the director was the devil himself.

Summit attempt - May 10th 1996

It was late in the afternoon of May 10th when a wicked storm blew in without warning. Several climbers and guides were stranded high on the mountain in a fight for their lives. Krakauer had just barely reached the safety of his tent at Camp four. Drained and more exhausted than he had ever been in his life, he had been one of the first climbers to stand on the summit of Mount Everest that morning. His quick ascent to the summit and back down to camp four saved him within an inch of his life from being trapped in the brunt of the storm. However, sub-zero temperatures, gale force winds, and near whiteout conditions made it near impossible for many of his teammates to escape the hurricane-like storm. Climbers began fighting for their lives. Some of them were

scattered along the upper reaches of the mountain. They were virtually stopped in their tracks near the summit and desperately tried to stay warm. Others frantically scrambled down to within a few meters from the safety of their tents at Camp four before they became lost in the whiteout conditions. Krakauer meanwhile lay in his tent concerned only with his own safety.

The aftermath. The May 10th 1996 disaster was one of the deadliest days in the mountain's history. All told, nine people perished over the next thirty six hours including two respected guides – New Zealander Rob Hall and American Scott Fischer. Another climber named Beck Weathers would eventually lose part of his nose, one of his hands, and all the fingers on the other to severe frostbite. For Krakauer, out of the eight climbers who never made it off the mountain, four were members on his team - people who he had gotten to know intimately over the course of the expedition.

The aftermath of the disaster that Spring season left people badly scarred. Many of the climbers who survived the 1996 season on Everest wrote autobiographies that talked about their disturbing experience on the mountain (Boukreev & DeWalt, 1997; Gammelgaard, 1999; Karkauer, 1997b; Norgay & Coburn, 2001; Pfetzer & Galvin, 1998; Weathers & Michaud, 2000). Krakauer (1996) who was on assignment for *Outside Magazine* wrote a major piece about that terrible day: "*Into Thin Air,*" *Outside Magazine, September 1996*, which he later expanded into a bestselling book by the same title. In both stories Krakauer openly discusses his struggle to come to terms with what took place on the mountain that day. He describes himself as a haunted soul and questions whether his actions, or failure to act, "may have played a direct role in the deaths" (p.283) of his two teammates Andy Harris and Yasuko Namba. The realization that he

may not have done all he could have during that desperate moment when his teammates lay dying on the South Col seemed to cause him tremendous heartache.

A number of details in Krakauer's magazine article, written 54 days after the tragic event took place, and in his book, that was written almost a year later, notably differ. Krakauer admits that writing "*Into Thin Air*" was an act of catharsis. It seems that he desperately wanted to emotionally rid himself of the grief that continued to haunt him months after the tragic day unfolded. Yet, how did he arrive at two different interpretations of what he believed transpired on the mountain that day? Moreover, how did the other climbers (who were also involved in the tragedy) arrive at their interpretation of the situation, which contradicted the accuracy of Krakauer's account, some writing their own books that describe the same events that transpired on the mountain that day quite differently?

An explanation. Based on an analysis of rhetorical indicators present in Krakauer's narrative representation of his climb, claims that cognitive dissonance is occurring are established. For instance, the author uses words that denote specific deeply felt feelings of psychological discomfort such as 'fog', and 'messy emotions.' Discursive repetitions are also used in a way that organize the 'self' as descent but troubled in certain inescapable ways. A final example is the author's use of rhetorical strategies that enable blame to be placed from self to others. In effect, the representation of language used in Krakauer's novel suggest that the consequences of the author's actions, or failure to act, in certain situations threatened important elements of his self-concept, creating intense and specific feelings of psychological discomfort.

Throughout his book and magazine article, it is clear that Krakauer was trying to reduce the dissonance he was experiencing. He tried to maintain his self-concept as a decent and responsible person through a process of self-justification. That is, he reconstructed the past in a

way that allowed him to feel like he was a responsible person, by highlighting his diminished physical and mental state and blaming others for the way things turned out on the mountain that day. Specifically, he focused on his own altitude sickness, his exhaustion, his difficulty with the cold after his struggle down the mountain during a storm, and his mistaken belief that he saw Harris precede him into the safety of Camp 4. He also blamed Boukreev (a Russian guide on Scott Fischer's expedition) for guiding without the use of oxygen and descending before Fischer's clients had returned safely to Camp 4, and Lopsang Jangbu Sherpa (Scott Fisher's lead climbing Sherpa) for also climbing the mountain without bottled oxygen. It appears that he was trying to deny all responsibility for what occurred on the mountain that day in such a way that allowed him to restore his pre-formed notion of self.

It is especially difficult to discern the 'truth' after a disastrous event, like the one mentioned above, unfolds in the mountains (Krakauer, 1996). No one will ever know for certain what happened that day on the mountain. The 'truth' is a very slippery thing, especially when you are talking about an event that happened years ago to a group of climbers who were sleep deprived, hungry, and suffered from extreme oxygen deprivation, which can make memories unreliable. According to Houston (2000), perception organizes reality; different individuals often describe the same events quite differently and this has been true as far back as historical mountaineering records show. In a review of published autobiographies, many of the climbers involved in the 1996 Mount Everest tragedy seemed to have interpreted the same events that took place on the mountain that day quite differently. It is quite possible that they felt psychologically uncomfortable with the turn of events, could not change the outcome of the incident, and so reconstructed their understanding of the situation in a way that allowed them to feel good about themselves.

Purpose of the Study

While the Mount Everest tragedies of 2006 and 1996 were unique they were certainly not out of the ordinary. Climbers die on Everest almost every year (Atheam, 2005). Due to the physically discomfiting, stressful, and life-threatening environment in which climbers perform and frequently make rash survival-oriented decisions, this activity lends itself very well to studying climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance. Guided by the ethnomethodological school of thought, the purpose of this study was to explore how Mount Everest climbers experienced cognitive dissonance in their natural setting based on Aronson's (1968, 1992) self-consistency revision of Festinger's (1957) original dissonance theory. This study also set out to explore the role of feelings in Mount Everest climber's experiences with cognitive dissonance using the RPM (Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2002) as the framework.

The subsequent section will include an in-depth review of the high altitude mountaineering culture, psychological research, and autobiographical accounts of what appears to be the arousal and reduction of dissonance of high altitude climbers based on published autobiographies.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT DISCOURSES

Few studies have explored the culture of high altitude climbing to gain an understanding of the cognitive processes of climbers. Although specific research on cognitive dissonance in the area of high altitude climbing does not exist, there are a number of autobiographies of climbers that offer some insight into the cognitive dissonance arousal and reduction of climbers. Prior to reading about high altitude climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance through published mountaineering autobiographies, however, an in-depth review of the culture of high altitude mountaineering and psychological research on climbers is provided. This research study attempts to explore climber's stories of experience climbing Mount Everest from an ethnomethodological standpoint. It will therefore help the reader to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation if a general overall picture of the sport of high altitude mountaineering is made available. Moreover, an overview of the limited research that relates to the psychology of high altitude climbing is provided to augment background information on topics that could in some way relate to the cognitive dissonance experienced by Mount Everest climbers. Consequently, the review of relevant discourses is divided into three sections: (a) culture of high altitude mountaineering; (b) psychological research and; (c) published autobiographies of high altitude climbers.

High Altitude Mountaineering Culture

The ethnomethodological school of thought would argue that Mount Everest climber's experiences with cognitive dissonance arise from within the activity of high altitude mountaineering in which it occurs (Garfinkel, 1967). In this instance, to help the reader gain a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, background information is necessary for making sense of the cognitive dissonance of climbers. Consequently, the purpose of this section was to provide background information on topics that are directly related to the

sport of high altitude mountaineering and Mount Everest in particular. This section is divided into eight sections: (a) A definition of the sport; (b) styles of climbing; (c) types of expeditions; (d) traditional objectives; (e) Mount Everest history; (f) Sherpa climbing culture and; (g) Mount Everest routes.

Definition of High Altitude Mountaineering

Mountaineering* (for words with an asterisk see Appendix B for glossary of terms) is the sport or technique of scaling mountains and is sometimes also known as alpinism, particularly in Europe (McDonald & Amatt, 2000). It tends to require a skill set that reflects a mix of different climbing disciplines. Specifically, the two main competencies needed are rock-craft and ice-craft. Depending on whether the chosen route is primarily over rock or over hard packed snow and ice, the climber will adapt appropriately. Both skills require great technical ability and agile movements, and require (at a minimum) that the climber know how to belay* and rappel.* It is interesting to note that over the last 30 to 40 years these skills that are fundamental to the activity of mountaineering have evolved into sports onto themselves, widely known as *rock climbing** and *ice climbing**. This section will begin by briefly discussing the sports of rock and ice climbing and will proceed to provide a detailed description of the sport of mountaineering. Subsequently I will conclude by outlining the important characteristics that differentiate high altitude mountaineering from the sport of mountaineering.

Rock and ice climbing

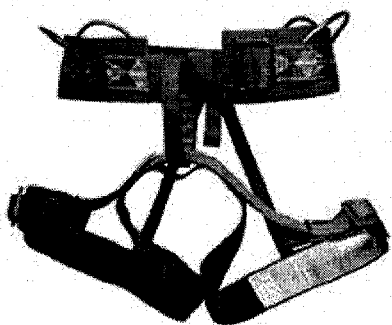
Rock climbing can be defined as the sport or activity of climbing sheer rock faces, especially by means of specialized techniques and equipment (see Figure 1 for photos of rock and ice climbing equipment). Karabiners,* quick draws,* harnesses,* and rope are some examples of specific gear used in this sport. Ice climbing has a similar definition except that the activity is mainly carried out over snow and ice, and requires that the climber use ice tools,*



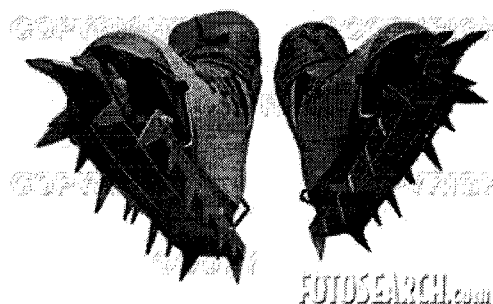
Climbing Jumar



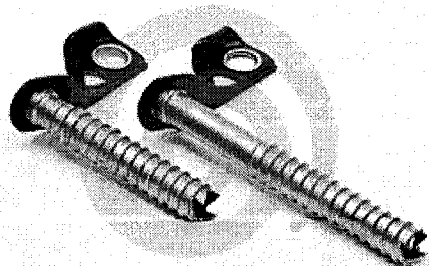
Ice axe and rope



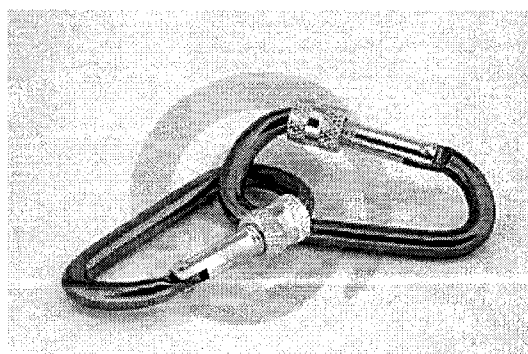
Climbing Harness



Crampons and Mountaineering boots



Ice Screws



Pair of Locking Karabiners

Figure 1. Photos of Climbing Equipment

ice protection,* crampons,* and rope. Over time, both of the above mentioned activities have evolved to include various sub-disciplines. In the case of rock climbing, the activity of *bouldering,* big wall aid climbing,* indoor sport climbing,* and free solo climbing** have become popular. *Speed competitions, artificial ice wall climbing, and frozen waterfall climbing* have emerged within the sport of ice climbing. Each of these sub-disciplines is a slight variant of their respective sport.

Over time the number of people who participate in the sport of rock climbing and, to a lesser degree ice climbing, has increased dramatically (outside.away.com). It can be argued that the reason for this rise in the number of people is due to the advances in climbing equipment that make rock and ice climbing not as dangerous as they once were. Over the past few decades, much specialized safety equipment has been devised transforming these activities into fairly safe sports (Elmes & Barry, 1999). Other than dangers due to falling rocks or ice, these sports currently present a physical and mental challenge with minimal risk.

Mountaineering

Mountaineering differs from the sports of rock and ice climbing in that it involves scaling mountains rather than rock or ice faces. It also involves a plethora of dangers and challenges that cannot be lessened due to technological advances. Chief dangers that are inherent to the sport include falling rocks and ice, snow avalanches, falls into crevasses, falls down snow/ice/rock faces, and dangers due to poor weather. Every rock mountain is falling apart due to erosion, the process being especially rapid above the snow line (en.wikipedia.org). As a result, falling stones that form furrows in a mountain face constantly sweep rock faces. Similarly, icefall is common due to overhanging cornices, hanging glaciers, and large icicles formed on steep rock faces. Climbers will devise the safest route possible through these intricate areas and avoid setting up

camp in their possible line of fall, but complete avoidance is near impossible. Interestingly, the avalanche* is the most underestimated danger in the mountains (en.wikipedia.org). People often tend to believe that they will be able to recognize the hazards and survive being caught. This, however, is rarely the case. There are two types of avalanches: The slab avalanche, which occurs when a plate of snow breaks loose and starts sliding down; and the powder avalanche, which can be defined as a small amount of moving snow that accumulates into a big slide.

In the sport of mountaineering, climbers need experience to know which rocks can be trusted to bear a person's weight, how to traverse ice slopes of moderate angle, and when to advance over snow in doubtful conditions. Similarly, they need to know how to detect hidden crevasses and safeguard against accidents related to crossing snow-covered glaciers.* According to McDonald and Amatt (2000), crevasses are the slits or deep chasms formed in the substance of a glacier as it passes over an uneven bed. They may be open or hidden by arched over accumulations of snow and pose serious problems for climbers if poorly detected. Weather can also be a serious threat especially when it causes changes in snow and rock conditions. Whiteouts are one example whereby it becomes difficult to retrace a route. Climbing in poor weather conditions makes navigation more arduous and hazardous than under normal conditions.

High Altitude Mountaineering

High altitude mountaineering mirrors the sport of mountaineering except that it takes place in high altitude and, as a result, can be even more dangerous. According to Hackett and Roach (2001), high altitude is arbitrarily defined as altitudes greater than 3,000 meters (10,000 feet). Reduced atmospheric pressure and a lower concentration of oxygen characterize these high elevations. Being in a high altitude environment usually results in acute mountain sickness affecting the body's nervous system, lungs, muscles, and heart. Symptoms can range from mild

to life-threatening. Hackett and Roach believe that in most cases the symptoms are mild including headaches, loss of appetite, nausea, dizziness, and difficulty sleeping. Severe cases, however, have been known to materialize resulting in pulmonary edema (fluid collects in the lungs) and cerebral edema (swelling in the brain). The likelihood and severity of altitude sickness is greater with increasing rate of ascent, higher altitude attained, and higher levels of exertion (m-w.com). According to Hackett and Roach (2001), people with heart and lung disease may have difficulty at lower altitudes and, rarely, a healthy person will develop some form of acute mountain sickness as low as 2,500 meters (8, 200 feet). Most commonly acute mountain sickness is seen above 3,000 meters. Clearly, the nature of high altitude mountaineering is dangerous and risky. Climbers can succumb, at any point on the mountain, to a variety of life-threatening obstacles.

The Himalayan (Nepal/Tibet) and Karakoram (Pakistan) mountain ranges hold the bulk of mountains that rise at elevations of 3,000 meters and above. However, most continents will have at least one or a couple of such peaks including South America (Mt. Aconcagua, Mt. Sajama), North America (Mt. McKinley), Europe (Mt. Elbrus, Mt. Blanc, Mt. Ararat), and Africa (Mt. Kilimanjaro).

Styles of Climbing

Various different styles of high altitude mountaineering currently characterize the sport (Fowler, 2000). The most common styles include traditional climbing, technical big mountain climbing, solo climbing, alpine style, and professional sponsored climbing. In traditional climbing, climbers set out to conquer a non-technical route in the high mountains, usually major snow slopes in the Himalayas. Climbing Mt. Cho Oyu (8,000m) in Nepal via the traditional Northwest Face is a perfect example of this style of climbing. The route has been previously

climbed and involves little technical skill. Evidently, most commercially guided companies set up their expeditions around this style of climbing.

Another popular way of climbing is often referred to as technical big mountain climbing. This method of high altitude mountaineering consists of large scale (a full array of camps, high altitude porters, oxygen, and fixed rope) ascents of technical routes. The Russian 1997 climb of the right hand side of Mt. Makalu's West Face is a recent example of an ascent in this mold (Fowler, 2000).

Solo climbing is a third style of climbing that usually requires that the climber is self-contained. In this scenario, the climber tends to rely solely on his or her skill and judgment throughout the duration of the climb. Many solo attempts have been made by climbers around the world, however, due to the great danger and isolation of solo climbing, this style of mountaineering remains somewhat eccentric.

A fourth way to climb in the high mountains is alpine style, widely known among mountaineers as pure climbing. In this scenario the climbers, usually a minimum of two, ascend the mountain in one self-contained unit. At present, alpine-style ascents tend to vary between the following (Fowler, 2000): (a) The minimum option, which consists of a two-person team, no fixed ropes, climb complete in one push, minimum hauling, and no bolts; and (b) The maximum option, which entails four or more climbers, more equipment than the team can carry in one push, fixed ropes between bivouacs,* several day climb, bolts are used, equipment is carried in haul bags, only the leader climbs the pitches; the others jumar. Climbers who adopt this style of mountaineering earn the most respect within the climbing community. Prestige is earned among climbers by undertaking the most unforgiving routes with minimal equipment and in the boldest style imaginable (Krakauer, 1997).

In the 1990s a further noteworthy development has been the appearance of climbing to break records. Climbers are encouraged to set spectacular objectives, break records by climbing lots of peaks on the same outing, or engage in speed climbing usually to draw attention to their sponsors. Achievements in this vein include The 2004 Discovery Channel Everest Expedition. Sponsored by the network, the team hauled video cameras up the mountain to document their experiences and the experiences of other climbers who were attempting to climb to the summit. It was the first time in history that a documentary was captured on the mountain while the climb was taking place. The human desire to surpass the achievements of previous generations will most likely result in the growth of this style of climbing (Fowler, 2000).

Types of Mountaineering Expeditions

High altitude mountaineering expeditions are generally set up in two distinct ways. Climbers either join a commercial expedition, or they privately finance and organize their own climb. The following section will attempt to define these two types of expeditions.

Commercial Expeditions

Commercial expeditions are usually centered on business objectives and can be divided into two main sub-categories: *Guided commercial groups* and *sponsored expeditions*.

Guided commercial groups. Companies that rely on great numbers of clients for profit generally run commercially guided groups. Clients pay commercial outfitters in exchange for various services. The services vary from those, which provide a full service (highest standards of equipment, staff, and safety) to those where there is minimal support. Generally speaking, however, commercially guided expeditions will provide a basic infrastructure to their clients that include guide services and camp facilities. An expedition leader is usually hired by the company and is responsible for the safety of the party and success of the trip. In particular, the leader tends

to make most of the decisions and execute most of the day-to-day tasks. According to Elmes and Barry (1999), because of the low skill of many clients, leadership involves a dependent model of authority. Examples of commercially guided companies worldwide include Adventure Consultants (New Zealand), Alpine Ascents International (United States), Jagged Globe (Britain), International Mountain Guides (United States), and Canadian Adventure Services (Canada).

The inception of commercially guided expeditions is a relatively new phenomenon. According to Houston (2000), the culture of high altitude mountaineering has changed as it has gone commercial. Consequently, highly experienced mountaineers are no longer alone climbing high altitude peaks. Rather, well-to-do, less-skilled adventurers are also attempting their fate on the highest peaks on the planet (Elmes & Barry, 1999). As the number of people climbing high altitude peaks has risen significantly, more and more climbers have joined commercially guided groups to reach their goals. Krakauer (1997b) believes that there has been an increase in the number of novice climbing teams whose members often meet for the first time just prior to leaving for the mountain they are intending to climb. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue that new technologies including ultra light, ergonomically designed gear, radio communication, and sophisticated guidance equipment have made it possible for many more novices to try the sport.

Over the last decade there has been considerable attention focused on high altitude commercial guiding and the various companies that offer such services. For instance, since the famous disaster in 1996 that claimed the lives of nine climbers from four separate commercially guided Everest expeditions, there has been much debate surrounding the issue of whether or not climbers should continue to be guided in the mountains. According to Elmes and Barry (1999), prior to the rise of the 1980's, mountaineering was the province of skilled individuals with the

right disposition. They suggest that the psychological makeup of climbers has changed. Clients of commercially run expeditions “have become not only less skilled than their predecessors, but also more self-inflated – perhaps as a compensatory device” (p.179). Consequently, this type of climbing group is at a much greater risk for disaster.

Sponsored expeditions. Sponsored expeditions are typically handled by two prominent figures: The expedition leader and the sponsoring agent. The expedition leader or a group of climbers align themselves with a sponsor who finances the expedition for business purposes. In return for their investment, the sponsor generally aims to gain media exposure. The expedition therefore is set up to meet the objectives of the sponsor. As a result, either the expedition leader will choose the members of the team that he or she feels can meet the objectives of the expedition, or the sponsor will decide who they want on the climbing team. In addition, a local outfitter is usually hired by the expedition leader to help with the logistical organization of the climb.

It is important to point out that many local companies also provide climbing services to the public for profit. For example, in South America the local company called *Acongaua Express* is designed to provide services primarily to foreign commercial expeditions or independent climbers. Local outfitters are usually hired to help climbing expeditions with their basic logistical set up such as administrative work (securing permits and flights in-country), load carrying, and managing camp facilities.

Private Expeditions

Many high altitude mountaineering expeditions are set up where climbers privately finance and organize their own climb. The climbing team usually consists of friends who have a shared climbing history or the team is selected via word of mouth. Since most of the organizing

and executing of tasks takes place by the climbers themselves, highly experienced, elite mountaineers tend to make up the climbing team. Some privately run expeditions have an expedition leader that they defer to however, more often than not, the decisions are made as a team. From load carrying to fixing ropes, the team usually equally distributes the tasks that need to be accomplished for a successful summit bid. Generally, the team is structured around collaboration and detailed planning.

Typical High Altitude Mountaineering Objectives

The most common high altitude climbing objectives include reaching the summit of the highest peak on each of the seven world continents and successfully climbing all 14 of the 8,000-meter peaks in the world. This section will provide detailed information related to each objective.

The Seven Summits

The tallest mountains on each of the world's seven continents are widely known among climbers as the *Seven Summits*. The name of each mountain, its location, and height include: Everest (Asia; 8,848m), Aconcagua (South America; 6,962m), Denali or otherwise known as McKinley (North America; 6,195m), Kilimanjaro (Africa; 5,963), Elbrus (Europe; 5,633m), Vinson Massif (Antartica; 4,897m), Carstensz Pyramid (Oceania; 4,884), and/or Kosciuszko (Australia; 2,228m). It is important to note that the seventh summit is under some dispute. According to (everestnews.com), if one considers the geographic zone that includes Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, and certain Pacific Islands as Australasia or Oceania, then Indonesia's Carstensz Pyramid (4,884m) is Australasia's highest mountain. However, if Australia on its own is considered a continent on itself, then the 2,228m walk-up Mount Kosciuszko is regarded as the seventh highest peak. Most climbers climb both mountains just to be sure, making eight in total.

The quest to climb the *Seven Summits* is among one of the most popular high altitude climbing goals aspired by climbers throughout the world. The first person to realize this feat was Dick Bass, an American businessman, on April 30, 1985. To date, 122 climbers are listed as having completed the *Seven Summits* (everestnews.com).

The fourteen eight thousand meter peaks

Reaching the summit of all 14 of the 8000m peaks in the world is considered by mountaineers to be the ultimate climbing achievement. There are only 14 summits that rise above 8000m, every one of them projecting into the death zone,* where humans rapidly degrade and eventually die without supplemental oxygen (McDonald & Amatt, 2000). All 14 of the world's 8,000-meter peaks are located in the Himalaya or the Karakoram ranges in Asia. Ten of the 8000 meter peaks are in the Himalaya including Everest (8,848m), Kangchenjunga (8586m), Lhotse (8,516m), Makalu (8,463m), Cho Oyu (8,201m), Dhaulagiri (8,167m), Nanga Parbat (8,126), Manaslu (8,163m), Annapurna I (8,091), Shishapagma (8,027). The other four are clustered closely in the Karakoram Range including K2 (8,611), Gasherbrum I (8,068), Broad Peak (8,047), and Gasherbrum II (8,035).

Generally speaking, only the top-notch of elite climbers strive to attain this goal. The first 8000 meter peak (Annapurna) was successfully climbed in 1950. The first to reach the summit of all 14 was Reinhold Messner, in 1986. To date, fewer than 12 other climbers have joined this most exclusive club of (everestnews.com) elite mountaineers.

Mount Everest History

About 60 million years ago, as the result of a massive collision of the earth's tectonic plates, Everest was formed in the heart of the Himalayan Range, on the border of Nepal and Tibet (bbc.co.uk). The Indian sub-continental plate had broken away from a large continent

called Gondwana, which included the continents of Africa, South America, Australia, and Antarctica, and moved northward toward the Eurasian continental plate at a rapid speed of about 10 centimeters a year (bbc.co.uk). Geologists know this process as seafloor spreading. As the Indian sub-continental plate collided with Eurasia it continued to move northward crushing the earth's crust, which caused the land to crumble and rise significantly above sea level (extremescience.com). This continental clash formed the Himalayan Range that we know today, which is made up of remnants of the earth's crust including metamorphic rocks, granite, sedimentary rocks (clays, silts, and carbonate), and much purer limestone, mixed with sandy layers (bbc.co.uk). The process of collision between these two continental plates continues today, which explains why the Himalayan Mountains are still growing in height (bbc.co.uk). The profound and ongoing human desire to explore, discover, and conquer the tallest mountain on the planet began as a result of this great collision. Interesting, however, Mount Everest is arguably much more than just a mountain of rock and ice. The people who have come into contact with the mountain shape our understanding of not only the mountain itself, but also what it represents. Consequently, this section will depict the more recognized incidences and people who have contributed to the history of the mountain.

In 1808 the British launched the Great Trigonometric Survey of India, which set out to accurately determine the dimension of the earth and the location of important geographical features in terms of latitude and longitude (Keay, 2001). It was a great scientific project that prevailed throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Led in its initial stages by William Lambton and later by George Everest, one of the many accomplishments of the survey was the measurement of the height of the great Himalayan peaks including K2, Kanchenjunga, and Everest. It is interesting to note that prior to the launch of the British survey, a South American volcano called

Chimborazo was believed to be the tallest mountain in the world (Keay, 2001). Initially, however, the British deemed Kangchenjunga the highest peak in the Himalayas. But, in 1852, they began speculating that Everest, known at that time as Peak XV, was the highest mountain not only in the Himalayas, but also on the planet (Klesius, 2003). In 1865, this assumption was confirmed and Peak XV was renamed Mount Everest after Sir George Everest. As it turned out, Tibetans who lived to the north of the great mountain already had a name for it, Jomolungma, which translated means “goddess, mother of the world.” Nepalis who reside to the south called it Deva-dhunga, “Seat of God.” Currently, the Nepali name for the mountain is Sagarmatha, “goddess of the sky.” Prior to 1960, however, this name was never used (Krakauer, 1997b).

Once deemed the tallest mountain in the world, Everest soon became a challenge of epic proportions. Climbers were determined to find out if it was humanly possible to stand on its summit. According to Krakauer (1997b), following the discovery in 1852, it would require the energy of twenty-four men, the labors of fifteen expeditions, and the passage of 101 years before the summit of Everest was finally realized. In 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary, a beekeeper from New Zealand, and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, whose second name means “the fortunate one,” became the first people in history to stand on the summit of Everest (Klesius, 2003). Prior to this extraordinary feat people tried to reach the top, but they either failed or died in pursuit of the act.

In 1921, the Tibetan government opened its borders that had been closed for some time to foreigners, while Nepal remained off limits. For this reason, the first eight expeditions to Everest, all of which were British, attempted the mountain from the northern Tibetan side (Klesius, 2003; Krakauer, 1997b). George Mallory, whose name is inextricably linked to Everest, was the driving force behind the first three expeditions to the peak. He is not only well known for his response, “because it is there” when asked by reporters why he wanted to climb Everest, but also

for his famous climb in 1924. Mallory along with climbing partner Andrew Irvine vanished somewhere near the summit on June 8, 1924. Their climb is legendary and echoes contradictory tales of victory and failure. Some people believe that before they died they were the first people to reach the summit of the world's highest peak – others trust they perished before getting there. Mallory's body was discovered on a sloping ledge at 27, 000 feet, where it had come to rest after an apparent fall seventy-five years earlier (Krakauer, 1997b). Although evidence of the discovery supported that the two climbers did not reach the summit before they perished, no one knows definitively if they reached the summit or not, and how they perished. As a result, their story continues to fascinate people nearly three-quarters of a century later (Hemmler, Johnson, & Simonson, 1999).

Reinhold Messner's extraordinary climb on Everest in 1980 contributes to our understanding of the mountain and what it stands for. Messner is one of the world's most outstanding mountaineers. He was the first person to ever climb all 14 of the earth's tallest peaks. In 1978, he and Peter Habeler successfully completed the first ascent of Everest without supplemental oxygen. This extraordinary feat surprised the medical community and caused a re-evaluation of high altitude physiology. It is interesting to note that long before high Himalayan peaks were first attempted, the altitude sickness experienced by mountain travelers was blamed on evil spirits, bad winds, minerals, and noxious exhalations from plants, minerals, or even dragons (Houston, 2000). It was not until climbers first began climbing as high as 22, 000 feet that various forms of mountain sickness were described. Messner's groundbreaking ascent of Everest without supplemental oxygen demonstrated that it was possible for people to survive at the highest point on the planet without supplemental oxygen. In 1980, Messner shocked the mountaineering community yet again by returning to the mountain to make the first solo attempt

on Everest without bottled oxygen. Since his historic climb in 1978, several dozen climbers have reached the summit of Everest without oxygen, and scores continue to explore their limits in this fashion.

The famous 1996 disaster on Mount Everest is another defining incident that shaped the way people perceive the mountain and what it represents. On May 10th, as a number of climbers were making their way to the top of the world, a rogue storm blew in and killed nine people from four separate expeditions. It was the biggest disaster in the history of the mountain that brought the dangers of climbing Everest to the forefront of the public's consciousness. More importantly, however, the resulting tragedy stirred debates over the role of commercial expeditions, guides, and climbers of Everest. Because the climbers involved in the 1996 disaster were primarily paying clients on commercially run expeditions they were critiqued as being less skilled, wealthy adventurers who if denied the services of guides, would have great difficulty making it to the top. Consequently, commercially guided expeditions were portrayed in a negative light. As more and more wealthy businessmen were led to Everest's summit, the prestige and respect associated with climbing Everest was beginning to wane. The public no longer held Everest climbers in the same high esteem.

Since Hillary and Tenzing's historic ascent to the summit in 1953, people have been coming to the mountain almost every year to realize dreams. Some walk away intact – others destroyed. Since 1975, as many as 1,200 people, ages 16 to 65, including 75 women have made it to the highest point on the face of the earth (everestnews.com). Various record breaking achievements have also taken place over time; In 1975 the first woman reached the summit; In 1983 an American team made the first ascent of the East Face, which had previously been deemed impossible to climb; The first person skied down Everest from summit to base camp in

2000 and; The first blind person reached the top in 2001. Since 1975, over 175 climbers making this attempt have died in pursuit of this dangerous test of skill and courage. Some reasons for dying include high altitude sickness, loss of will, injury, fatigue, and extreme weather conditions. Each person's experience on the mountain contributes to the history of the mountain and what it stands for.

Sherpa Culture

The Sherpa people of Nepal are often inseparable from their association with world-class mountaineering, and Everest in particular. The term "Sherpa" means "people of the east," but is most commonly used to refer to the ethnic group of devout Buddhists living in northeastern Nepal (Reid, 2003). Sherpa, however, is not merely an ethnic classification. The Sherpa people often use their ethnic name as their last name as well. Because of their renowned reputation as climbers Sherpa has also become a generic Eurocentric or Anglicized term for a porter* or a guide. Some scientists believe that Sherpas' genetic features and lifelong adaptation to low-oxygen conditions makes it easier for them to perform in high altitudes. It is believed that they can breathe faster and thus can take in more air per minute than lowlanders can (Reid, 2003). Their performance at high altitude usually surpasses that of a Western climber. They tend to be stronger and much quicker than most foreign climbers. Other than the Gurkhas, who gained recognition in the West as tremendously skilled soldiers for the British army, the Sherpas are the best known of the 40 or so ethnic groups that make up the Nepalese population.

The Sherpa people originated in Eastern Tibet before migrating in the early 1400's to the Solu-Khumbu region of the Himalayas (Krakauer, 1997b). They settled in Khumbu and Pharak and gradually moved south into the lower regions of the Solu region where milder temperatures make farming more productive (Reid, 2003). Initially their relationship with the mountains of

their region was one of respect from afar. The mountains were admired as dwelling places of gods and goddesses; for generations, the very thought of climbing the mountain was considered blasphemous. It was not until climbers from the West made mountaineering in the region lucrative that Sherpas began setting foot on the treasured mountains. When the first British mountaineering expeditions journeyed to Everest in the early 20th century, they hired young strong Sherpas to act as porters (Krakauer, 1997b). They were impressed by the Sherpas' work ethic and skill at high altitude. From that point on, the Sherpas became an integral part of international Himalayan climbing. According to Reid (2003), Sherpas play a central role in climbing each of the Khumbu's 25, 000 foot-plus peaks.

The arrival of Western climbers evidently brought money to the Solu-Khumbu region. Accordingly, the Sherpa people began developing business opportunities by organizing treks, running lodges, leading tourists on hikes, and serving as high altitude porters. Charging money for services such as food and lodging is a fairly new phenomenon. According to Norgay and Coburn (2001), when foreigners first visited Nepal it was considered an insult to demand money for something that costs only one's time and labor to produce. Nevertheless, with the upsurge of foreign mountaineers to the Himalayas, tourism eventually became critical to the Khumbu economy. The average per capita income in Nepal, which derives mainly from subsistence farming, is about \$1,500 a year. Sherpas involved in tourism can average about five times as much. As a result of the tourism industry in Nepal, the Sherpa ethnic group was able to improve their socioeconomic status (Norgay & Coburn, 2001) and is consequently no longer seen carrying big loads in the mountains. Raj and Tamang porters now carry out most of the hard labor. Still, only the owner's of the Nepali outfitters and top sidars – the middleman between the Western team leader and Sherpa climbing team who not only tends to be the most accomplished

and experienced of the Sherpa climbers but who also organize and distribute the work load among the Sherpa climbing team – can afford to own a house in Katmandu.

The Western influx also had a significant impact on the climbing values that Sherpas embrace. The Sherpa people, who began climbing primarily for financial necessity, also now value personal challenge and praise for their climbing achievements. The culture of Sherpa climbing holds high standards for strength and speed. At present, climbing is embraced like a sport in Nepal. For instance, in May 2003 Lakpa Gelu Sherpa, 36, broke the speed ascent record by climbing from base camp to the summit in 10 hours and 46 minutes (everestnews.com). Moreover, in 2005, Appa Sherpa reached the summit of Everest for a record 15th time. Both men are celebrated in Nepal for their record-breaking achievements. Their accomplishments have brought the allure of mountaineering fame into the Sherpa way of life.

The Sherpas' relationship to the mountains of their homeland has remained the same over time. Specifically, they approach Everest with an attitude of respect, awareness, humility, and devotion (Norgay & Coburn, 2001). Ultimately, these beliefs are shaped by their pervasive religious faith. According to Reid (2003), the Buddhist legend maintains that Everest is home to a goddess bearing a bowl of food and a mongoose spitting jewels. Consequently, those who have lived in its shadow for centuries treat the mountain like a goddess. For instance, the Sherpas will not step foot on the mountain until a puja, or religious ceremony is performed. The ritual can be described as a petitioning of the gods for permission to climb and for good weather and safe passage. The ceremony requires that the team, which usually includes most Western climbers, gather around a stupa-like structure that acts as the site of worship. A ten foot wooden flagpole is planted in the center of the stupa capped with a juniper bough. Five long chains of different colour prayer flags are strung from the pole above, which radiate in a spoke-like fashion to

protect the expedition from harm. The ceremony is conducted by a lama who engages in a series of chants with the intended purpose of summoning eight categories of deities including Miyolangsangma, the bountiful protector goddess of Everest (Norgay & Coburn, 2001). Before they step on the mountain, the climbing gear of every team member gets blessed and purified. Meditation and prayer takes place during the ceremony.

Everest Climbing Routes

Mountaineers frequently climb Everest via two popular routes: The South Col* and Western Cwm* located on the Nepalese side of the mountain, and the North Col and the Northeast Ridge, which is located on the Tibetan side of the mountain. There are, however, 13 additional routes that are recognized as ways to the top including the South-East Ridge Route, North Ridge, West Ridge with traverse of the North Face, Southwest Face, entire West Ridge, North Face, east side of the South Pillar, Southwest Pillar and the West Ridge, East or Kangshung Face, Great Couloir of the North Face, upper North Face, southern buttress of the East Face, Northeast Ridge from the East Rongbuk glacier, and the Northeast ridge from a couloir to its east. Between the years 1953 and 1996 climbers have been successful in reaching the summit via these previously unclimbed routes. The route that was climbed by the participants who were involved in the present study is described in detail in the findings section of this dissertation.

Few researchers have chosen to examine high altitude climbing as a behavior of interest (Lester, 2004) thus the literature in this area is sparse. Consequently, the next section will focus on psychological studies that have been carried out with high altitude climbers.

Psychological Research

The psychological studies that have been conducted with high altitude climbers mainly focused on personality (Breivik, 1996; Freixanet, 1991), psychological functioning in high

altitude (Missoum, Rosnet & Richalet, 1992; Ryn, 1988), mental strategies of elite Mt. Everest climbers (Burke & Orlick, 2003), and narcissism and regression in the May 1996 Everest climbing disaster (Elmes & Barry, 1999). This section will provide a brief overview of the studies that have been carried out in these four areas of psychological research to highlight what is already known about what takes place in the minds of climbers at high altitude.

Personality Types

An individual's personality predisposition has been widely researched to explain what motivates people to seek out risk and participate in the sport of high altitude climbing. One area that stands out in the personality research is that high altitude climbers tend to be sensation seekers. High sensation seekers search for situations that are unfamiliar or risky (Breivik, 1996). Mountain climbers score high on Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking Scale (Breivik, 1996; Freixanet, 1991; Rossi & Cereatti, 1993). The subscales include Thrill and Adventure (TAS), Experience Seeking (ES), Disinhibition (DIS), and Boredom Susceptibility (BS). This measure has been used across a wide range of studies to assess the sensation seeking needs of athletes in a variety of high-risk sports. According to Rossi and Cereatti, a sensation seeker is an individual characterized by a need for intense stimulation and new, complex, and varied experiences who, in the attempt to seek these kinds of experiences is prone to assume physical and social risks. A high-risk sport, such as high altitude mountaineering, is a means to meet sensation-seeking needs (Rossi & Cereatti, 1993).

Some researchers also examined the general personality profile of high altitude participants. Findings indicate that a certain personality profile exists for mountain climbers. Climbers share similar characteristics of low anxiety, high sociability, tough mindedness, and control (Breivik, 1996; Freixanet, 1991; Magni, Rupolo, Simini, Leo, & Rampazzo, 1985). Breivik as well as Magni and colleagues, both examined the personality of Everest climbers

using the Cattell 16 PF questionnaire. These researchers found that elite climbers score low on anxiety and super ego and high on emotional stability and dominance. The results are varied, however, with respect to extroversion. Breivik found that elite climbers score high on extroversion while Magni et al. found the opposite. Freixanet also examined the personality profiles of participants engaged in high altitude climbing using the Eysenck Personality questionnaire. Results indicated that participants were low in anxiety and neuroticism and high on extroversion and emotional stability.

Psychological Functioning in High Altitude

As previously mentioned in this study, high altitude is one environmental challenge encountered by climbers on their journey to the summit of Mount Everest. Clearly, the shortage of oxygen at high altitude not only can have an affect on the climber's physiological capacity but it can also have a serious impact on the psychological frame of mind of participants. Two separate studies (Missoum, Rosnet, & Richalet, 1992; Ryn, 1988) are discussed below to highlight the psychological functioning of climbers in high altitude.

A relationship exists between high altitude environments and impaired psychological functioning (Missoum, Rosnet & Richalet, 1992; Ryn, 1988). In a study conducted by Missoum et al., the relationship between acute mountain sickness and certain psychological factors was explored. Acute mountain sickness (AMS) can be defined as a pathological manifestation of the organism when exposed to lower atmospheric pressures (Missoum et al.). Using the Bortner's scale of behavioral adaptation to stress in subjects susceptible and not susceptible to AMS, Missoum et al. found that people susceptible to AMS were significantly more anxious than the participants not susceptible to AMS. Climbers susceptible to AMS scored higher in regards to their level of stress just prior to the final push to the summit. Their state of anxiety rose greatly at

elevations above 3500 m and they experienced AMS symptoms such as headaches, nausea, vomiting, insomnia, etc.

Ryn (1988) analyzed mental disturbances under high altitude stress. His findings were based on a group of 80 Polish alpinists who participated in four separate mountain expeditions to the Hindu Kush Mountains and to the Andes. For each participant, average periods of stay at high altitudes in the zones 3000-4000 m, 4000-5000 m, 6000-7000 m, and over 7000 m above sea level were established for research purposes. Psychiatric and psychological examinations, direct observation, and interviews were the main methods of data collection.

Based on the results from the four expeditions, Ryn (1988) concluded that at the altitude of 3000-4000 m, 80% of the participants suffered from neurasthenic syndrome. According to Ryn, the neurasthenic syndrome had two forms: the apathetic-depressive form and the euphoric-impulsive form. Examples of symptoms of the apathetic-depressive form include a decrease of psycho-motoric capacity, mental exhaustion, slowing down of thinking process, and growing indifferent and disinterested. In the euphoric-impulsive form, symptoms include mood of elation bordering on euphoria, the feeling of unexplained happiness, irritability, explosiveness, and episodes of floating anxiety, which can involve feeling nervous, jumpy, oversensitive, aggressive, and anti-social. Out of all 80 participants, 76 people suffered one or both forms of neurasthenic syndrome in alternate occurrence.

Above 7000 m, 35% of the participants experienced acute organic brain syndrome effecting psycho-motoric drive, intellectual function, and disturbances of consciousness and orientation. According to Ryn (1988), examples of symptoms of acute brain syndrome include a decrease of motoric and mental activity, aversion or inability to perform even the simplest activities, weakening of defense mechanisms, slowing down of thinking processes, a decreased

ability to evaluate critically the objective danger, and episodes of amnesia. A loss of consciousness was also found. Some participants experienced disturbances of consciousness, particularly during excessive periods of fatigue. Several climbers lost consciousness for up to a dozen minutes as they climbed. Clearly, the affects of high altitude can have a profound affect on the psychological functioning of climbers.

Mental Strategies of Elite Mount Everest Climbers

In a study carried out by Burke and Orlick (2003), the mental strategies of elite Mount Everest climbers were investigated. Individual interviews were carried out with 10 climbers who have successfully reached the summit of Mount Everest at least once. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to explore the mental strategies used to prepare for and successfully overcome obstacles while ascending and descending the mountain. In particular, the climbers were asked about their experiences: a) preparing for the overall challenge, b) making the ascent from base camp to camp 1, 2, 3 4, and reaching the summit, c) making the descent from the summit to base camp, and d) overcoming obstacles on the mountain. Common strategies of success were identified, as well as factors that created difficulty on the mountain. The themes of focus, mental toughness, short-term goals, drawing on past experience, connecting to one's body, feeling support from other climbers, and belief in personal capacities were seen to have importance in overcoming adversity on the mountain. According to Burke and Orlick (2003), mental strategies are required to stay alive and successfully complete the complex, high risk, high endurance challenge of climbing Mount Everest.

Narcissism and Regression in the 1996 Everest climbing disaster

In a study on narcissism and regression in the May 1996 Everest climbing disaster, Elmes and Barry (1999), demonstrated how historical changes in the culture of high altitude climbing encouraged the surfacing of dysfunctional narcissistic and competitive behavior, and ineffective

work-group cultures that ultimately contributed to numerous climbing deaths. Based on archival data, articles, transcripts of taped interviews, video accounts, and copies of round table Internet discussions collected before, during, and after the disaster occurred, the findings in this study show that the commercialization of high altitude climbing fostered ineffective leadership approaches. In effect, as a result of the rise in the number of less skilled climbers taking extreme risks to reach the summit of Everest, there has been an increase in the number of adventure travel companies run by ambitious entrepreneurs (Elmes & Barry). Consequently, climbing leaders and guides took on a more dependent model of authority. That is, rather than relying on the traditional climbing practice of consensus decision-making, the role of the leader was more burdensome as clients were fundamentally dependent on them or their systems for survival. According to Elmes and Barry, “because of this shift in leadership orientation, leaders and guides had to cope with more work and greater complexity than if they had had a more interdependent, collaborative leadership approach” (p.178).

The findings in this study reveal that because of the shift in the cultural set-up of the climbing expedition noted above, the psychological makeup of climbers (particularly clients) changed (Elmes & Barry). According to Elmes and Barry, adventure-climbing clients not only became less skilled than their predecessors, but also more “narcissistically crippled” (p.179). Narcissism can be either a healthy or unhealthy structure of the self (Elmes & Barry). Healthy narcissism or positive self-regard is, according to Pulver (1970), “high self-esteem based on predominately pleasurable affect self-representation linkages” (p. 336). It is characterized by the ability to feel positive about one-self, confident, and capable. Unhealthy narcissism or self-inflation is “self-centeredness or apparent high regard for oneself utilized as a defense against underlying unpleasurable linkages” (Pulver, 1970, p. 336). In particular, the climbers who were involved in the May 1996 disaster tended to deny their limitations and many felt that they were entitled to reach the summit considering the large sums of money that they paid (Elmes & Barry).

Because very little is known about the cognitive dissonance of climbers, this next section will highlight autobiographical accounts of what appears to be the arousal and reduction of cognitive dissonance of high altitude climbers.

Autobiographies of High Altitude Climbers

There are no empirical studies that have previously examined the cognitive dissonance of Mount Everest climbers. Consequently, the following section will highlight autobiographical accounts (Gammelgaard, 1996; Hornbein, 2003; Krakauer, 1997b; Messner, 2003; Norgay & Coburn, 2001; Wickwire & Bullitt, 1998) of what appears to be the arousal and reduction of cognitive dissonance of high altitude climbers based on a review of published autobiographies. Rhetorical indicators (i.e. language representation) present in the narrative texts were used to establish the presence of cognitive dissonance. Specifically, 5 indicators that establish claims that cognitive dissonance is occurring were analyzed in the narrative representations below (see Table 1 for examples). Examples of rhetorical indicators used include: a) uses of particular words that denote specific deeply felt feelings of being discomfited; b) uses of scenes from memory to communicate felt tension or conflict; c) discursive repetitions that portray 'self' as descent but afflicted in certain unavoidable ways; d) narrative strategies that displace blame from self to others and; e) narrative reconstruction of the past through symbolization in a way that signifies meaning for the present and the future. Direct quotes from the autobiographies are used to portray the climbers' perspectives in their own words.

Into Thin Air, by Jon Krakauer

Into Thin Air (1997b) is a detailed account of one climber's struggle to make sense out of a tragic and legendary event that occurred on Mount Everest in 1996. On May 10 1996 Jon Krakauer, a novice high altitude mountaineer, was descending from the summit of the mountain when a rogue storm blew in without warning and killed nine climbers from four separate expeditions. The disturbing psychological effects of the incident provoked the climber to write a book to explain and describe the confusing sequence of events that occurred that day. He says:

Table 1

Examples of Rhetorical Strategies Used in Published Autobiographies

| Words that denote specific deeply felt feelings of being discomfited | Scenes that communicate felt tension or conflict | 'Self' as descent but afflicted | Blame from self to others | Reconstruction of the past through symbolization |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| <p><i>"messy emotions"</i> <i>"fog", "guilty"</i> <i>"foolish"</i> (Krakauer, 1997b)</p> | <p><i>"It was to end tragically but this does not mean that our decision to descend into the unknown was an unreasonable one to make... it was the only possible way out of the very serious situation we were in"</i> (Messner, 2003, p.204)</p> | <p><i>"I worried a lot about my family. I could blame only myself if I were injured, regardless of the circumstances, and when frightening images of the mountain arose, I felt guilty in advance"</i> (Norgay & Coburn, 2001, p.58)</p> | <p><i>(i.e. Krakauer blames the Russian guide for guiding without oxygen and one of the Sherpas for also climbing the mountain without bottled oxygen).</i> (Krakauer, 1997)</p> | <p><i>"Existence on a mountain is simple. ...it is this simplicity that strips the veneer off civilization and makes that which is meaningful easier to come by – the pleasure of deep companionship, moments of uninhibited humour, the tasting of hardship, sorrow, beauty, and joy"</i> (Hornbein, 2003, p.151)</p> |

“The Everest climb had rocked my life to its core, and it became desperately important for me to record the events in complete detail” (p. xvi). Compared to his climbing partner, who believed that there was nothing more he could have done to save the lives of those who died on the mountain that day, Krakauer questioned whether he had done all he could to help. He shares, “In contrast to Schoening, I’ll never be sure. And the enviable peace of which he speaks eludes me” (p. 283). Krakauer’s experience climbing Mount Everest led to feelings of psychological discomfort. It is apparent throughout his book that he is trying to restore a sense of cognitive consistency to help him cope with his discomfort.

At the age of forty-one, Krakauer was sent to the mountain by *Outside Magazine* to participate in, and write about, a guided ascent of Mount Everest. Since childhood, he dreamed of climbing the highest peak on the planet and when the opportunity presented itself to write an article about the growing commercialization of the mountain, he was elated. His editors agreed to book him with one of the more reputable guide services and cover the \$65,000 fee to climb the mountain and cover the story. Even though he had no experience climbing above 17,200 ft he decided to fulfill his boyhood fantasy and went as one of eight clients on an expedition led by a well-known guide from New Zealand named Rob Hall.

The author’s experience climbing Mount Everest left him badly shaken. Evidence of psychological discomfort is scattered throughout the book. As he introduces the reader to his harrowing tale, he shares:

I tried to put Everest out of my mind and get on with my life, but that turned out to be impossible. Through a fog of messy emotions, I continued trying to make sense of what had happened up there. (p. XV).

Near the end of the book, the reason for his psychological discomfort is made clear to the reader. Krakauer felt partially responsible for the death of his fellow climbers:

My actions, or failure to act, played a direct role in the death of Andy Harris. And while Yasuko Namba lay dying on the South Col, I was a mere 350 yards away, huddled inside a tent, oblivious to her struggle, concerned only with my safety (p. 283).

The consequences of Krakauer's actions, or failure to act, on the mountain likely threatened his self-concept creating psychological discomfort. Krakauer states: "The stain this has left on my psyche is not the sort of thing that washes off after a few months of grief and guilt-ridden self-reproach" (p. 283). Clearly, he felt guilty for the way things unfolded on the mountain that day.

Throughout the book, it is clear that Krakauer is trying to make peace with the events that occurred on the mountain. For instance, when he discusses the death of fellow climber Andy Harris, he tries to maintain his self-concept as a decent and responsible person. He does this by highlighting his own altitude sickness, his exhaustion, his difficulty with the cold after his struggle down the mountain during a storm, and his mistaken belief that he saw Harris precede him into the safety of camp 4. In a magazine article that he wrote for *Outside*, he blames his role in the death of his guide on the hierarchical structure of the group:

There is no way I should have ever left him on the mountain. I should have recognized that he was hypoxic and in trouble...If I had been on Everest with six or seven friends instead of climbing as a client on a guided trip, I never would have descended to my tent and gone off to sleep without accounting for each of my partners (Krakauer, 1997a, p. 61-62).

Through this process of self-justification, Krakauer appears to (re)construct the past in such a way that helps him reduce his dissonance. Clearly, he could not change the outcome of the incident to eliminate or reduce his psychological discomfort. Upon reflection, however, he was able to focus on his diminished physical and mental state and the fact that he was climbing on a guided ascent of the mountain, which helped him to no longer feel like he acted in an irresponsible manner. Reconstructing his reality in this manner likely helped him to reduce the

psychological discomfort he was experiencing and restore his self-concept as decent and responsible.

The Naked Mountain, by Reinhold Messner

In June 1970 a tragic event unfolded on Nanga Parbat that not only sparked a bitter and long lasting controversy in the public eye, but also had a profound and ongoing influence on the life of a world-renowned mountaineer. Reinhold Messner, long considered one of the world's best mountaineers, and his brother Guthner Messner set out to traverse the dangerous 8,125 m pillar, situated in the Karakoram chain at the western end of the Himalayas, from south to northwest. Translated from Urdu to mean 'the naked mountain,' Nanga Parbat is considered by many to be a very challenging and dangerous peak to climb. The percentage of people who summit the mountain relative to the number of attempts is quite low. Moreover, the percentage of deaths per capita of attempts is relatively high, making the ninth tallest mountain in the world one of the more daunting. The event that unfolded on the mountain in 1970 is representative of this statistic. In the autobiography *The Naked Mountain* (2003), Reinhold Messner reveals his version of the tragedy that befell him. Experiences with cognitive dissonance arousal and reduction are clearly evident throughout the book.

Reinhold Messner was the first man to climb Everest solo in 1980 without the aid of oxygen, and the first man to climb all 14 of the world's 8,000-meter peaks without oxygen. Known for his strong character and ruthless determination, the only thing Reinhold truly cared for in his life was climbing. At one point in his autobiography he says, "Everything else – job, girls, career – are pushed into the background. The only challenges I aspire to are the mountain summits, faces, and ridges" (p. 97). He lived his life obsessed by the idea of climbing higher, harder, and further and in 1970 an opportunity to challenge himself in this regard presented itself when he got invited to join an expedition to Nanga Parbat. During his descent from the summit of the mountain, however, Reinhold was faced with a decision that would impact his life forever. On the brink of exhaustion and without food and water his brother had succumbed to altitude

sickness and was unable to descend via the technically challenging route they had just ascended. Thus, Reinhold made the decision to climb down the Damir Flank. It was a decision that left his brother dead and would leave a scar on his psyche for years to come.

Reinhold's climb on Nanga Parbat became a story of epic proportions within, and to a lesser extent outside, the mountaineering community. He was accused not only by the public but also by his mountaineering companions of taking unnecessary risks and sacrificing his brother for his own glory. According to the *Globe and Mail* (Aug, 2005) two other climbers who took part in the ascent, but did not reach the summit, published books in Germany claiming that Reinhold had sent his brother down the mountain's extremely dangerous Rupal flank while he chose to descend a different route that had never before been climbed. They said the reason Reinhold heartlessly left his ailing brother to fend for himself was so he could become the first climber in history to achieve such a descent (interestingly 35 years later Gunther's body was discovered in the snow half way up Nanga Parbat on the western Diamar face and not the Rupal face) (*Globe and Mail*, Aug 2005). Regardless of how things 'truly' unfolded on the mountain that day, Reinhold struggles to make sense of significant events that took place on the mountain in his autobiography. It is obvious that the consequences of his decision to climb down the western Diamar face created psychological discomfort for him. He shares:

In the intervening years, I have retold the whole story a hundred times. Calling to mind the details over and over again, I have tried to hold on to Gunther and at the same time let go of him piece by piece (p. 40).

It is apparent throughout the book that Reinhold is trying to restore a sense of cognitive self-consistency to help him cope with his psychological discomfort. He does this by describing his role in the death of his brother in such a way that upholds his self-concept as a sensible person. He stresses that there were only a limited number of routes that were possible to descend and at 8000 meters one cannot afford the time to start searching around for the best way down. Specifically, he rationalizes his decision saying:

It was to end tragically but this does not mean that our decision to descend into the unknown was an unreasonable one to make. In the circumstance it was the only possible way out of the very serious situation we were in (p. 204).

Reinhold continues to defend his decision to descend the Western Diamar face by highlighting Gunther's exhausted and diminished state: "In Gunther's state it would have been too dangerous to descend the Rupal Face and it would soon be dark, so we were forced to piece together an alternative plan" (p. 204). Rather than outright say that he may have made a poor decision that led to the death of his brother, Messner recalled the past in a way that shaped his current sense of self as sensible and good so as to reduce the dissonance he was experiencing.

Touching My Father's Soul, by Jamling Tenzing Norgay and Broughton Coburn

Jamling Tenzing Norgay's autobiography of his ascent during the infamous 1996 Mount Everest disaster is more than simply one man's account of the dramatic events of this unforgettable episode. His story is primarily about the triumphs and tribulations involved in fulfilling his lifelong dream of following in the footsteps of his legendary mountaineering father Tenzing Norgay who, with Sir Edmund Hillary, was the first to reach the summit in 1953. In the book *Touching My Father's Soul*, Jamling Tenzing Norgay recounts his journey to the top of the world and discusses the spiritual life of the Sherpas and his personal quest to come to terms with his past. Experiences with cognitive dissonance arousal and reduction are clearly evident throughout the book.

Jamling was firmly committed to climbing Everest at a very young age. His desire to take part in an expedition to the mountain was driven primarily by a need to both uphold his father's legacy and learn about the man who was a painfully transient presence during childhood. In 1996, his opportunity to fulfill his lifelong dream arrived when Jamling was invited to join the IMAX filming expedition to Everest led by American mountaineer David Breashears. Although his desire to climb Everest was paramount, his decision to climb the mountain created much

psychological discomfort for him. After receiving a divination – a forecast into the future done by a high lama – he shared:

Not only would I be defying my wife if I chose to climb, but I'd also be going against my family and my religious heritage. The last time my mother defied the cautious directive of a divination, she died (p. 10).

Before setting out on his long awaited journey to climb Sagamartha, Jamling requested a divination from a high lama and learned that the forecast for the upcoming season on Everest was unfavorable. Even though his belief in Buddhism was skeptical, the news he received made him feel uneasy about his decision to climb the mountain. Consequently, he began questioning whether or not he should follow through with his decision:

I was beginning to think that I should heed the high lama's premonition. For one thing, I was still firmly planted in the householder stage of life, with a wife, young daughter, and thoughts of more children. Because I had an obligation to care for them, I had an obligation to care for myself (p. 14).

Choosing to climb the mountain despite the high lama's premonition appeared to conflict with Jamling's responsible nature. Deliberately placing himself in an environment that was deemed especially dangerous that season at the potential cost of abandoning his family created psychological discomfort for him.

As Jamling continues to contemplate his decision to join the American expedition to Mount Everest he appears to take steps to reduce the dissonance he was experiencing. He reflects: "how can I drop out with only three months before the start of the climb, it would cast a long shadow over the expedition, and I felt, over my father's name and my family's legacy." (p.5). Above all else, he convinced himself that he chose not to climb the mountain he would

regret his decision for the rest of his life. To help him reduce his psychological discomfort he set out to request a second divination from a high lama who is apparently known in the community for his accurate forecasts. Interestingly, the divination remained ominous however the lama supported Jamling's decision to climb the mountain believing that his intentions were pure. Consequently, with the lama's backing Jamling was able to reduce his psychological discomfort. After leaving the monastery he shares: "I felt infused with a sense of calm and warmth and sense of proximity to Guru Rimpoche" (p. 30). Seeking new cognitive elements that supported his decision to climb the mountain helped Jamling restore his self-concept as decent and responsible.

The psychological discomfort that Jamling experienced in relation to his decision to climb the mountain continued to prevail throughout the expedition. Arriving at Base Camp he says: "I worried a lot about my family. I could blame only myself if I were injured, regardless of the circumstances, and when frightening images of the mountain arose, I felt guilty in advance" (p. 58). His manner of coping with the threat to his self-concept was to engage in offerings, rituals, and prayers. Jamling's belief in Buddhism strengthened considerably during the climb. As more and more disastrous events began to unfold on the mountain he embraced the traditions of the Buddhist faith. He shares:

While studying in the United States, I tended to think that the Sherpa's attention to the mystical and religious aspects of the mountain was little more than superstition and imaginings. But once I arrived in the lap of the mountain, surrounded by Sherpas who believed, and confronted by a rich history of death – and death itself – I could no longer remain cynical. (p.155)

To help him cope with his psychological discomfort Jamling fully embraced the teachings of the Buddhist faith. Giving over to a higher power allowed him to feel protected

from death. In turn, the guilt he felt as a result of abandoning his family to pursue his dream subsided to the point that he was able to continue climbing the mountain.

Climbing High, by Lene Gammelgaard

Lene Gammelgaard (1996) describes her journey as the first Scandinavian woman to reach the roof of the world in her autobiography *Climbing High*. A team member of one of the expeditions that was directly involved in the May 1996 disaster, Lene's story provides a unique perspective on the chain of events that took place on Mount Everest that fateful day when a raging storm hit the mountain and claimed the lives of nine climbers. As she describes her path toward fulfilling her goal of reaching the summit of Mount Everest experiences with cognitive dissonance are evident.

Choosing to put one's life at risk for mountaineering can be psychologically discomfoting for some people. Lene's autobiography clearly illustrates this discomfort. At the very beginning of her book, she states:

I knew deep within that it was utterly foolish to try to reach the summit of the world at the risk of my life. I did not believe that happiness lay at the top of the world's highest mountain. Nor did I believe that once having stood on top, life, or I would change or become better (p. 5).

As she recounts her struggle with her decision to attempt to climb the highest mountain in the world, she does so in such a way as to maintain her sense of self as intelligent. She achieves this by focusing on the positive aspects of mountaineering such as the beauty of the high mountains, the connection with other climbers, and the opportunity it provides to grow and reach one's true potential. For instance in asking herself why she shouldn't climb the highest mountain in the world she shares:

I know this drive is more than the desire to summit Everest, much more than the rather superficial act of climbing to the top of that mountain. For periods in my life I have hidden from the world because that was what I needed to do. But it is obvious that now I must grow, I must strive to reach my full potential. (p.11).

In this way, Lene reduces her dissonance by adding new cognitive elements that are consonant with climbing Everest. She convinces herself that climbing the mountain is a worthwhile and meaningful act by (re)constructing her understanding of what it means to her to climb the highest peak on the planet. In effect she comes to believe that climbing Everest is an act of self-actualization. She also avoids information that might increase the existing dissonance. She shares:

Selectively I studied the accounts of successful expeditions and communicated with people who have a playful, positive attitude toward mountaineering. My incentive was to code my mind with enough positive input to overrule my own healthy skepticism and to forget the stories I myself have gathered over the years as arguments against climbing mountains (p. 24).

In this case, seeking new information that supported climbing and discounting information against climbing reduced the magnitude of her dissonance and helped her restore her sense of self as intelligent.

Addicted to Danger, by Jim Wickwire and Dorothy Bullitt

Addicted to Danger (1998) is a memoir written in part by Jim Wickwire, one of America's most accomplished high altitude mountaineers. A successful Seattle attorney, Wickwire began climbing at 20 years of age. Risking his life on some of the most dangerous mountains in the world, climbing quickly became a remarkably important and substantial part of Wickwire's life. Some of his climbing highlights include: one of the first two Americans to reach

the summit of K2, the world's second highest and most dangerous mountains to climb, and the first American to reach the summit of Mount Everest in 1963. In his autobiography, Wickwire recounts his past climbing adventures including the triumphs and tragedies he has faced. He also addresses the impact some of his decisions have had on his life. Experiences with cognitive dissonance arousal and reduction are clearly evident throughout the book.

At one point in the book, it is clear that Wickwire experiences psychological discomfort while trapped alone on the side of the mountain. He recalls,

The hardest part of the night was not the cold or the fear, but the realization of how stupid I'd been to come. What the hell was I trying to prove? Coming to climb McKinley solo was nothing but an ego trip. Putting my life at such great risk when I had five small children at home was incredibly irresponsible and utterly selfish (p. 77).

The act of climbing the mountain alone conflicted with Wickwire's sense of self as responsible and considerate. To reduce the dissonance he was experiencing Wickwire changed his behavior. So that he no longer felt his self-concept was being threatened by his decision to climb alone, he admitted defeat and the very next day descended the face toward Base Camp. Changing his behavior and returning home helped him cope with his psychological discomfort.

After committing to his decision to no longer climb solo, it is clear that Wickwire took steps to reduce his psychological discomfort and restore his sense of self. He says:

Mary Schuman was right. Solo climbing is a denial of what's best in mountaineering: that close bond with the man on the other end of the rope. Maybe the positive thing that will come out of this expedition is a return to climbing with the best of companions. Perhaps I have gotten too wrapped up in notions of self-importance (p. 77).

Wickwire does not give up the sport of mountaineering, however, by deciding to no longer climb alone he reduces the psychological discomfort he was feeling.

Everest: The West Ridge, by Tom Hornbein

In the excerpt taken from the autobiography *Everest: The West Ridge*, in volume IV of *The Mountaineers Mythology Series* (2003), Tom Hornbein recounts his final days of the 1963 American Mount Everest expedition. Caught up high on the mountain in the brunt of a wicked storm, after ascending Everest by a new route in virtual alpine style, anesthesiologist Hornbein discusses how he and his climbing partner heroically survive the tragedy that unfolds before them. Specifically, he highlights his rendezvous with two of his teammates who were also ascending Everest, however by means of a different route, and the risky, unplanned bivouac at 28,000ft that ensued. As Hornbein discusses the events of this great Himalayan climbing epic, that mark the first successful traverse of the world's highest peak via a new route, experiences with cognitive dissonance arousal and reduction are clearly evident.

Hornbein joined a large expedition to Mount Everest in 1963, led by Norman Dyhrenfurth, because of its stated objectives. The expedition intended on putting the first American on the summit of Everest as well as attempting a new route. It was the appeal of a new route on Everest that attracted Hornbein to the expedition. He shares: "Growing excitement lured my thoughts again and again to the West Ridge. My dreams were of the Reconnaissance of the West Shoulder and the possibilities that lay above" (p.132). All things considered, Hornbein joined the American expedition to climb the West Ridge. But, his opportunity to realize his dream almost came to an end when the team encountered some difficulties part way through the expedition. Successfully achieving the goals of the expedition seemed daunting, and so to ensure an American success, Dyhrenfurth temporarily changed the plan and put the team's resources into place to support the effort of an ascent via the traditional South Col route. Hornbein was angry. His frustration with the turn of events did not subside until a member of his expedition finally reached the summit and his opportunity to climb the West Ridge route became possible. At this point, his desire to fulfill his goal had reached critical mass.

Descending the mountain from the summit ended tragically. In difficult climbing conditions, Hornbein and his climbing partner, along with two of their teammates that they haphazardly stumbled across while also making their way down from the summit, were forced to spend the night on the side of the mountain. With each passing hour, the climbers grew increasingly tired and were close to collapsing from the cold. Hornbein's climbing partner developed frostbite on his feet to the point that he would have to get his toes amputated. This turn of events created psychological discomfort for Hornbein:

Why hadn't I known that his feet were numb? Surely I could have done something, if only... We'd climbed Everest. What good was it to Jake? To Willy? To Barrel? To Norman, with Everest all done now? And to the rest of us? What waits? What price less tangible than toes? There must be something more to it than toiling over the top of another, albeit expensive, mountain. (p. 150)

Reflecting on the turn of events that transpired on the mountain during the storm created psychological discomfort for Hornbein. His actions, or failure to act, while his climbing partner lay on the side of the mountain freezing his feet conflicted with Hornbein's sense of self. Moreover, reaching the summit at the cost of physical injury caused Hornbein to question his actions. To help make sense of his motivation to climb Everest he shares:

Existence on a mountain is simple...it is this simplicity that strips the veneer off civilization and makes that which is meaningful easier to come by – the pleasure of deep companionship, moments of uninhibited humor, the tasting of hardship, sorrow, beauty, joy. (p.151)

In summary, it appears from autobiographies that high altitude climbers experience dissonance arousal on and off the mountain and as a result, they use dissonance reduction mechanisms to restore cognitive consistency. In the aforementioned examples, the cognitive dissonance seemed to result from decisions or actions that threatened the climbers' sense of self.

The mechanisms that were used to reduce or eliminate the dissonance seemed to have involved a process of self-justification: climbers either changed their cognitions or attitudes so that the threat to the self no longer prevailed, or they added new cognitive elements to restore a sense of competence and morality. The following section will outline the conceptual framework that was used to guide the present study. In particular Aronson's self consistency perspective of Festinger's (1957) original dissonance theory and the Resonance Performance Model will be summarized.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Over 45 years after the publication of Leon Festinger's book, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, revisions to the original theory have been proposed. Most of the revised versions of dissonance theory assume, along with the original version, that situations evoking dissonance produce a motivation that results in genuine cognitive changes (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). These revisions differ, however, in their interpretation of what they believe is the nature of the motivation underlying the cognitive changes that result from dissonance. Based on the review of published mountaineering autobiographies, Aronson's (1968, 1992) self-consistency revision of Festinger's (1957) original ideas was deemed most appropriate to use as a conceptual framework for this study. That is, the autobiographical accounts of the climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance, reviewed in the previous section of this study, seemed to have resulted from actions or decisions that threatened their self-concept. The mechanisms that were used to try and reduce or eliminate their dissonance seemed to have involved a process of renewing the threatened elements of their self-concept. In this section, Aronson's self-consistency perspective of cognitive dissonance will be reviewed.

Research exploring the role of feelings in dissonance processes including the nature of psychological discomfort is sparse. For instance, only a few studies have directly assessed the experienced psychological discomfort associated with dissonance from an affective standpoint (e.g. Elliot & Devine, 1994; Shaffer, 1975; Zanna & Cooper, 1974). These studies found that dissonance is associated with increased feelings of negative affect. Because people's experiences with cognitive dissonance appear to involve an affective component whereby individuals "feel" a sense of psychological discomfort, the Resonance Performance Model (Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2002) was chosen as a second framework to examine the second objective of this study, which was to explore the role of feelings in dissonance processes. Consequently, this section is divided into two parts: (a) Aronson's self-consistency perspective of the theory of cognitive dissonance and; (b) The Resonance Performance Model.

Aronson's Self-Consistency Perspective

The first objective of the present study was to explore the cognitive dissonance experienced by Mount Everest climbers in their natural setting based on Aronson's (1968/1992) self-consistency revision of Festinger's (1957) original dissonance theory. As a result, Aronson's cognitive dissonance perspective is reviewed.

As the theory of cognitive dissonance materialized, researchers began striving to clarify and tighten Festinger's original assumptions through an organized search for the circumstances under which dissonance was most likely to occur. Aronson (1968) proposed one of the first revisions of the original dissonance theory that stated that a person's self-concept is at the very core of dissonance theory (Aronson, 1968; Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962; Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992). In his view, dissonance is most likely to occur when people voluntarily act in a ways that violate an important element of their self-concept. Accordingly, dissonance is not the result of just any two inconsistent cognitions; rather, it depends on "the specific cognitive elements that constitute the individual's self-concept, as well as the expectations for behavior that are derived from these self-relevant cognitions" (Thibodeau & Aronson, p. 592). The greater the personal involvement involved in the discrepant act and the smaller the external justification for that action, the greater the dissonance and, therefore the stronger the need for self-justification (Aronson, 1999).

Aronson maintains that dissonance is generated when people interpret a discrepancy between their behavior and their own standards for competence and morality, which derive from "the conventional morals and prevailing values of society" (Aronson, 1968, p. 17). In general, the populace has a favorable sense of self that they strive to uphold (Aronson, 1968). In particular, they want to see themselves as competent, moral, and able to predict their own behavior (Aronson, 1999). Consequently, when they act in ways that leave them feeling stupid, immoral, or confused dissonance is by and large generated. The reduction of dissonance involves efforts to maintain or restore the threatened elements of the self-concept through justification of

the discrepant behavior (Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992). That is, people will try to justify the self-discrepant act in a way that restores their pre-formed notion of self as both (a) morally good and (b) competent.

Aronson (1999) maintains that dissonance is a function of what people expect their behavior to reflect about their own standards for competence and morality (Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992). That is, dissonance occurs when people fall short of their expectations for behavior, which derive from self-relevant cognitions. For instance, in a study carried out by Aronson, Fried, and Stone (1991), students experienced dissonance after making a video in which they hypocritically urged their audience to use condoms; they were informed that the video would be shown to high school students. Because they themselves were not using condoms against the dangers of unprotected sex and their self-concept did not include behaving like a hypocrite, the students experienced psychological discomfort. In this instance, the dissonance was not generated as the result of the mere making of a video; rather, it was the full meaning of the act – the expectation that, as good, intelligent, honorable people, they would behave with integrity coupled with the cognition that they did not act with integrity. In other words, the knowledge that they were preaching what they were not always practicing was inconsistent with their self-concept as honorable individuals. In effect, “it is the psychological significance of a behavior, as it reflects on the self, that carries the potential to arouse dissonance” (Thibodeau & Aronson, p. 594).

Evidence that the self-concept mediates dissonance arousal stems from experiments in which the self-concept has been directly manipulated (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962; Aronson & Mettee, 1968). In a series of research studies on cognitive dissonance and self-concept findings suggest that individuals with negative self-concepts will experience dissonance under different conditions than those with positive self-concepts (Aronson & Mettee, 1968; Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992). That is, people who do not hold very high expectations for competent or moral behavior (i.e., negative self-concept), dissonance would not be aroused following an incompetent

or immoral act, whereas people with higher expectancies for competent and moral character (i.e., high self-concept), would perceive a discrepancy and be motivated to seek self-justification (Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992). In a study conducted by Aronson and Carlsmith (1962), compared to college students with positive self-concepts, students who had developed negative self-concepts experienced cognitive dissonance when faced with success on a particular task. Achieving a successful performance conflicted with their self-concept as unintelligent. Because they preferred to be accurate in predicting their own behavior, they consequently took steps by changing their behavior to preserve a consistent, though negative, self-concept. This finding thus highlights that an important inference underlying the dissonance phenomenon. That is, what generates dissonance is a subjective matter related to one's perception of self.

Cognitive consistency remains the central driving force underlying Aronson's (1968/1992) version of the dissonance phenomenon, yet in his view, inconsistent cognitions alone are not sufficient to produce dissonance. The emphasis, rather, is shifted to the self-concept. People may hold different standards for behavior that certain events are regarded as dissonant for some but not for others. That is, inconsistent elements of cognition that constitute the individual's self-concept generate dissonance. Consequently, people strive to maintain a positive and consistent sense of self through a process of self-justification. According to Harmon-Jones and Mills (1999), Aronson's theoretical modification provides meaningful and clear predictions about where dissonance does and does not apply.

Dissonance Resulting From Effort

According to Festinger (1957) and Aronson (1968), in situations where people expend effort in order to reach a particular objective, yet fail to reach it, they will experience dissonance. The cognition that they are expending effort conflicts with the cognition that they are unrewarded. One way of reducing dissonance, in this instance, would be by leaving the situation and convincing themselves that they did not want the goal in the first place. But, consider individuals who do not readily leave the situation, and thus continue to go through a great deal of

trouble or pain to attain the goal without success. According to Aronson (1961), constantly attempting to attain the goal strengthens people's cognition that they really want the goal; thus, making it difficult for them to convince themselves that they did not really want the goal in the first place. Under these circumstances, dissonance must be reduced in a different manner. Aronson (1961) argues that people will find something else in the situation in which to attach value (i.e. unsuccessful climbers might reduce dissonance by boasting of the profound learning experience they received while challenging themselves on the mountain).

People who endure a great deal of discomfort to achieve something tend to value it more highly than persons who attain the same thing with a minimum of effort (Aronson & Mills, 1959). Because the cognition that the activity is unpleasant is dissonant with engaging in the activity people consequently come to like the things for which they suffer. It is widely recognized that high altitude alone exacts a very heavy toll from a person's energy and physical and mental resources (Emerson, 1966). Lassitude, weakness, breathlessness, and retardation of thought and action are the principal effects of high altitude, and are always present over 5485 meters (Bahrke & Shukitt-Hale, 1993). To reach the summit of Everest, climbers perform under extreme physical, psychological, and emotional duress. The cognition that climbing Everest is uncomfortable is likely dissonant with the cognition that they are smart and reasonable people, who make smart and reasonable decisions. The high-altitude climbing environment for this reason, likely lends itself to experiencing dissonance in this way.

As previously noted Aronson (1968, 1992) postulated that any time our actions threaten our self-concept, we experience psychological discomfort and attempt to reduce the dissonance through a process of self-justification to help us restore our self-concept as morally good. Based on the autobiographies of mountaineers previously reviewed, climbers appear to experience dissonance under these same circumstances. Aronson's (1968) perspective of dissonance theory was therefore deemed the most appropriate to use as the basic framework for studying the

cognitive dissonance experienced by Everest climbers. Since Aronson's (1968, 1992) dissonance perspective does not clearly describe self-concept, it will be reviewed in more detail.

Self-Concept

According to Bong and Clark (1999), definitions of self-concept vary widely. They range from self-descriptive behavior (Mintz & Muller, 1977) to feelings about oneself as a person or social being (Caplin, 1969). Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) stated:

In very broad terms, self-concept is a person's perception of himself. These perceptions are formed through his experience with his environment and are influenced especially by environmental reinforcements and significant others. We do not claim an entity within a person called "self-concept." Rather, we claim that the construct is potentially important and useful in explaining and predicting how one acts. One's perceptions of himself are thought to influence the ways in which he acts, and his acts in turn influence the ways in which he perceives himself.

(p.411)

A common theme underlying various definitions of self-concept appears to be that one's perception of the self is constructed from experience and from reflections on those experiences (Reeve, 2004; Shavelson, et al., 1976). It is a general representation of the self that is derived from specific life experiences (e.g. given my timid demeanor during the group discussion, on the school field trip, and at lunch, I perceive myself as "shy"). A person's self-concept encompasses a litany of specific life domains also known as self-schemas – cognitive generalizations about the self that are domain specific. The ones most important to the person make up the self-concept. Specific life domains may include peer acceptance, athletic competence, or relationship with parents. According to Markus (1977), it is this general conclusion, which is based on a range of self-schemas that people readily remember and use as building blocks for constructing and defining the self-concept.

Once individuals establish a well-defined self-schema in a particular domain, they generally act to preserve that self-view (Reeve, 2004). They maintain a consistent self by actively seeking out information that is consistent with their self-concept and by ignoring information that contradicts their self-view (Swann, 1983; Tesser, 1988). Moreover, individuals will attempt to create social environments that result in self-confirmatory feedback. A process called 'selective interaction' has been widely used to explain this phenomenon. According to Swann (1987), we intentionally choose to interact with others who confirm our self-view and we intentionally avoid others who treat us in ways that are inconsistent with our self-view. This behavior is motivated by a need for self-consistency. According to Reeve (2004), inconsistency and contradiction directed at a person's self-schema generates a negative affective state, which produces the motivation to restore consistency. This aspect of Reeve's (2004) motivational depiction of the self and its strivings can also be referred to as cognitive dissonance. In effect, the idea of striving to maintain self-consistency, especially when the opposite of one self-belief follows from the other (i.e. being a moral person but lying) is central to Aronson's (1969, 199) perspective of cognitive dissonance.

When self-discrepant feedback occurs, individuals are motivated to restore self-concept consistency. According to Reeve (2004) this process can occur in various ways. People can counter disconfirming feedback with compensatory self-inflation (Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985), self-affirmation (Steele, 1988) or engage in new behaviors to prove one's self view (Swann & Hill, 1982). According to Aronson (1968, 1992), however, people maintain self-concept consistency through a process of self-justification. Specifically, this process entails the individual distorting the self-discrepant information to the point that it loses its status as being discrepant information. In this scenario, the ultimate goal is to rescue the specific element of the self-concept threatened by discrepant behavior/information.

The term 'self-concept certainty' has been used to describe a person's confidence in his or her self-schema (Swann & Ely, 1984). When a person's self-concept certainty is high, their self-

schema tends to be deep-rooted and stable. Consequently, their self-schema rarely changes when faced with discrepant feedback. When low or moderate, however, discrepant feedback *can* eventually lead to self-schema change. According to Swann (1983, 1999), conflict between an uncertain self-schema and discrepant feedback instigates a “crisis self-verification.” When self-concept certainty is low discrepant feedback tends to overwhelm existing self-schemas and instigate self-concept change. When self-concept certainty is moderate, however, the individual resolves the threat to the self by seeking out additional self-relevant feedback. If the subsequent feedback is discrepant but ambiguous (i.e. easy to discredit), the person’s self-concept certainty will not change. If it is extremely discrepant the self-view does not change, but instead it lowers self-concept certainty making the person vulnerable to self-concept change in the future. Finally, if additional feedback is self-confirming the self-verification crisis ends by strengthening self-concept certainty.

Though self-concept can change, if self-concept certainty is low and self-discrepant feedback is extreme and unambiguous, it is rare. Rather, people frequently engage in a routine self-verification process that aims to maintain and validate one’s self-view. Both Swann (1983) and Aronson’s (1969, 1992) perspectives of the self are similar in that people strive to maintain a consistent sense of self. The two perspectives differ somewhat, however, in the way people restore self-concept consistency when faced with discrepant or contradictory information. Swann maintains that people with low self-concept certainty and under certain conditions moderate self-concept certainty will change their self-schema when faced with discrepant information. Moreover, if their self-concept certainty is moderate people will suspend judgment and seek additional information that will lead to maintaining, strengthening, or weakening self-concept certainty. Aronson, on the other hand, maintains that people regardless of their level of self-concept certainty, justify the discrepant information or act until it loses its status as self-discrepant information.

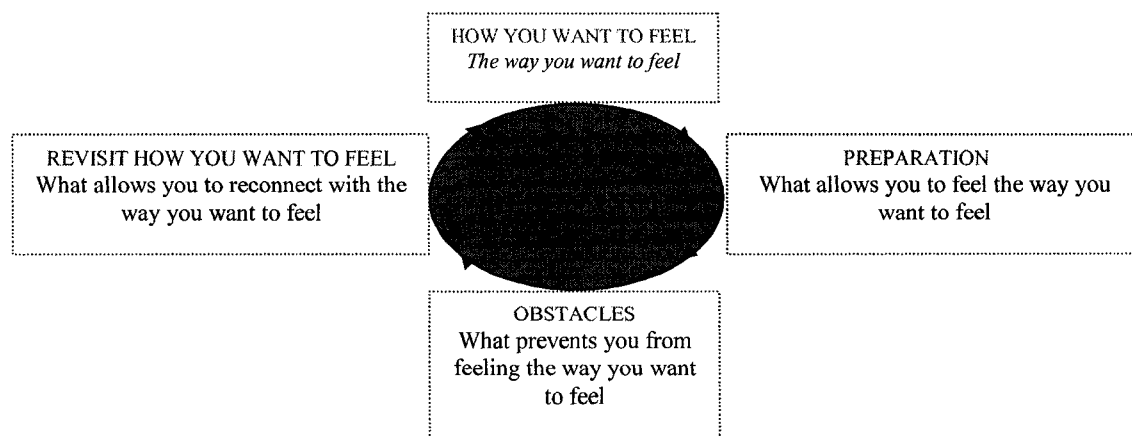
A person's self-concept is continually reinforced by evaluative inferences that reflect both cognitive and affective responses. For instance, Pajares (1996) maintained that self-concept includes competence judgments coupled with evaluative reactions and feelings of self-worth. Markus and Nurius (1986) viewed self-concept as "a system of affective-cognitive structures... about the self that lends structure and coherence to the individual's self-relevant experiences" (p. 955). According to Bong and Clark (1999), whereas a cognitive facet of self-concept consists of awareness and understandings of the self and its attributes, their definition also includes an affective facet of self-concept which incorporates one's feelings of self-worth and refers to approval or disapproval of the self in any given situation. Using Bong and Clark's (1999) definition of self-concept, Aronson's cognitive dissonance perspective was used in the present study to explore how the climbers' experienced cognitive dissonance including what role was played by cognitions of the self.

The present study set out to explore if feelings played a role in Mount climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance, using the Resonance Performance Model (Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush & Doell, 2002) as the framework. Consequently, the RPM is reviewed in the subsequent section. That is, the following section will outline a process that may increase our understanding of the role of feelings in climber's experiences with cognitive dissonance.

The Resonance Performance Model

Because of its focus on feel and strategies to reconnect with desired feelings when not experiencing them, the RPM (Newburg et al., 2002) was used to explore the role of feelings in climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance.

The RPM (see Figure 2) is an educational model developed to help individuals experience resonance on a consistent basis and enhance performance and well-being (Newburg et al., 2002). According to Newburg et al. (2002), resonance is a process that allows people to feel the way they want to feel, prepare to experience desired feelings, recognize obstacles that



The Resonance Performance Model (Newburg et al., 2002)

Figure 2. The Resonance Performance Model

prevent them from feeling the way they want to feel (e.g., cognitive dissonance), and reconnect with desired feelings when they are not experiencing them. The concept of resonance emerged from grounded theory research in which 300 in-depth interviews were conducted with experts from various domains including sports, performing arts, medicine, and business (Newburg et al., 2002). The purpose of each interview was to examine how these individuals became outstanding performers in their chosen field and led fulfilling lives in the process. Findings suggest that many high-caliber performers follow this typical process as they perform in their chosen field, which is typically experienced as a seamless fit or harmony between them and their environment. The findings led to the development of the RPM, which is a model used by practitioners to empower people to learn about themselves and increase their awareness and focus on how they want to feel and what they can do to sustain this in the face of adversity, big or small. Through a process of ongoing, deliberate self-reflection, individuals can learn how to overcome obstacles and reach their potential on a daily basis. The RPM comprises four components: (a) How you want to feel, (b) Preparation, (c) Obstacles, and (d) Revisit how you want to feel. The following section will expand on the four components that comprise the RPM.

How you want to feel. This component is at the core of resonance and speaks for itself. It represents the feeling individuals seek when they engage in a particular activity. It is based on a conscious decision individuals make to determine how they want to feel on a regular basis in a specific context. For instance, two novice Mount Everest climbers participating in an 8-week resonance-based intervention comprising 6 interviews and daily reflective journaling identified rhythm, strength, and a sense of accomplishment as the way they wanted to feel on a regular basis (Burke, Durand-Bush, Doell, 2006). It is noteworthy that how each person wants to feel is unique and specific to his or her activity. Feel can be experienced at different levels, for example, at a physical, physiological, cognitive, emotional, and/or spiritual level. Because feel is

a subjective experience, people define and articulate it in their own unique way. Festinger's (1957) theory of dissonance focuses primarily on the cognitive aspects involved in the arousal and reduction of dissonance. The present study is interested in the affective dimension of cognitive dissonance. One's desire and ability to stay connected to how he or she feels is linked to optimal performance and well-being (Arcand, Durand-Bush, & Miall, 2007; Doell, Durand-Bush, & Newburg, 2006; Durand-Bush, Faubert, & Newburg, 2004; Newburg et al., 2002) and it may also be related to Aronson's idea that people strive for self-consistency.

Preparation represents the various activities in which individuals engage to feel the way they want and develop required skills to excel in a particular domain. Such activities may include physical, psychological, technical, tactical, and/or emotional strategies that are unique to each individual. According to Doell et al., (2006), track athletes use the preparation strategies of appropriate rest and nutrition, visualization, and goal-setting to help them experience desired feelings while performing. The preparation stage usually requires a strong commitment on the part of individuals.

Obstacles represent setbacks or difficulties that performers experience in their performance domain that prevent them from feeling the way they want. According to Newburg et al. (2002), obstacles may be internal, such as self-doubt or fear, or they may be external like high altitude sickness, or extreme weather conditions (Burke, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2006). Individuals must overcome the obstacles they face and not get stuck in the "Obstacle-Preparation Loop," which occurs when they work harder and engage in more preparation before trying to reconnect with the feeling that drives them to perform their chosen activity, that is, the intrinsic motives for participating in their activity. Some examples of obstacles faced by track athletes included self-doubt and performance anxiety (Doell et al., 2006). In Burke, Durand-Bush, and Doell's (2006) study, one obstacle that climbers faced included fear of failure and although this was not examined per se, this obstacle could have been a threat to their self-concept. The

potential arousal of dissonance, as a result, could have prevented them from experiencing desired feelings.

How a person feels when they encounter an obstacle that takes them away from experiencing desired feelings has not been clearly defined in the resonance literature. According to Harmon-Jones (2000), the psychological discomfort component of dissonance is defined as negative affect that is general and diffuse; that is, “persons report feeling more uncomfortable, uneasy, and bothered as well as more tense, distressed, irritable, nervous, and jittery” (p.1498). Elliot and Devine (1994) define psychological discomfort as global discomfort as well as elevated feelings of specific negative self-directed affect. Similarly, Aronson (1992) argues that dissonance induction procedures, such as the hypocrisy manipulation, are likely to create feelings of guilt and not just global discomfort. As there appears to be a strong affective component to dissonance whereby individuals “feel” a sense of discomfort it was believed that the process of resonance may shed light on the role of feelings in climbers’ experiences with cognitive dissonance.

Revisit how you want to feel involves developing and applying strategies and tactics to reconnect with the way individuals want to feel. These strategies or activities enable them to overcome obstacles and sustain their motivation to pursue their endeavor. Newburg et al. (2002) found that individuals revisit their desired feelings by writing in a journal, looking at pictures, watching a favorite movie, resting, talking to a friend, or engaging in self-talk. According to Burke, Durand-Bush, and Doell (2006), climbers tended to rely on self-talk as one way of overcoming obstacles. Justifying a self-discrepant behavior may be a revisiting strategy that climbers use to restore a feeling of competence and morality. That is, the resonance process may be used by climbers to help them reduce their feelings of psychological discomfort after experiencing a threat to their self-concept.

Two resonance-based studies have been conducted to examine the resonance process of four Everest climbers in preparation for this proposed doctoral study (Burke, Durand-Bush, &

Doell, 2006). Specifically, the RPM was used in these two pilot studies to explore, if and if so, how both novice and elite climbers experienced resonance on a consistent basis in the face of life threatening obstacles. The climbers participated in multiple individual interviews on and off the mountain and engaged in daily reflective journaling. Results revealed that in addition to strength, focus, and rhythm the novice climbers were mainly motivated to feel a sense of accomplishment whereas the elite climbers wanted to feel like they were pushing through barriers (Burke, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2006). Identifying and engaging in their personal process of resonance helped climbers to overcome obstacles and sustain how they wanted to feel in an extremely adverse environment. It is noteworthy, that the novice climbers were not as aware and capable to regulate how they felt but got better at it throughout the study. Conversely, the elite climbers were aware and able to connect with how they wanted to feel on a consistent basis even in the face of obstacles. It is not known, however, if this process of staying connected with desired feelings helped the elite climbers to reduce any dissonance they might have been experiencing.

An important lesson from these studies is that although the RPM is usually used in research studies as an intervention tool to help performers experience resonance on a daily basis, it was challenging for the researcher to facilitate the learning of resonance while climbing with them due to the nature of the high altitude climbing environment (e.g., fatigue, altitude sickness, harsh weather). Therefore, in the present study, the RPM framework was used to explore and observe the process of resonance as it relates to cognitive dissonance rather than to facilitate the learning of resonance through an intervention.

The RPM is a fairly new educational model that has been linked to enhanced performance and well-being. Since it focuses on a process that enables people to experience harmony between the self and the environment and affective consistency, it was deemed an appropriate model to use to explore the role of feelings in dissonance processes including how climbers reduced their dissonance. As previously mentioned, high altitude climbers encounter

ongoing life-threatening obstacles that can pose a threat to their self-concept, particularly if they must make decisions that are in disharmony with who they are. Aronson's cognitive dissonance perspective and Newburg et al.'s framework complement each other well. In an attempt to link both of them, it can be suggested that cognitive dissonance is an internal obstacle (an integral component of the RPM) that typically leads to feelings of psychological discomfort. According to the RPM, these feelings would prevent individuals from experiencing desired feelings and harmony or "congruency" *within* their "self" and also *between* their "self" and their environment. When experiencing undesired feelings such as pain or discomfort, a typical response is to reduce them or get rid of them (Newburg et al., 2002) and as such, a link can be made between dissonance reduction and the "revisit how you want to feel" component of the RPM. It is innovative to suggest that one way to reduce dissonance is not only by changing, adding, or removing cognitive elements (Festinger, 1957) but also by replacing undesired dissonance-aroused feelings with more desired ones. This is presuming that individuals are aware of how they want to feel as awareness is fundamental to the resonance process. Interestingly, awareness underlies understandings and judgment of the self (Bong & Clark, 1999), the latter of which is fundamental to Aronson's perspective on cognitive dissonance.

Research Questions

The purpose of the present study was to explore the cognitive dissonance experienced by Mount Everest climbers in their natural setting, as there are no empirical studies that have previously examined this. Consequently, the main research question that guided this investigation included: How did Mount Everest climbers experience cognitive dissonance? Sub questions included: (a) what role was played by cognitions of the self in climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance? (b) what feelings did climbers experience in this process?

The following section will outline the methodology that was adopted to carry out the present study using the RPM and the self-consistency perspective.

METHODOLOGY

After reviewing research in the area of high altitude climbing and cognitive dissonance, it became evident that very little is known about the cognitive dissonance that is experienced by Mount Everest climbers. Consequently, a qualitative methodology provided the flexibility and freedom to explore the cognitive dissonance experienced by Everest climbers while they climbed on the mountain. Specifically, an ethnomethodological narrative case study approach involving multiple in-depth interviews captured on video and participant observation captured by field notes was used to guide the present study. This section begins with a brief overview of the qualitative method, followed by an in-depth description of the ethnomethodological worldview including core principals and research methods. Subsequently, an overview of the case study approach that was selected to carry out the present study is provided. Finally, this section concludes with a description of the narrative method including data analysis and data representation.

Qualitative Method

Qualitative research is the method of inquiry that seeks to comprehend social phenomena within the context of the participants' perspectives and experiences (Merriam, 2002). It is best described as a process of understanding a social or human problem, whereby the researcher "builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p.15). The qualitative term is conceivably more appropriate for describing research methods than research paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Consequently, a diverse range of ontological and epistemological assumptions characterizes qualitative research. For this reason, it is important to make one's assumptions about reality and truth explicit. Although there are no distinct boundaries between paradigms, one of the more progressive worldviews that fall under the postmodernist "umbrella" is ethnomethodology (EM). The present study subscribes to the tenets of the ethnomethodological tradition.

Ethnomethodology

Introduced by Harold Garfinkel in the mid 1960s, EM stems from the field of sociology, which has not only afforded people with a new manner of thinking about sociology's problems, but it has also led to new ways of studying sociology's phenomena (Have, 2004). According to Heritage (1984), EM derives from phenomenological sociology – a focus on the ways the life-world is produced, experienced, or accomplished interactionally and discursively. Specifically, the ethnomethodological approach to social inquiry is concerned with describing the experience of everyday life as it is internalized in the subjective consciousness of individuals (Schwandt, 1997). The ethnomethodologist sets out to uncover the actual nature of social facts, which help form the normative basis of a given social order.

EM, generally speaking, means the study of people's practices or methods. According to Schwandt (1997) "this approach to social inquiry has been described as the study of everyday practical reasoning and as the study of the processes whereby rules that cover everyday interactional settings are constructed" (p.44). According to Aronson (1968) and Festinger (1957) people experience cognitive dissonance on a daily basis. Consequently, its manifestations can be explored as part of everyday practical reasoning and also be observed in a wide variety of contexts including high altitude mountaineering. EM tends to study the daily practical actions of communication, decision-making, and reasoning whether in 'trivial' or 'fundamental' settings. Primarily, however, the focus is on marginalized populations and 'how' social actors do regular, everyday things, rather than 'why' or 'what.' Arguably, climbing Mount Everest is considered unconventional in that only a small exclusive group of people partakes in the extreme sport. Moreover, according to Aronson (1999), "cognitive dissonance theory is essentially a theory about sense making: *how* people try to make sense out of their environment and their behavior."

(p. 105). The ethnomethodological worldview therefore lends itself very well to conduct the present study.

EM stems from a genre of the *interpretivist* philosophical assumption (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), from the standpoint of an interpretivist, knowledge and meaning are an act of interpretation hence there is no objective knowledge that is independent of thinking, reasoning humans. This worldview embraces an ontology that denies the existence of an external reality (Denzin, 1994). In this case, external reality refers to one that exists outside and independent of our interpretations of it (Searle, 1995). EM claims that people make sense of other peoples' activities as well as their own through commonsense views and talk, which are interpreted through the mind. Hence, the interpretive meanings we attach to a given situation are defined by the on-going reconstruction of meaning. Several of the principal ideas that describe the ethnomethodological perspective are described in detail below.

Ethnomethodology's Core Principles

Various core principles characterize the ethnomethodological school of thought. In particular, the documentary method, reflexivity, indexicality, and membership were chosen to depict how ethnomethodologists perceive the social world.

Documentary method

Garfinkel (1967) believes that the way in which people make sense of their world is through a psychological process, which he calls the documentary method of interpretation. According to Garfinkel, at the outset this method consists of choosing certain facts from a social situation, which seem to conform to a pattern. Subsequently, making sense of these facts in terms of the pattern takes place. Once the pattern has been established, it is used as a template for interpreting new facts, which arise within the situation. In effect, this direction of attitude is accomplished through routines of perception that enable us to orient ourselves in the world. In other words, our understandings and actions consist of 'recipes' that can be followed, which are practically effective and learned from other people (Benson & Hughes, 1983).

Reflexivity

According to Handel (1982), interpretations about society and its workings are reflexive. That is, they become fundamental parts of the very thing they describe, denoting their relation to themselves. Consequently, ethnomethodologists require an awareness of their contribution to the construction of meaning throughout the research process (for this reason, a description of the values, beliefs, experiences, and self-concept of the primary researcher is included in Appendix D). Not just that, it is important to take into consideration the acknowledgement that it is impossible to remain 'outside' of one's phenomenon under investigation while conducting research.

Indexicality

Ethnomethodologists argue that the orderliness of everyday life be looked at as arising from within activities themselves due to the work done by partakers to that activity (Benson & Hughes, 1983). That is, reality is constructed within the social environments in which it occurs (Garfinkel, 1967). Based on this premise, an in-depth description of the background of high altitude mountaineering was made available in Chapter 2 to give the reader supplementary information that likely provided sight into the participants' meaning of accounts.

Membership

The notion of membership refers to the competencies involved in belonging to society. According to Have (2002), members of a particular group or culture use and rely on shared competencies, including the mastery of a common language and practical knowledge to act in ways that make sense to them. Consequently, ethnomethodologists assume the subjectivity of the individual and attempt to identify the everyday decision making processes, sense making activities, and language that are used in different settings. The following section describes the methods used by ethnomethodologists to investigate the everyday activities of people.

Ethnomethodology as Method

The most effective way to gain insight into the practices or methods people use to make sense of their world is for researchers to immerse themselves in the activity under study. In the words of Rawls (2002): “Ethnomethodologists generally use methods that require immersion in the situation being studied - they hold it as an ideal that they learn to be competent practitioners of whatever social phenomena they are studying” (p.6). As the primary researcher, I have extensive experience as a mountaineer (please see researcher as instrument section on p. 73). I am familiar with Mount Everest, having climbed the mountain on two separate occasions before setting out to fulfill the purpose of the present study. To investigate how the climbers made sense of their experiences on the mountain in this study and gain an in-depth understanding of the 2005 season on Mount Everest, the primary researcher was part of *every aspect* of the expedition including climbing on the mountain with the participants throughout the entire journey.

According to Francis and Hester (2004), EM is fundamentally concerned with research methods even though it has no official manual of research procedures. Instead, EM encourages researchers to use whatever procedures they think is most effective to make ‘visible’ the taken-for-granted organization work of everyday life. Proponents of EM believe that applying ethnomethodological methods in the field has much more to do with the researcher’s grasping of the underlying principle than a mere set of sociological research techniques (Flynn, 1991). The literature suggests that different methodological strategies are adopted depending on the setting under study.

The research methodology most often employed by researchers to test predictions derived from cognitive dissonance hypotheses involved the construction of an elaborate scenario in which participants became immersed (Aronson, 1999). In the confines of the laboratory, the experimenter would create dissonance effects by ensuring that real things happened to real people: participants either made important decisions (the free-choice paradigm), engaged in an unpleasant activity to obtain some desirable outcome (effort-justification paradigm), were

exposed to information inconsistent with a prior belief (belief-disconfirmation paradigm), or acted in ways that were discrepant with their beliefs and attitudes (the induced-compliance paradigm) (refer to Appendix C for examples of frameworks). In this way, dissonance theory inspired a large number and variety of hypotheses specific to the theory that continue to be used to gain insights into dissonance processes (Aronson, Fried, & Stone, 1991; Brehm, 1956; Festinger & Carlsmith; 1959).

Although much has been learned about the theory of cognitive dissonance in the confines of the laboratory, exploring the phenomenon in a natural setting that by its very nature is conducive to experiencing cognitive dissonance may be valuable to furthering our understanding of the theory. Guided by the philosophical assumptions of the ethnomethodological worldview, the primary researcher captured the everyday methods that were used by the participants by directly immersing herself in the culture of high altitude climbing. Consequently, dissonance was not artificially created. Using ethnomethodology as the backdrop, a narrative case study approach involving multiple in-depth interviews captured on video and observations captured by field notes was deemed an appropriate research methodology to explore how Mount Everest climbers made sense of their daily experiences and struggles in their natural setting.

Case Studies

It is suggested that qualitative researchers embrace a case study approach when a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, “over which the investigator has little or no control” (Yin, 1994, p. 20). There is a range of possible case study approaches that can be used to guide one’s research (Creswell, 1998). For the purpose of the present study, Stake’s (1995) case study approach was used. Stake argues that the aim of case study research is to explore a phenomenon within its real-life context, focusing on both the phenomenon and its context, using multiple sources of data collection methods. Rich, in-depth information “using ample but non-technical description and narrative (Stake, 2006, p.vii) is provided to highlight the phenomenon in detail and show its complexity. As defined by Stake

there can be three types of case studies: (a) intrinsic case studies refer to studies that focus on improving the understanding of a particular case; (b) instrumental case studies examine a particular case with the purpose of providing insight into a phenomenon and; (c) multiple or collective case studies analyze a set of cases individually and across cases. To gain an understanding of how Mount Everest climbers experienced cognitive dissonance, the present doctoral dissertation used a multicase study approach. That is, six cases comprised the case study. Each case was analyzed individually and across case to provide insight into the cognitive dissonance phenomenon. The research question determines the case within the case study approach, and can therefore represent an individual, a group, an organization, an event or social process (Schwandt, 1997). For the purpose of the present study, each climber was a case.

Case Study Participants

Six Mount Everest climbers were studied as cases; five men and one woman (see Table 2 for demographic profile). All six climbers were attempting to climb the mountain for the first time and were members of a commercially run expedition; five of them were members of Alpine Ascents International (AAI) and one of them was a member of Mountain Madness (MM) (see Appendix D for overview of AAI and MM). Each case, or climber, was considered a separate study. The participants from AAI and MM were selected for various reasons. The first reason was based on their willingness to participate in the present study. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), people who are in a position to have the knowledge you want may not always want to share that information openly. Second, five out of the six participants belonged to AAI, which allowed for a practical data collection timetable. The primary researcher was able to adhere to the group's climbing schedule and climb on the mountain at the same time as five of the participants made their way up and down the mountain for interview and observation purposes. Third, AAI and MM's Base Camps were ideally located in the same area of the Khumbu glacier beside the primary researcher's Base Camp. All three Camps stood within a 100 meter walk of one another. This proximity allowed for easy and continuous access to the primary researcher

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Mount Everest Climbers

| Climber Identification | Climber Gender | Age | Years Climbing | Number of Seven Summits | Highest Peak Achieved | Name of Commercial Expedition |
|---|----------------|-----|----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Janette <i>"The Conflicted Mother"</i> | Female | 39 | 7 | 4 | McKinley (6,195m) | Alpine Ascents |
| Nate <i>"The All American"</i> | Male | 41 | 22 | 1 | McKinley (6,195m) | Mountain Madness |
| Gordie <i>"The Old Jock"</i> | Male | 63 | 30 | 4 | Cho Oyu (8,200m) | Alpine Ascents |
| Sayeed <i>"The Gregarious Amateur"</i> | Male | 36 | 2 | 1 | Mera Peak (6,476m) | Alpine Ascents |
| Steven <i>"The Intellect"</i> | Male | 50 | 29 | 2 | Aconcagua (6,962) | Alpine Ascents |
| Allan <i>"The Sensitive Soul"</i> | Male | 59 | 10 | 4 | Aconcagua (6,962) | Alpine Ascents |

and participants. The number of cases to decide on in a multicase study is optional, however, the benefits of this type of case study “will be limited if fewer than, say, 4 cases are chosen, or more than 10” (Stake, 2006, p.22). The objective of the present study was to select a number of cases who would provide enough data to develop an accurate and comprehensive account of how Mount Everest climbers experienced cognitive dissonance. Six cases were deemed sufficient based on the amount of time and work required for data collection with each case in the field.

Gaining Entry

The primary researcher established face-to-face contact with all of the members who were part of the AAI expedition (n=5) upon the team’s arrival at Base Camp. She introduced herself, and her background, and fully described the inquiry (refer to Appendix E for a summary of researcher preparation). Five out of the twelve AAI members expressed interest in partaking in the present study. The same procedures were utilized to gain access to the participant from MM except the interaction took place on the trail to Base Camp. The participants from AAI and MM who showed interest were subsequently provided with all of the information required regarding their involvement and purpose of the study to be able to make an informed decision to participate or not. Thereafter, they signed a consent form explaining that they had the option of withdrawing from the study at any point and that confidentiality would be respected by omitting any information that may identify them as participants in this research (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, refer to Appendix E).

Data Gathering Methods

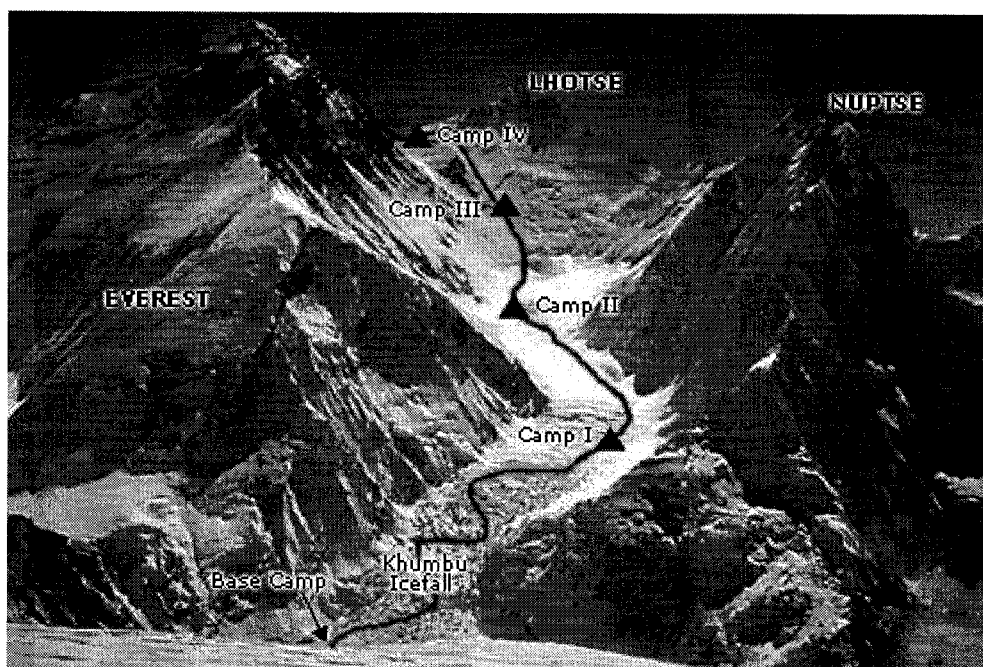
For multicase studies, the most common data gathering methods are observation, interview, coding, data management, and interpretation (Stake, 2006). The data gathering methods used to represent field experience in the present study included in-depth interviews and participant observation. Except for the last interview, which was conducted over the telephone one month after the climber’s returned home from the mountain, all of the interviews were

captured on video. The purpose of the videotaped interviews was to help the primary researcher reconnect with the lived reality (i.e. displays of emotion) of the participants in preparation for and during the data analysis process. According to Sands (2002) visual images help in recalling an event or witnessing a phenomenon. More than bringing to mind what the climbers said, the videotaped interviews served to put forward the feeling of the moment while I was working to analyze the transcribed interviews. It is important to note, video can easily retain more detail (i.e. movement, emotion, non verbal behavior) than tape recording (Sands, 2002). In this study, however, the videotapes were used to simply analyze what was said.

Data was collected over the entire spring 2005 Mount Everest climbing season (March 15th – June 2nd) and one month after the participants returned home from the mountain. An average of four interviews and five observation sessions, captured by field notes, were carried out with each climber.

Interviews

The interviews that were conducted with each participant took place at different areas on and off the mountain (see Figure 3 for interview and observation location). The first interview was conducted a few days after the participants arrived at Base Camp. The second interview was held at Camp 2 about one day after the climbers arrived there and a few days before they set out on their acclimatization climb to Camp 3. The third interview took place at Base Camp after the climbers returned from their acclimatization climb to Camp 3. The fourth interview took place at Base Camp about one week before the summit push. The fifth interview occurred in the homes of the participants about one month after they returned home from Nepal and was carried out over the telephone. The first, second, fourth, and fifth interviews were conducted with all six of the participants. The third interview was conducted with only two of the participants. The



P=Participant BC=Base Camp C1=Camp 1 C2=Camp 2 C3=Camp 3 C4=Camp4 H=Home

| | | | | |
|--------------|--|----------------|--|--|
| Interview 1: | P1 / BC P2 / BC P3 / BC P4 / BC P5 / BC P6 / BC | Interview 4: | P1 / BC P2 / BC P3 / BC P4 / BC P5 / BC P6 / BC | P3 / BC P4 / BC P5 / BC P6 / BC |
| Interview 2: | P1 / C2 P2 / C2 P3 / C2 P4 / C2 P5 / C2 P6 / C2 | Interview 5: | P1 / H P2 / H P3 / H P4 / H P5 / H P6 / H | Observation 3: |
| Interview 3: | P4 / BC P5 / BC P6 / BC | Observation 1: | P1 / BC P2 / Icefall-C1 P3 / BC P4 / BC P5 / BC P6 / BC | P1 / C2 P2 / C2 P3 / C2 P4 / C2 P5 / C2 P6 / C2 |
| | | Observation 2: | P1 / BC P2 / BC | Observation 4: |
| | | | | P1 / C1 P2 / BC P3 / C1 P4 / BC P5 / C1 P6 / BC |
| | | | | Observation 5: |
| | | | | P1 / BC P2 / C3-C4 P3 / BC P4 / BC P5 / BC |

Figure 3: Interview and Observation Location

interviews explored the participants' stories climbing the mountain and their experiences with dissonance arousal and reduction in particular. According to Seidman (1998), "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p.3). The semi-structured interviews, lasting between 30 to 60 minutes, allowed the participants and interviewer to discuss the cognitive dissonance arousal and reduction that occurred and the cognitions and feelings associated with the experience. An interview guide (refer to Appendix F) facilitated the interview process.

Throughout the interviews, the researcher followed the guidelines of organized interviewing, listening, open communication, and observing to collect as much information as possible (Ivey, 1994). The experiences of the researcher were shared only when it was considered to be appropriate and when she was invited to do so (Sparkes, 2002). This sharing of experiences helped the researcher to develop a more trusting relationship with the participants and promote the participants to open up to one of their own. The first, second, third, and fourth interviews with each participant were recorded on videotape.

Observations

Throughout the two-month expedition, the researcher observed each participant on at least five separate occasions. The observation sessions occurred naturally and took place at Base Camp, Camp 2, and while climbing with the participants on the mountain. Field notes were taken after each session to record specific events or occurrences (i.e. what was seen and heard). A few times throughout the expedition, the researcher reflected on the experiences of the climbers and included her reflections in the field notes: "This type of document will provide the researcher with a medium to record emerging themes, interpretations, hunches, and striking gestures and non-verbal expressions essential to understanding the meaning of a person's world" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 115). While the interviews provided most of the data for this research the data collected through observations served mostly to fill gaps, validate, or expand what was shared during the interviews. The field notes helped the researcher move back and forth between full

involvement with the participants and distance from them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Because I was fully involved in the experience studied, I felt it important to construct field notes and reflect on them on a regular basis. Composing and reading field texts enabled me to enter in and out of the investigated experience and look at the stories of the participants from a more detached perspective.

Narrative Inquiry

Research interest in the analysis of stories has increased as researchers in many disciplines strive to understand the world through the eyes of others (Riley & Hawe, 2005). According to Clandinin & Connelly (2000), people understand the world from a storytelling point of view. That is, they tell stories in an attempt to understand, make sense of, and communicate their experiences (Sparkes & Partington, 2003). In effect, they are a story telling animal - through daily conversation they tell stories to “inform, instruct, entertain, impress, empower, exonerate, or cathart, among other things” (Smith, 2000, p. 327). According to Crossley (2000), it is through stories that language is the medium that makes experience meaningful and enables individuals to understand themselves. In other words, language produces meaning. It creates social reality. Smith (2000) supports this viewpoint: “language is the medium through which meaning and socially constructed reality can best be studied” (p.328). It is not surprising therefore why researchers within diverse fields such psychology, sport and physical activity, education, medicine, and cultural studies make the methodological case for narrative inquiry – it is as an ideal way of gaining insight into complex phenomenon that more familiar research methods may not be able to obtain (Riley & Hawe, 2005).

Although ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ are words that are often used interchangeably, it is important to note the difference between the two constructs. According to Frank (2000), whereas people tell stories, narratives result from the analysis of stories. That is, the difference is set apart

where primary data ends and where the analysis of that data begins. With that said, for the purpose of the present study, the role of the researcher involved interpreting the participant stories (i.e. data) with the purpose of constructing the underlying narrative. Narrative inquiry was used to gain insight into the climber's practices and methods from an EM perspective as well as their thoughts, behavior, feelings, and struggles as they made their way up and down the mountain. According to Cortazzi (1993), narrative inquiry brings to light much about the identity, intentions, and feelings of the individual telling the story. Interestingly, it also reveals much about the culture to which the storyteller subscribes. According to Miller (1994), narratives are indexical; that is, they are part of the setting in which they occur and which they help organize, and reciprocally, from which stories are organized, in part, by the setting in which they occur. Garfinkel (1957) would also agree that content and form cannot be separated – people's accounts imply a contextual world; that is, they are part of the particulars of the situation in which they occur. Using the narrative approach to explore the cognitive dissonance of Everest climbers therefore not only provides insight into how the dissonance phenomenon came into being (i.e. how climbers experienced cognitive dissonance) but it also opens a window into the workings of the social world of high altitude mountaineering (i.e. culture of Mount Everest).

According to Bruner (2002), narrative inquiry is one of trying to make sense of life as lived by giving “shape to things in the real world and often bestowing on them a title to reality” (p. 8). Riley and Hawe (2005) draw attention to the fact that there are a range of approaches to narrative inquiry; that is, there is no one unifying method. According to Garfinkel (1967), EM brings to light what is already available but sometimes difficult for all to see. In the present study, stories were the vehicle used to uncover the practices and methods of interpretation that underlie everyday mountaineering activity. According to Bruner (1991), telling stories can provide meaning and coherence to, and perspective on, experience. The present study was guided by the narrative approach because cognitive dissonance is a form of experience.

For the purpose of the present study, the participants in this study were asked to share,

with the primary researcher, their personal stories with important challenges, difficult decisions, feelings of psychological discomfort, sense making practices, expectations, regrets, etc. throughout the duration of, and one month after, their climb on Mount Everest. In effect, they were invited to tell their story of climbing the mountain. The narrative approach was also used in the present study to analyze the findings.

Narrative Data Analysis

The field of narrative analysis within qualitative research is broad-based. That is, narrative analysis “assumes a multitude of theoretical forms, unfolds in a variety of specific analytic practices, and is grounded in diverse disciplines (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). The literature suggests that narrative analyses tend to be flexible even as they inquire about complex phenomenon. A narrative data analysis approach (Gergen & Gergen, 1993) was used in the present study. The purpose of the data analysis was to understand, interpret, and report the participants’ experiences and realities. According to Frank (2000), the researcher's role is to interpret the stories in order to analyze the underlying narrative to which the storytellers may not be able to give voice themselves. In the present study, the primary researcher constructed an interpretation of the participants’ experiences with cognitive dissonance, based on their descriptive accounts, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how the climbers made sense of their experiences of climbing the mountain. A narrative view of experience was kept in the foreground of the writing, with the participants’ stories of experience situated in ethnomethodological landscapes. Against this backdrop, data analysis revolved specifically around the ways in which the Mount Everest climbers experienced cognitive dissonance. A focus on what role their self-concept and ‘feel’ played in this process was also examined. It is important to note, however, that based on the purpose of the study our attention in this dissertation is primarily devoted to *how* the climbers experienced the dissonance phenomenon using the narrative approach.

For each of the six case studies, three levels of data analysis were performed. The first

level of narrative analysis led to the creation of six participant profiles. In the second level of data analysis, six narratives representing each of the six case studies carried out in this study were created. In particular, the researcher highlighted certain common characteristics of narratives including the setting, the time-ordered sequence of events, the problem-solving or goal orientation, and the conflict or difficulty to be resolved. According to Simms (2003), integration of time and context in the interpretation of meaning is a distinctly narrative characteristic. In other words, narrative analysis focuses more directly on the dynamic process of interpretation. That is, how the climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance might have changed with time, with new experiences, and with new and varied social interactions was kept in the foreground of the writing. Moreover, in analyzing the data, the researcher attempted to stand in the climbers' shoes and experience the events as they did. According to Riley and Hawe (2004), narrative analysis centers on the person; that is, "narrative analysis contextualizes the sense-making process by focusing on the person, rather than a set of themes" (p.8). Consequently, as situations, people and events changed over time, our vantage point remained the same. In this way narrative analysis gains unique insights into how people interpret their world (Riley & Hawe, 2004).

Specifically, Gergen and Gergen's (1983) procedure for analyzing the structure of a narrative was used to make sense of the data in the present study. For them, the idea of directionality among events is an essential aspect of the narrative; that is, "to structure events in such a way that they move over time in an orderly way toward a given end" (p. 257). Consequently, we analyzed the data keeping the order and direction of events in their natural sequence. The participants' narratives begin at Base Camp, at the onset of the expedition where the first interviews were conducted, and end back at the climbers' homes three months later. That is, the climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance are highlighted in the natural manner in which they occurred throughout the expedition. The following criteria, as outlined by Gergen and Gergen were used to construct a well-formed narrative: Establishing a valued endpoint, selecting events relevant to the endpoint, the ordering of events, and causal linkages (see Table 3

1. Establishing a Valued Endpoint.

“How Mount Everest climbers experienced cognitive dissonance.”

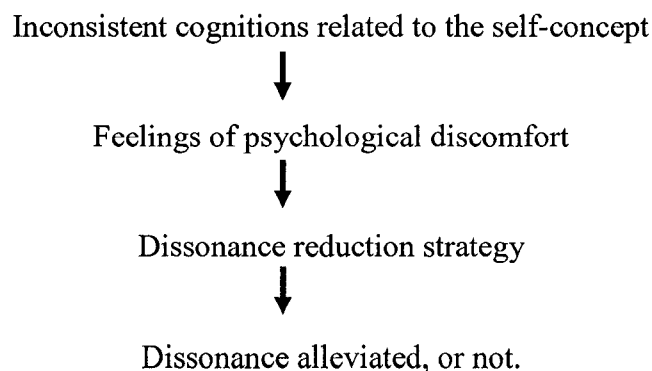
2. Selecting Events Relevant to the Endpoint.

(e.g. “Climbing Mount Everest conflicted with Janette’s self-concept as a decent and responsible mother. Consequently, she experienced feelings of guilt.”)

(e.g. “Because Steven experienced feelings of psychological discomfort after abandoning the climb to the summit, he reordered his understanding of events leading to his final decision in a way that allowed him to believe he made a sensible decision.”)

3. The Ordering of Events.

The process of experiencing cognitive dissonance was placed in an ordered arrangement matching the sequence in which the process naturally occurred.



4. Causal Linkages.

The processes involved in the climber’s experiences with cognitive dissonance were woven into the narrative in such a way that they were casually linked.

(e.g. “Because he experienced psychological discomfort, he reordered his understanding of events.”)

5. Demarcation Signs.

Each climber’s narrative employs signals to indicate a beginning and ending.

Table 3. Steps in Constructing a Well-Formed Narrative

for Steps in Constructing a Well-Formed Narrative). In this study, six peoples' narratives of experience attempting to scale the world's tallest peak are told within the greater story of climbing Mount Everest.

The narrative method of data analysis was chosen as the preferred approach to analyze the data in the present study because it permits a holistic view of discourse that maintains context and particularity (Riessman, 1993). The question that was asked by the researcher as we analyzed the data was, 'how is cognitive dissonance achieved and experienced in the telling?' In other words, the goal was to identify instances of cognitive dissonance arousal and reduction and uncover the cognitive processes and feelings that the climbers used to make sense of their experiences through the medium of language. An interpretive case study analysis of each of the six climbers' stories reflected their unique interpretive stance. Specifically, the analysis attempted to identify instances of cognitive dissonance arousal and reduction.

The third level of data analysis entailed performing a cross-case analysis to explore the patterns of similarity between accounts or themes expressed in the climber's stories. The focus of this approach is on what is said (Sparkes, 2005). According to Labov (1972) there is no agreed-upon methodological approach in narrative analysis to extract themes from patterns. Labov suggests searching for sequences of core phrases which are repeated across interviews as indicators of themes. The researcher analyzed each narrative by breaking the text into fairly small units of content and yielding them to descriptive treatment. In other words, sections of the narratives belonging to a defined category (i.e. self-concept, feelings, effort expenditure) were scrutinized and subsequently extracted from the entire narrative and from numerous narratives that pertained to various story tellers (Lieblich, 1998). A cross case analysis was carried out with the express purpose of developing general knowledge about the main themes that make up the content of the stories.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis occurred on three levels in a horizontal fashion. Before engaging in data analysis the researcher personally transcribed all of the interviews and subsequently viewed all of the video tapes with the sole purpose of immersing herself in the data in order to understand the climbers' point of view from an empathetic perspective. The data analysis procedures for each of the three levels of analysis are described below.

Profile analysis. Leading up to the first level of analysis, which entailed developing a narrative profile of the participant's stories, the researcher re-read the transcripts and re-watched the video interviews (of the first interview) and then identified narrative categories within it (see Appendix G for steps in developing a participant profile). The categories were based on relevant information that was discussed in the first interview, which revolved primarily around demographic information (age, place of residence, climbing background) and self-concept information (personality, feelings, values, inner conflicts). Categories that emerged from the data are presented and discussed in conjunction with direct quotes from the interviews to present the participants' perspectives in their own words. The presentation of the narrative profiles "allows the researcher to present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time" (Seidman, 1998, p.102). The narrative profiles were subsequently sent to each participant for authentication.

Case study analysis. The second level of data analysis entailed an intra case study analysis to explore how the participants experienced cognitive dissonance arousal and reduction. The researcher re-read the transcripts and re-watched the video interviews (first, second, third, and fourth interviews) in order to construct a chronicled and summarized account of the phenomenon under investigation for each of the six participants. The climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance arousal and reduction were highlighted. The purpose of this type of analysis

was to highlight the structure of the story in its completed form (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilbar, 1998). The primary researcher focused on how the participants' experiences with cognitive dissonance were told in particular ways without losing important contextual information.

Cross-case study analysis. The third level of data analysis entailed performing a cross-case study analysis to explore the patterns of similarity between the stories told. The purpose was to develop general knowledge about the core topics that made up the content of the stories including what role the climber's self-concept and 'feel' played in their experiences with cognitive dissonance. From the case studies, the researcher extracted information pertaining to cognitive dissonance arousal and reduction, self-concept, effort expenditure, decision making, and feel, and assigned a temporary name or label to each piece of that text, which was subsequently followed by categorization. The traditional pencil and paper method was used to organize and code the data. Coding is the process of classifying individual responses into categories that bring together similar ideas, concepts, or themes (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). An inductive and deductive method of data analysis was implemented to create general categories and sub-categories under which common themes and concepts were regrouped. The general categories of dissonance arousal and reduction, self-concept, and feel were deductively created from Aronson's perspective of cognitive dissonance and the RPM. All additional categories were inductively created.

Narrative Truth

The issue of validity, or whatever alternative term i.e., authenticity, credibility, confirmability, dependability, transferability, truth, trustworthiness is used by researchers in qualitative research, has been widely debated. The dispute is seen in its clearest form in discussions about whether interview or other forms of qualitative data can be authentic (Sliverman, 1993). On the one hand positivists argue that the goal of research is the creation of the 'pure' interview with the express purpose of eliciting a 'mirror' reflection of the reality that

exists in the social world (Silverman, 2001). On the other hand, radical social constructionists suggest that “no knowledge about reality that is ‘out there’ in the social world can be obtained from the interview, because the interview is obviously and exclusively an interaction between the interviewer and the interview participant in which both parties create and construct narrative versions of the social world (Silverman, 2004, p. 125). For the purpose of the present study, an interactionist approach (Silverman, 2004) to validity was assumed. By validity, I mean truth: the extent to which the climbers’ narrative accounts accurately represent how cognitive dissonance is experienced in the telling (Hammersley, 1990).

Interactionists refute the positivist belief of a ‘singular objective or absolute world out-there’ even though they recognize objectified worlds. That is, they believe the following:

They contend that some objectification is essential if human conduct is to be accomplished. Objectivity exists, thus, not as an absolute or inherently meaningful condition to which humans react but as an accomplished aspect of human lived experience. (Silverman, 2004).

This approach to validity falls in line with the ethnomethodological worldview. That is, research cannot be treated as reports on external reality; rather, it expresses “interpretive procedures or conversational practices present in what both the interviewer and interviewee are doing through their talk and non-verbal actions” (Silverman, p. 107). In this way, emphasis is placed on intersubjective depth between the interviewee and interviewer. For this reason, interactionists tend to reject standardized interviews and prefer open-ended interviews.

In the present study, open ended interviews were used in an attempt to explore how everyday, common-sense knowledge was experienced in the minds of the climbers. In-depth interviewing allowed for greater depth than other research techniques providing meaningful insight into the climbers’ subjective experiences. That is, the climbers were encouraged to “elaborate, provide incidents and clarifications, and discuss events at length” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.8), which elicited the climbers’ views of their experiences climbing the mountain.

The relationship between the informant and the researcher was based on deep understanding. It was not only sustained through prolonged engagement - an entire climbing season – but the researcher and researched were also connected in that they were both members of the culture of high altitude mountaineering. In particular, we shared a similar goal of reaching the summit. This relationship enabled meaningful understanding of the participants and their experiences including challenges faced throughout the process of data collection.

Member checking, the term used by Lincoln and Guba (1985) was also used as a method for establishing narrative ‘truth.’ The participant profiles and case study analysis were sent to each participant via e-mail for authentication. That is, the participants were sent the interpreted participant profiles and case narratives and given the opportunity to review and comment on the accuracy of both documents. Except for one participant who did not comment, all of the climbers indicated that the profiles and case studies were an accurate representation of their experience climbing the mountain. Only minor corrections were made to the final narratives.

Narrative Representation

There is a range of possible forms within the narrative approach that qualitative researchers can use to represent their findings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). According to Sparkes (2002), the realist tale, which is a form of narrative, dominates qualitative research in sport and physical activity. This type of tale demands researchers to distance themselves, as much as possible, from the descriptive narrative – That is, “only the words, actions, and (presumably) thoughts of members of the studied culture are visible in the text” (p.41). It is important to note, however, that the researcher cannot completely distance herself from the findings as it is her interpretation of the data that was used to construct the narratives. Also, because the interviews are an interaction between the researcher and the participant, the narratives are a co-construction making it impossible to completely separate the researcher from the findings. Nonetheless, extensive, closely edited quotations are used in the narratives to convey to the reader that what is being interpreted by the researcher is an accurate representation

of the participants own remarks. In the present study, the realist tale, as delineated by Sparkes (2002) in his book *Telling Tales in Sport and Physical Activity*, was deemed an appropriate method for making 'visible' the 'taken-for-granted' cognitive processes of Mount Everest climbers.

In conclusion, because I am ever present throughout the text, even though this chosen form of representation does not include my voice, I felt it was important to include a section on my background, preparation, and bias in the methodology section to demonstrate my credibility as a researcher on the mountain and to convey my position regarding the data collection and presentation (see researcher as instrument statement below). The quotes and the way the story is conveyed to the reader is a direct representation of my interpretation of the climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance. I was not simply reporting findings, but also actively constructing interpretations of the participants' experiences in the field. As Newman (1992) comments: "To establish the researcher's credibility as an effective instrument of inquiry, it is necessary to provide information regarding his or her background, qualifications, and training" (p.77). The core justification for choosing the realist tale over other possible forms of narrative representation stems from the belief that this representational genre focuses on the participants' experiences with cognitive dissonance allowing for a focused account of their daily experiences, struggles, and learning on the mountain (Sparkes, 2002).

Researcher as Instrument Statement

The findings in the present study are my interpretations of the climbers' everyday accounts of cognitive dissonance – accounts which were created during the process of interaction between primary researcher and the researched. In effect, my values, beliefs, experiences, and social identity are reflected in the study. Consequently, information regarding my climbing background and appropriate research qualifications, biases with regards to the topic of analysis, and personal experiences with cognitive dissonance are included.

Climbing background. My passion for the mountains led me to become the second Canadian woman to summit Mount Everest. This success on May 30th 2005 was the culmination of a willful personality and ample experience climbing in the mountains. Some of my climbing highlights include a successful ascent of Mount Elbrus (5,633m), Mount Blanc (4,700m), and Mount Aconcagua (6,962m). In the fall of 2003, I climbed Everest to 6,400m as part of my research related to the process of resonance of novice Everest climbers. In 2004, I was a main character in The Discovery Channel documentary mini-series that was filmed on Mount Everest titled “Ultimate Survival: Everest” and continued conducting my research using the Resonance Performance Model with elite climbers. That season, I climbed the mountain to 8000m, failing to reach the summit (please note: While collecting the data for the present study, I was *not* a member of the summit club; while analyzing and writing the findings I was).

For me climbing, like most challenges I take on, is an expression of spirit. It represents the yearning to grow, to push through barriers. I am driven into the mountains because of the physical, mental, and emotional challenge that is characteristic of the pursuit. I believe, to realize our potential as human beings we need to have courage; courage to take risks by trying our hand at tasks that are outside of our comfort zone. With that said, I climbed Mount Everest because I wanted to find out if I had what it took to get to the top - I was curious to know if I had the mental toughness, emotional stability, and physical endurance and strength to complete the task.

Personal biases. I believe that each and every one of us experiences cognitive dissonance to varying degrees. The nature of the motivation underlying the arousal and reduction of dissonance stems from a skewed self-perception that we strive to maintain. That is, human beings are fallible. For the most part, we see ourselves through flawed glasses – filters that either positively or negatively alter our perception of self. That is the reason why people experience cognitive dissonance on a day-to-day basis; for the most part they do not have a realistic self-concept. For those people whose self-concept is skewed positively, acting in ways that are

inconsistent with their romanticized self-concept leads to feelings of psychological discomfort. For those people whose self-concept is negatively skewed, psychological discomfort arises when they act in ways that are inconsistent with their understated self-concept. In effect, I believe that actions leading to the arousal of cognitive dissonance may be more in line with our true self than we wish to believe. Nonetheless, we strive to maintain our pre-formed notion of self (through dissonance reduction strategies) because it helps us avoid having to face the hard, cold reality of our personal shortcomings or (in the case of the negative self-view) prevents us from having to acknowledge the good qualities of our makeup that we have not embraced.

Human beings are 97% water and like water they will inevitably take the path of least resistance. It is easier to preserve our self-image through dissonance reduction strategies than to take a hard, honest look in the mirror. Self-reflection after committing an 'out of character' or undesirable act often arouses adverse feelings that are uncomfortable and difficult to embrace. Thus, to avoid experiencing hardship we deny or rationalize our behavior to quickly get past our uneasiness. I feel that it is important to point out, however, that experiences with cognitive dissonance can lead to important, beneficial changes especially if the person is courageous and willing to look inward and self-reflect. I believe that when we are shaken to our core by acts that disturb us we are given the opportunity to learn and alter our behavior.

Personal experience with dissonance. Like the participants in the present study, I have my own personal experiences with cognitive dissonance. Reflecting on my past climbing expeditions, a prominent example of dissonance comes to mind. It occurred during my first climb to the summit of Mount Everest in 2004.

It was day three at the South Col (Camp 4) and I was stuck in a wind storm (wind speeds of 70knots) unable to make the final 800meters to the summit without most likely dying of hypothermia and suffering from extreme bouts of frostbite. Despite the odds, my desire to reach the summit was high. So high that I chose to overlook the signs of danger and remain at Camp 4 in a desperate attempt to wait out the bad weather and fulfill my dream of standing on the

summit. Ignoring the advice of more experienced climbers who counseled me to abandon the climb, I believed in my core that I was capable of getting to the top trying to avoid having to admit failure at all costs. With each passing minute in the death zone my physical, mental, and emotional state deteriorated rapidly. Nevertheless, I downplayed the severity of the situation around me ready to continue my journey toward the summit. Some people would label this type of behavior 'summit fever.' I call it reconstructing reality (a dissonance reduction strategy). Failing to reach the summit conflicted with my self-concept as successful to the point that I altered my reality and changed my behavior to prolong the inevitable.

Like most climbers, I came to the world's tallest peak with emotional baggage. Driven by an overwhelming need to succeed my desire to reach the summit was ultimately fueled by fear of failure. In trying to analyze why I was so afraid of not succeeding on the mountain I came to realize that my fear had roots in my childhood development. When I was younger I had aspirations of competing on the world's stage for alpine ski racing. At eight years old I experienced my first taste of being a 'star.' I had natural talent for skiing making me the best skier of my local club. I won all the races and quickly became a little celebrity in my hometown. It was at that time that I began to equate success with respect, approval, and feeling special. I was treated by not only my parents, but also their friends and the people of the community with acceptance and high opinion. Competitive ski racing became more than simply a childhood diversion. It separated me from my peers and became my way of life.

At the age of fourteen I left my home in the West Island of Montreal to join a ski academy in the Eastern Townships where skiing became the primary focus in my life. Over the years I slowly moved up the performance ladder to the point where I became a member of the Quebec Alpine Ski Team. At this stage in my career, my commitment to the sport was all encompassing - all other aspects of my life were point on hold as I strived to get on the National Team. The pressure to succeed mounted. I was fully aware of the time and money my parents were investing to help me achieve my goals, the hard work my coaches were devoting on my

behalf, the large sums of money my sponsors were providing, and the personal sacrifices I was making. It was at this time in my skiing career that a norm was established - for every rewarding race, there were twice as many disappointing ones. I believed in my core that I was not reaching my full potential as a skier, unable to compete in race situations to my capacities. My performance in training far exceeded my abilities in competitions. Because my race performances were not meeting my expectations I felt inadequate. The continued weight of disappointment I felt toward myself was heavy.

The feelings of inadequacy that I experienced as the result of poor competition performances continued to prevail eventually ending my skiing career. After three years of competing at the provincial level I walked away from representing the province of Quebec and accepted a skiing scholarship at Sierra Nevada College in the United States where I was able to continue skiing on a competitive level while also getting an education. Failing to meet my expectations at the National level, however, was difficult to accept. I struggled to embrace the closing of an important chapter in my book of life. Whether I truly had promise to become a member of the Canadian National Ski Team or not is a question I continue to ponder. I am aware that to cope with disappointing race results I may have convinced myself that I had more potential than I truly possessed. It was likely easier for me to rationalize the time, money, sacrifices, and hard work that I invested in the sport by trying to convince myself that it was something other than my natural talent that was holding me back from reaching my potential than accepting my limitations.

My self-analysis as a young athlete striving to reach soaring heights on the ski slopes brings me full circle to Camp 4 on Mount Everest in 2004. As I waited several days in the death zone for the weather to improve, I reconstructed the reality of the dangerous situation in a way that helped me feel like I was capable of succeeding. I did this to avoid having to face defeat. Because I saw myself as having what it took to reach the top, failing to succeed on the mountain conflicted with my sense of self as successful. Consequently, I did everything in my power to

avoid defeat, including trying to saddle up with another team who was at the South Col and was considering making a summit attempt. Wanting to prove to myself that I was a capable athlete, I interpreted reality in a way that mirrored my self-perception. Eventually, however, as the winds continued to howl and my only chance of joining the other team vanished, I abandoned the climb and made my way down the mountain to Base Camp. Failing to reach the summit in that year created much psychological discomfort for me. Even though I believed in my core that if the weather had been conducive for climbing I would have succeeded in reaching the summit that year, I never felt settled inside. It was not until 2005 when I successfully achieved my goal that the unfinished chapter in my life finally closed.

In the following section, you will be introduced to the participants of the present study - six climbers who fled their homelands to attempt to scale the world's tallest peak. Their personal journey climbing the mountain including their experiences with cognitive dissonance is highlighted.

FINDINGS

No standard format is recommended for reporting qualitative research. Consequently, researchers are left with the task of writing in the style they believe will best represent the richness of their research (Merriam & Associates, 2002). According to Garfinkel (1967), EM is about how social order is produced and shared. In the present study, narratives were the vehicle used to uncover the methods that underlie everyday mountaineering activity. Using an ethnomethodological lens, a narrative view of experience was kept in the foreground of the writing. Specifically, the findings in this research study were represented using the realist tale (Sparkes, 2002), which involves a description of the participants' experiences with the cognitive dissonance phenomenon, a telling of the story. As such, this is the narrative of six Mount Everest climbers who are attempting to climb the mountain.

The narrative approach was chosen as the method to represent the findings, hoping to deepen the reader's comprehension of our interpretation of cognitive dissonance and how this relates to the frameworks upon which this research is founded. According to Atkinson (1990), the findings must do simply more than transcribe or report - they must persuade the reader. Consequently, how research is presented is paramount. This section begins with a personal profile for each of the six participants. Subsequently, a detailed presentation of the six participant case study findings is provided. Please note that the participant's narratives are told simultaneously in a parallel fashion. Consequently, you, the reader, will be taken along a journey that begins at Base Camp, at the onset of the climb where the first interviews were conducted, and ends with the final interviews three months later. A brief description of events that unfolded on the mountain between each of the interviews is provided for contextual purposes. I felt it important to tell the narratives of climbing Everest in a fluid manner, intending to portray each of the six participants' lived experiences with cognitive dissonance as the climb naturally unfolded.

Finally, this section will conclude with cross-case study findings, which reveal patterns of similarity and differences between the climbers and their experiences with the cognitive dissonance phenomenon.

Personal Case Study Profiles

The participants involved in the present study were interviewed at Base Camp a few days after they arrived at the base of the mountain. This interview included primarily demographic information and self-concept information. The data from this interview were used to develop a profile for each of the six participants. The findings that emerged from the data are presented and discussed in conjunction with direct quotes from the interviews to portray the participants' perspectives in their own words.

Janette – “The Conflicted Mother”

Janette is a single mother of three children who are 11, 13, and 15 years old. She resides in Malibu California and spends her days looking after her children and training for adventure races and high altitude mountaineering expeditions. Ever since her first climb in 1998, when she stood on the summit Mount Whitney, she has been captivated by the sport. This passion has led her to climb several high altitude peaks around the world including Mt. McKinley (6,195m), Mt. Elbrus (5,633m), Mt. Kilimanjaro (5,963m), and Mt. Vinson Massif (4,897m). Janette's ultimate goal is to successfully climb the highest mountain on each of the world's continents - widely known among climbers as the seven summits. At age 39, she will not only be one step closer to her goal if she reaches the summit of Everest, but she will also have successfully climbed her first 8000m peak.

Janette is a self-driven, introverted, and empathetic person. When asked to describe herself she shared:

I am driven because if I have a goal then I will see to it that it gets done, but I am also quiet. I don't really like to socialize, I am kind of shy. Really, I am just a Mom. (Interview 1).

She enjoys sports, especially being part of an athletic team and the camaraderie that goes along with it. She tends, however, to keep to herself whenever she is in a group setting. On expeditions, when she is not climbing, she spends most of her time either reading a book or writing in her diary. She believes that her quiet and withdrawn demeanor leads many of her fellow team mates to think that she is weak and inept. Consequently she works very hard when she climbs to disprove this self image to others. She prefers to be seen in the light of a strong vibrant woman.

When Janette climbs she wants to feel at peace, focused, healthy, competent, and strong. Experiencing these feelings is the primary reason why she climbs. At home she often feels overwhelmed by her day-to-day responsibilities. At one point in the interview she shared: "When I climb I feel like I am a very strong woman. I don't feel like that at home. I am just an overwhelmed mother of three." (Interview 1). When she is away from her everyday routine and completely focused on putting one foot in front of the other, she feels completely at peace. When asked to describe how she wants to feel when she climbs she shared:

Some people find it at the beach, some people find it with their friends, but I think that once you find that place you want to keep on going back. I can tell you that when I am on a mountain, I am incredibly at peace and happy. And that keeps me going when I am living my normal life. (Interview 1).

She enjoys climbing expeditions because it means that she rarely has to deal with outside interferences that arise in her day-to-day life. Instead, she can focus entirely on the task at hand.

For Janette, climbing brings a sense of competency. In the initial stages of an expedition, she often experiences feelings of self-doubt. She does not know if she has what it takes to complete the task and therefore questions her abilities. But, by the end of an expedition after she reaches her objective she often feels confident and self-assured about her abilities as a climber. When asked what it means to her to climb she shared, “When I summit a mountain I look back and say to myself ‘I pulled another one off’ and think ‘yes I had what it took.’” (Interview 1). Not only does her self-perception change when she achieves her goals but her behavior toward others also changes. She becomes more self-assured, sociable, and overtly passionate with those around her.

Janette values loyalty, honesty, hard work, and a sense of humor both on and off of the mountain. She enjoys climbing with people who do not take themselves too seriously and expects everyone around her to work hard. To remain motivated and overcome obstacles in the difficult climbing environment, Janette relies on the strategy of goal setting. When asked how she copes with adversity she said: “I just think about where we are supposed to be next, that one goal. And then you get there and you’re very happy.” (Interview 1). Setting small attainable goals that she believes she can achieve gives her the confidence she needs to get through the endeavor. To reconnect with how she wants to feel when she is faced with obstacles, she uses the strategy of self-talk. She reflected,

At one point on Denali I was lying face down in the snow thinking ‘God please let me have a heart attack because I just can’t take one more step.’ And then that little voice inside my head said ‘Get your ass up right now and let’s go.’ (Interview 1).

The moment she picked herself up off the snow and began putting one foot in front of the other, she regained her sense of strength and focus.

The inner conflict that Janette usually experiences when she is in the mountains revolves around her home life. She often feels a sense of guilt when she leaves her children for a protracted period of time to pursue her love of climbing. As she spoke about her experiences with this feeling of discomfort she appeared very serious and ill at ease. It is obvious that as a mother, she finds it hard to balance her family life with her passion for the mountains.

Janette is climbing with the same commercial expedition that she has joined in the past. She always climbs with Alpine Ascents International (AAI) because she trusts the guides and believes that they have one of the best infrastructures in the mountaineering business.

Nate – “The All American”

Nate has been involved in the world of climbing since the age of 19. He has a well-established background and passion for technical climbing, which later led to a career in high altitude mountaineering. Living in Denver Colorado, his love for the outdoors is well situated. When he is not in the office managing his business, he spends most of his free time in the Rocky Mountains not only rock and ice climbing, but also taking advantage of other activities the region has to offer including skiing, competing in marathon races, and biking. At 41 years of age, physical activity is an important part of Nate’s life. He likes to engage in a variety of large scale projects, including coming to Nepal to climb Mount Everest. This undertaking led him to pursue various high altitude peaks around the world. The highest mountain he climbed includes Mt. McKinley (6,195m) in Alaska as part of his preparations for climbing Everest.

Nate is young at heart and has a personality that is larger than life. His zest for life radiates around him everywhere he goes. He never seems to be at a loss for words and always has an interesting story to share with others. He works hard at creating his life in a way that he wants to live it. A devoted husband and father of three, Nate takes charge of his life. When asked

how he would describe himself as a person he said: “I am the type of person who creates my own environments. Rather than work with others, I built my own company. Rather than buy a house from somebody else, I designed and built one myself.” (Interview 1). Nate is detail-oriented and likes to feel a sense of control over his environment. He continued: “Where I am right now in my life is because I put myself here. I didn’t just end up here and say, ‘oh my gosh what am I doing in this tent?’” (Interview 1). He is a person who thinks for himself and takes responsibility for the decisions he makes in his life.

When Nate climbs he wants to feel a sense of purity, focus, accomplishment, balance, and that he is pushing through boundaries. These feelings are the main reason why he climbs. When asked why he climbs he shared,

It is a different feeling that I can’t get from any other area of my life. And it is that feeling that pulls me back up another route or up another ice face at 5 a.m. in –13 degree Celsius temperatures. (Interview 1).

Experiencing these feelings is very important to Nate because he firmly believes that how he feels affects how he performs. For instance, when he becomes too excited while he is climbing it negatively impacts his ability to remain mentally alert. One of the reasons why Nate is drawn to the sport of high altitude climbing is the break he gets from being caught up in modern society’s high technology and fast paced way of life:

I love having climbing in my life because I live a very intense business life and so the only time that I don’t think about anything else is when there is about 200 feet of ice and just air between my legs. (Interview 1).

For Nate, climbing represents a sense of freedom and the ability to be creative.

The values that are fundamental to Nate's life include family, religion, and helping others. As a climber, he values human life, safety, and helping others. The following is a story that he shared with the primary researcher and reflects his values and philosophy of climbing:

One of my friends who used to be a mountaineering guide was climbing in Oregon with a group of five climbers who were roped together. The climbers on the team mindlessly followed the guide's lead without questioning whether or not it was safe to have five people climbing on a rope. Five people died as a result of this set up. It was such a shame that so many lives were lost because of it. They were foolish to allow this to take place.

(Interview 1).

He not only values human life but he also holds high standards for the ability to self-reflect. When asked to describe the values that are important to him as a climber he said, "I value human life and self-reflective thought over some guide's perception of what is good or bad." (Interview 1). Nate has strong opinions and is not afraid to voice his ideas of right and wrong.

When faced with obstacles on the mountain that prevent Nate from feeling how he wants to feel, he relies on various refocusing techniques such as writing in a journal, praying, or meditating to regain a sense of balance and focus. In the moment while he is faced with adversity he takes a more rational approach to cope. When asked how he deals with obstacles while climbing he shared:

When I am in a stressful situation I say to myself, 'keep your cool, don't get scared, and don't panic. You have skills, so use them. You know that you are in a hypoxic environment so be aware of your hypoxic state. Don't for one minute think that it is not that serious, because it is.' (Interview 1).

Using the strategy of self-talk helps him surmount obstacles in the difficult and stressful environment. He also believes that his heart gets him through almost everything. He continued, Psychologically, it is the heart behind the person that gets them through life. Some people sit down and die; others fight and refuse to give up. It took me three years and a half to build my house and it was my heart that got it finished. I was working 17 hours a day, 7 days a week. It was crazy. (Interview 1).

Nate's spirit seems to be the driving force behind most of his accomplishments.

Nate is part of a guided commercial expedition called Mountain Madness. This is his first expedition where he will be guided by a professional leader. In the past, he has always climbed solo or with a group of friends. He believes that his experience in Nepal will in some way change his life. Meeting new people and experiencing a new culture are some examples of ways he thinks his life might be changed after the climb.

Gordie – "The Old Jock"

At 63 years of age Gordie is a retired engineer from the U.S. government. He grew up on a farm in Indiana and presently spends most of his time in Boulder Colorado pursuing athletic goals. He is a marathon runner and is on the executive committee of the Colorado Mountain Club. When he was younger he received 3 degrees from MIT and a Ph.D. from Cornell University. And since his mid thirties, he has been involved in the sport of high altitude mountaineering. To date, he has been on nine major expeditions and has successfully climbed four of the seven highest mountains on each continent - widely known among climbers as the seven summits. The highest peak he climbed was Cho Oyu (8,200m) in the Himalayas, the sixth highest mountain in the world. Climbing Everest however will be the pinnacle of his climbing career. He is not only hoping to become the second oldest American to summit the mountain but

he and his wife are also attempting to become the oldest married couple to triumph. He will be climbing the mountain this season for the first time alongside his wife who he has been married to for eight and a half years.

Gordie is a self-driven individual. When he was younger he was an eagle scout and the captain of every athletic team he was on. He is also extremely intelligent, unpretentious, and empathetic. The following is a story that he shared when he was asked to describe himself as a person. It centers on an incident when he was with his team mates in a small village in the Khumbu valley on the trek to base camp. He shared:

After a typical day of walking in the mountains, one of our porters – locals hired to carry loads up and down mountainous trails - was busy working in the teahouse where our team was going to be staying for the night. He was filling the stoves with yak dung. I was watching the hardworking man and immediately decided to help him. With my bare hands I worked with the porter to load yak dung onto the burning fire. I thought nothing of my actions. My team mates, however, were profoundly disturbed by my behavior. They did not try to hide their disgust of me handling the dug as they openly looked at me like I was from another planet. But, this was nothing that was unusual for me. I had worked in cow shit and delivered calves and pigs for many years. That is part of me. (Interview 1).

The old adage that he used to describe himself was: “You can take the boy out of the country but you can’t take the country out of the boy.” (Interview 1). Gordie’s early days, growing up on a farm in Indiana, have clearly shaped who he is.

Athletics have played an important role throughout Gordie’s life. For as long as he can remember he has been involved in various athletic pursuits. In high school and college he was on the baseball and basketball teams and he ran track and field, and to this day, running marathons

and mountaineering are part of his current activities. When he talks about climbing Everest and what it means to him to climb he said, “It is part of the continuation of my athletic being.” (Interview 1). Sports serve a purpose in his life other than simple enjoyment. For instance, during his years at MIT he struggled somewhat from a scholastic standpoint. The education he received from his small community high school barely provided him with the fundamentals he required to succeed at the college level. Consequently, he was behind the power curve and raced to try and keep up with his peers. His self-confidence suffered as a result. Sports however gave him the confidence he needed to persevere in school and in life. He shared, “Fortunately I was on freshman basketball and baseball teams. I know now, looking back, that that was giving me self-confidence, the only self-confidence I was getting.” (Interview 1). He eventually overcame his difficulties at school and by the time in was a junior he was on the dean’s list. As he opened up and shared this aspect of his life, he became quite emotional.

Gordie wants to feel healthy, confident, and remain positive when he climbs. He believes that how he feels affects how he performs and has really been noticing this trend ever since he has gotten older. His athletic performance has been slowly deteriorating over the years and consequently he tends to experience negative thoughts. Knowing that they are harmful to his performance, he works hard at blocking out the negative thoughts that arise during his performances. He achieves this by doing a lot of visualization to prepare him to feel in good physical shape while climbing. When asked how he prepares himself to feel the way he wants to feel while climbing he shared,

Every night before I go to bed I imagine what it is going to be like going up the Hillary Step and what the last day is going to feel like. I know I am going to feel like crap, but I see myself pushing through it and feeling healthy and strong. (Interview 1).

Gordie climbs in high altitude because it teaches him something about himself. Through climbing he learns what he is capable of. When asked why he climbs he shared, “It is about yourself and learning what you can do if you really have determination.” (Interview 1). He also believes that overcoming hardship builds character. Specifically, when he overcomes obstacles in the mountains he gains self-confidence. He also points out that the beauty of climbing is enduring tests with other people. It creates bonds that led to long lasting friendships.

The values that guide Gordie’s life are integrity, honesty, personal responsibility, and humor. These values shape him into being the best person he can possibly be. As a climber, he holds these same values in high esteem but he also embraces courage and team work. He respects climbers who are brave and who help others. On a past climbing expedition he abandoned the climb because the chemistry between the members of the group did not feel right to him.

When Gordie feels threatened in the climbing environment he relies on the same strategies that he uses in his daily life. He tends to take a rational well-thought-out approach unless his anger gets the better of him. If the latter occurs he tends to bash his way through adversity. Generally, however, he focuses on being sensible by looking for logical ways around the problem. He generally takes a step back from the problem and then reconnects with his overall objective. For instance, when he is climbing and his focus shifts to how bad he is feeling and the effort of all that lies ahead he refocuses his attention only on the next step in front of him until he eventually reaches his goal. He thinks about his breathing and simply putting one foot in front of the other.

Sayed – “The Gregarious Amateur”

Five years ago Sayeed had a vision of becoming the first Jordanian to stand on the summit of Mount Everest. At that time he had no climbing experience, had never seen snow or slept in a sleeping bag, and was not even sure where Mount Everest was located. But his desire to achieve something big in his life was so manifest that it superseded any hesitation he may have been experiencing at that time.

Sayed was born in Kuwait in 1970 and then moved to Jordan in 1990 to study Accommodation Management. Three years later he moved to London to work as a butler for the Jordanian ambassador and study International Hospitality and Tourist Management at a local educational institution. Before completing his degree in London, however, he decided to return to Jordan to settle. But before long he got restless and decided to leave his homeland to travel around India for six months hoping to fulfill a feeling of emptiness he experienced in his everyday life. Upon his return to from India he continued to sense a void in his life so he moved to Edinburgh and found work in the retail business. The void he was experiencing continued to prevail and for that reason he made the commitment to try and make his vision of standing on the top of the world become real. When asked to tell me about himself he shared, “I really wanted something big in my life and I thought that climbing Everest would help so I set out to make it happen.” (Interview 1).

Sayed is an extremely likeable, gregarious, shrewd, self-driven person. Whether he is at home or on an expedition he enjoys spending time socializing with others. His outgoing and likeable personality tends to draw people to him. The self-driven side of his personality surfaces whenever he sets his mind on a particular task. For instance, when he made the decision to climb Everest he stopped everything in his life and focused entirely on the climb. His ability to

convince the proper people to invest great sums of money for him to climb Everest demonstrates a clever mind. To find the necessary funds that were required to climb the mountain Sayeed contacted a newspaper in Edinburgh, which the King of Jordan reads on a daily basis. And with the help of one of his friends at the network Sayeed wrote an article highlighting the benefits for his country if someone were to stand on the summit of Everest for the first time. A few days later the Royal Palace contacted him because they had decided to finance his training and climb to the mountain. Consequently, Sayeed began training for the biggest undertaking of his life. He joined the commercial outfitter Jagged Globe and set out to attempt climbing various peaks around the world including Mt. McKinley (6,195m), Mera Peak (6,476m), Mt. Vinson Massif (4,897m), and Shishipangma (8,012m) in preparation for Everest.

When Sayeed climbs he wants to feel pain. Specifically, he talks about embracing the pain he is experiencing and using this feeling as a tool to continue climbing. He also relies heavily on the strategy of self-talk for motivational purposes. He repeats inspiring quotes to himself and uses positive words to keep going when met with difficult conditions. Ironically, however, he does not like the sport of high altitude mountaineering and the discomforts associated with it. He would prefer to be in the islands scuba diving rather than being in the mountains. He trusts however that a strong belief in one's capacities will ensure success in whatever activity he pursues. When asked to describe how he copes with obstacles he shared,

All I have to do is believe. When I was on Mt. McKinley I fully believed I was going to do it. And it was hard because I had never been on snow. But I succeeded because it was all in my head and that is how it is with anything I do in life. (Interview 1).

The Muslim way of life greatly shapes Sayeed's values and philosophy of life. He practices his religion on a daily basis, sometimes praying five times a day. The way he copes

with distressing thoughts that arise as a result of placing himself in a dangerous climbing environment stems from his religious beliefs. When asked to describe how he copes with thoughts of death he shared,

I believe in Allah so much and am therefore not scared of dying. I have absolutely no fear. If I die in the mountains then it was meant to be. I did what I had to do for Allah. And, I believe that my next life is actually better than being in this life. My future has already been written for me (Interview 1).

Sayed copes with thoughts of death by giving over to his religious beliefs; as per the Muslim faith a person's life is preordained, which allows Sayeed to distance himself from taking responsibility for his actions.

The guides on Sayeed's expedition will play a significant role throughout the climb on Everest. Sayeed always relies a great deal on the guides he hires to lead him up a mountain. He says,

I have the right equipment because this is what the professionals said to bring. And I wear it when they say wear it. And, I don't really need to know how to use it because the guides that I have hired are very experienced. (Interview 1).

Sayed is climbing Everest with the commercial outfitter Alpine Ascents International (AAI). He will allow the guides to make decisions and ultimately defer entirely to their judgment concerning when he should or should not climb.

Steven – "The Intellect"

For 40 years, since the day his father gave him a copy of the book "The Descent of Everest," Steven had been thinking about climbing Everest. When he was a young adult financial restrictions, work, and family responsibilities prevented him from fulfilling his dream. The day

he retired from working as a geologist in a mining company, however, he positioned himself so that his dream could be realized. When he started his current job, four years ago at the British Chamber of Commerce in China, he put aside enough money to climb Everest and began preparing for the challenge. He got himself into the best physical shape possible and gained experience by climbing various high altitude peaks around the world including Mt. Aconcagua (6,962m) and Mt. McKinley (6,195m).

Steven is a very easygoing, optimistic, and analytical person. When asked to describe himself he shared, “I guess I am an optimist, but with a dose of realism as well.” (Interview 1). He is the type of person who sees life as ‘the glass half full.’ He looks for the positive side in everything but always from a realistic standpoint. For instance, when he climbs he views obstacles as opportunities to grow. He will not however place himself in precarious situations to surmount adversity unless he has taken a rational approach toward assessing the danger. He is a pragmatic type of person who tends to remain calm in pressure situations.

Mountains have been a part of Steven’s life for as long as he can remember. When he was 5 years old his family took him walking in the hills in England. When he turned 10, he got into rock climbing and between the ages of fourteen and twenty one he worked in mountain rescue. The mountains have always been a big part of Steven’s life. When he climbs he wants to feel in balance and focused because these feelings provide him with a sense of comfort within the dangerous environment that high altitude stands for. It is important for Steven to be aware of his capabilities so that he can remain within his comfort zone at all times. He learned from his days working in mountain rescue that when people are oblivious of their capabilities they tend to find themselves in situations that are outside of their comfort zone. And consequently they lack the necessary experience to extract themselves from their problem. Feeling safe and comfortable

in the climbing environment is important for Steven. He firmly believes that people who do not feel comfortable should not attempt a mountain like Everest because a climber's level of comfort is very telling and reflective of a person's experience and skill level.

Steven believes that life is a series of contrasts. He climbs because it allows him to experience a sense of equilibrium within it. He experiences a sense of balance in his life when he is able to couple the monotony of his day-to-day routine with the adventure and challenge that he finds while climbing. He also climbs because he likes to feel challenged and enjoys the feeling he derives from being connected to nature. Whether he is walking in the hills, rock climbing, or high altitude mountaineering, he enjoys the feeling he derives from being close to something which is greater than he is. He believes that it is very important in life for people to feel insignificant.

The values that are important to Steven both as a person and climber include honesty and helping others. In his day-to-day life he makes an effort to help other people when he can. When he climbs he believes that it very important to work together as a team and help others whenever they are in need. He also believes in being honest with one's self and with other people with whom he climbs. Being honest breeds the group cohesion that is needed when people's lives are dependent on one another in the mountains.

When asked if he has ever experienced an inner conflict Steven referred to his days when he used to solo rock climb quite a bit. The acts of being alone in the mountains often made him question his sanity. He answered, "Yes, there is an inner conflict when you ask yourself if you are sane or not. Should I really be doing this especially when I am often in precarious situations?" (Interview 1). In these instances he would either back off or overcome the fear by

pushing forward. Generally speaking, however, his approach is one where he tries to manage his fear by finding a middle ground:

There is a balance between pushing too hard and trying to overcome the inner fear and backing off. If the spectrum that you choose is too far on the risk scale you may not survive. But on the other hand, you don't want to be on the lower end of the spectrum because then you won't learn. (Interview 1).

He believes that climbers should always perform somewhere in the middle of their risk spectrum. That way when they encounter an obstacle they can work their way through it rather than becoming overwhelmed by their fear.

Steven views obstacles whether they are encountered in life or while climbing as an opportunity to learn. His climbing and life philosophy are one and the same: "Where there is a problem, there is an opportunity." (Interview 1). He applies the lessons that he draws from difficult climbing experiences to his everyday life and vice versa. He shared: "Climbing not only helps my life but life also helps my climbing." (Interview 1). According to Steven, it is a reciprocal process.

Allan – "The Sensitive Soul"

At 59 years of age Allan climbs mountains because he loves the thrill of pushing himself past imagined limits. To date, he has successfully climbed four of the seven highest peaks on each continent including Mt. Kilimanjaro (5,963m), Mt. McKinley (6,195m), Mt. Aconcagua (6,962m), and Mt. Elbrus (5,633m). This will be Allan's first attempt climbing Everest. He is aware that the mountain is extremely dangerous and difficult to climb and greatly respects the mountain for these reasons. According to Allan, "Everest is a horse of a different color." (Interview 1). Climbing the highest peak on the planet not only requires that Allan learn new

skills such as how to repel and ice climb, but it also means that he will be performing in altitudes above 7,000m for the first time. Consequently, Allan knows that he is going to be frequently pushed beyond his limits, which is exactly what he came here for.

Allan is a highly motivated self-starter and humble soul who is compassionate to the needs of others. When asked to describe himself he shared, “I always work hard at trying to make the world a better place. I am empathetic, a go-getter, and a thrill seeker.” (Interview 1). Allan also appears to be quite modest. This personality trait surfaced when he talked about some of the other climbers who were going to be on the mountain at the same time as him. He shared, “I am always cautious about calling myself a climber because when I am in the presence of guys like Willy, Dave, or Jose Louis I know that I am out of their league.” (Interview 1). His outlook in this regard however is coupled with a subtle sense of self-assurance. His chest and shoulders straightened when he talked about how proud he felt for having the courage to simply step on the mountain.

When Allan climbs he wants to feel free, healthy, competent, and proud. Climbing is a spiritual experience for him given that he feels extremely close to God whenever he is in the mountains. It also provides him with tremendous feelings of accomplishment. This feeling of achievement occurs whenever he pushes himself past physical and psychological limits that he thought existed. He does not mention how he reconnects with these desired feelings when they are lost. He does, however, stress the importance of challenging himself and getting enough sleep so that he can feel the way he wants to feel.

Allan values each and every day and tries to take full advantage of the opportunities presented to him. He is climbing the mountain because he hopes that his experience pushing through barriers will have positive impact on people with cancer. A few years ago Allan and his

wife created a non profit organization, which raises money for cancer. They started the organization with the purpose of giving people hope and helping them fight their battles. Allan's sister was diagnosed with cancer eight and a half years ago. She was given only six months to live. Allan hopes: "That my experience on Everest becomes a metaphor for beating cancer: That anything is possible." (Interview 1). It is clear that his climb on Everest is more than just a personal feat.

Making the decision to climb Everest was difficult for Allan. His advanced age, money, and risk were factors that prevented him from making a quick and affirmative decision. Choosing to climb with the best company in the mountaineering business however helped him eventually come to terms with his decision. He says, "I have a tremendous amount of confidence in the guides. So, I let them make the decisions and have confidence in what they are asking us to do." (Interview 1). Allan's level of comfort related to being in a high risk environment increased when he decided to climb with Alpine Ascents International (AAI).

Allan's way of overcoming hardship on the mountain is to think of the people he knows who are fighting cancer. Every time he thinks he can't take one more step, he thinks about the children, his sister, and everyone else he is friends with who is diagnosed with cancer. He says, "Every time I say I am so tired, I can't go on, I am so fatigued, I think about my sister, a 9 year old boy I am close with who is fighting for his life, or a young friend of mine who overcame cancer twice and reached the summit of Everest the year before with one lung. I think about what it would mean to them because they have told me that a 59 year old man attempting Everest would give them a lot of hope that anything is possible. (Interview 1). As he spoke these words tears of compassion swelled in his eyes. It is clear that Allan deeply cares for the people he knows in his life that are struggling to overcome the hardships associated

with cancer. When he thinks about what they have to endure in their lives and reflects on his capability to give hope to these people he finds the motivation to persevere when faced with obstacles on the mountain.

Case Study Findings

The data from the interviews, and to a much lesser extent the field notes, that were conducted at different times both on and off the mountain with each of the six participants were used to develop the case study findings. The participants' narratives are broken down into various segments, which reflect the point in time during the expedition when each interview was conducted: (a) the onset of the climb; (b) Camp 2; (c) preparing for the summit climb; (d) the countdown and; (e) the aftermath. A description of events that unfolded on the mountain before each interview took place is provided. Each participant's narrative is told in a chronological and simultaneous fashion within the greater story of climbing Everest. The narratives were structured in this way to highlight the particulars of the 2006 season on Everest given that they are an integral part of the climber's experiences with cognitive dissonance.

The Onset (5,464 meters) – April 8th

After arriving in the capital city of Nepal, the climbers who were involved in the present study spent two weeks trekking through the *Solu Khumbu* region of the Himalayas on route to the base of Mount Everest. They began their journey from Katmandu with a flight into *Lukla* - a mountainous village that acted as the starting point of their trek – and then followed an ancient route that took them through tiny villages, across high mountain passes, and along deep valleys. A strong walker, pre acclimatized to the altitude, could cover the distance between the *Lukla* airstrip to Everest Base Camp in two or three long days. However, to ensure proper acclimatization * (because they had just arrived from sea level), the climbers enjoyed a series of

short trekking days stopping often for food and drink at trailside teahouses. Seldom did they walk more than three or four hours on any given day. Most of their gear was carried by yaks and human porters, which allowed them to carry very little in their backpacks except maybe a bottle of water, a camera, and an extra layer of clothing. Moreover, they enjoyed periodic rest days, walking nowhere at all, as they gradually made their way toward Base Camp - a protected area at 5,464 meters that becomes a temporary 'home' for climbers during the length of their stay on the mountain.

After arriving at the base of the mountain - a desolate patch of rock and ice that housed over 300 tents - the climbers spent a few days at 5,464 meters resting and acclimatizing to the reduced levels of oxygen in the air before starting their journey up the mountain. More than three miles above sea level, the climbers began to seriously experience the effects of high altitude. Sleep became elusive, cuts and scrapes refused to heal, appetites diminished, and walking into the mess tent at mealtime left most of the climbers breathless for several minutes. Nonetheless, as they settled into their thin nylon dome shaped tents, they readied themselves for one of the most challenging climbs of their lives. It was at this point in the expedition, before the climbers' journey toward the world's tallest peak was about to begin that they partook in a first interview with the primary researcher.

Janette

After finally arriving at the base of the mountain Janette was starting to prepare herself for the upcoming week. She was nervous about making her very first attempt through the dangerous Khumbu icefall, which she had read and heard so much about from her guides and other Everest climbers she met along the trail to Base Camp. She felt at once nervous anticipation and a nearly overwhelming sense of dread. She was unsure if her training and skills

were up to par for the challenge, but ultimately she didn't think she would have a problem getting to Camp 1. Even more, she expected that in due time she would reach her goal of standing on the summit. And, she hoped that she was going to have a good time throughout the process.

She was not going to push herself to the point of death or serious injury to get to the top, even though she was concerned about going back to California without being victorious. The anger she experienced when she thought about returning home having to potentially explain to friends and family why she did not succeed sat on her. She did not think that the layman understood how hard it was to just be there and give it a try and was frustrated by the realization that her accomplishment would only be respected if she were to reach the summit. The annoyed look on her face reflected this belief. When asked how she would cope if she did not reach her goal she said: "Whatever is meant to be is meant to be. The mountain will always be here. If I don't summit, I will come back." (Interview 1). She was determined to reach her goal no matter how long it took her. Ironically, however, she was not prepared to take full responsibility for the outcome of her situation. She believed that ultimately fate would dictate the end result.

On her way to Nepal, she was reflecting and struggling with her thoughts of balancing her life between family and mountaineering. Her decision to climb Everest was causing her inner turmoil. She felt a profound sense of responsibility to her children that she knew she was unable to fulfill while she was in the mountains. As a result, she was experiencing a nagging feeling of guilt, which began the moment she left home and was headed toward Katmandu. She knew that she was going to be away from her children for a two-month period of time and that they were not happy with this arrangement. This was her longest expedition and she felt uncomfortable with that realization. To help ease her troubled state of mind, she called home everyday since she

left the city of Katmandu. The moment she got off the phone with her kids, however, she felt tremendous remorse. On the phone her kids would ask her, “When are you coming home? Are you coming home today?” The inner struggle it created was like an emotional tug of war. On the one hand, she wanted to be in the mountains pursuing her goal, but on the other hand she felt strongly that it was her duty to be at home with her children looking after their well-being. She copes:

I am entitled to do this and they are entitled to do what they want to do. And I will support them fully as they go after their dreams. But, I need the same support. I don't want to do this when I am 50 or 60 when they are in college. (Interview 1).

She was dealing with her inner conflict by assuring herself that she had every right to pursue her goals just like her kids.

As she projected into the future, she believed that her experience climbing the mountain would not have a huge impact on her. Her life would not change, however, she did believe that if she were to summit, her confidence would improve. When asked if she thought this experience would change her life she shared: “It would be a bit of a confidence boost. It would be a nice feeling to know I could do something.” (Interview 1). She also hoped that by attaining her goal, she would not be as bothered by the little things in life that usually had a negative impact on her well-being. She continued, “Usually when I come home from a climb, small things in my daily life don't faze me as much. I mean, molehills are no longer huge mountains like they once were. I hope that is the same this time.” (Interview 1). She believed that climbing Everest was going to be one of the biggest learning experiences of her life. She was going to learn a lot about her strengths and weaknesses.

Nate

He was excited to be in Nepal and thrived on the novelty of the experience. He was meeting new people, trying different foods, and taking in all the idiosyncrasies of a culture he knew little about. At the end of the day he was very passionate about the process of climbing Everest and wanted to experience every aspect of the climb. He had spent the journey to Base Camp getting to know the other climbers on his expedition. He wasn't sure what to make of his fellow team mates. In attitude and experience they were nothing like the hard-core climbers with whom he usually went into the mountains. And having never climbed as a member of a commercial group – a group of complete strangers, no less - he was wary about joining forces with those whose climbing backgrounds were unknown to him. Nonetheless, they seemed like nice, decent folks and his hesitancy did not stop him from warming up to his new comrades. His manner of communicating with the group was filled with great energy and intensity.

A few days into the trek, after the team had spent an acclimatization day in *Namche Bazaar*, they were able to see the icy thrust of Everest itself for the very first time. Although he had seen hundreds of mountains, Everest was different from anything he'd previously witnessed. As he stared at the peak in awe he tried to comprehend what it would be like to be standing on its apex. He was highly motivated and even more telling he expected to reach the top. When asked how important it was for him to reach the summit he shared:

I really want to do this. I mean waking up at 3:30 a.m. every morning seven days a week, is not because I hope to reach the summit. In more ways than one, I really expect to. My desire is very high. (Interview 1).

He would not do so however at all costs. He planned on working hard and pushing through physical, mental, and emotional barriers, but he was not going to consciously place himself in a situation that had the potential of costing him an extremity or his life.

His decision to climb Everest initially created inner conflict for him. The discomfort he experienced after choosing to climb the mountain stemmed from the fact that he was consciously placing himself in a dangerous environment at the potential cost of leaving his three children and wife financially ruined. This realization was somewhat disturbing for him even though took steps to protect his family by taking out a sizeable insurance policy. When asked if he had experienced any inner conflict thus far, he shared: “I think it is one thing not to be there, but it is another thing to throw your entire family into financial ruin and not have your kids go to college.” (Interview 1). He took steps to ease this distressed state of mind before he left home for the mountain. When asked how he coped with his discomfort he said, “Taking out an insurance policy makes sure that that won’t happen and makes me feel better at the same time.” (Interview 1). The three million dollar insurance policy that Nate took out before leaving for the mountain helped him feel better in the knowledge that his family would be financially protected if he were to die on the mountain.

He believed that climbing the mountain was a selfish act. When asked what climbing meant to him, he shared: “I mean it is pretty much a selfish thing. I can’t say that I am benefiting mankind you know or raising money for any particular cause, like Erik Weinheimer did a few years ago for the blind.” (Interview 1). To cope with this thought he continued:

Well, it pretty much is not a totally selfish act rather it is a ‘for me’ thing, because selfish sounds a little negative. It is like hanging out in the steam room for half an hour every morning; it’s kind of a ‘for me’ thing. (Interview 1).

He believed that people needed things in their lives that they did strictly for themselves.

By the end of the expedition, he believed the climb would provide him with a unique opportunity to learn about himself. He believed he was going to look inward and see something inside his self that he had never seen before.

Gordie

He was driven to reach the summit and thought about it a lot since leaving his home in Boulder. In particular he thought about the discomfort he was going to have to face to achieve his goal. He knew he was going to suffer a great deal but he felt ready for the physical and mental challenge. Even more he looked forward to the very end of the journey – the moment when the climb was over and he was out of harm's way. He believed the aftermath of the experience was going to be one of the best things in the world. When asked how he planned on coping with the discomfort he was going to experience he shared,

I imagine it is a bit like childbirth. While you are in the throes of labor, you think wow, I am never going to do this again, but then a few weeks later it is viewed as the best experience of your life. (Interview 1).

The only thing that really troubled him was how the expedition was going to conclude. He wholeheartedly hoped the entire team would make it to the top, including him, but realistically he didn't think they all would. Having been on expeditions when some of his team mates triumphed and others didn't, he dreaded to think that it might happen again. The schism it created among the group was not something he looked forward to. He was starting to get to know the eleven other people on his team and was thoroughly enjoying their company. When asked how he coped with the realization that some of his team mates might not make it the summit he said, "I think that if anyone has the chance of getting our entire team up there, this outfitter will.

They are dedicated, well organized, and experienced. So, we may have a chance after all.”

(Interview 1). He believed AAI was the best outfitter in the mountaineering business and that ultimately they were going to provide the support that he and his team mates needed to succeed.

He did not want to go home without the Everest summit under his belt. When asked what his expectations were at this point in the journey he shared,

I don't want to go home and say 'I didn't make the summit but it was a good experience.' I don't need to pay this kind of money and do this kind of training and mental commitment for an experience. I want to be able to make it. I am very driven to do it. (Interview 1).

The weight he placed on reaching the summit was very heavy. He was not, however, going to try and succeed at all costs. He planned on taking a cautious approach during the climb because he worried that his stubborn nature might push him to climb in dangerous situations that were beyond his capabilities. His strategy to climb cautiously involved deferring completely to the judgment of his guides when it came time to making decisions. When asked how important it was for him to reach the summit he shared, “The guides are going to tell me whether I am too slow, too sick, or whether I am not acclimatizing properly and I have to completely entrust my situation to them. And, I will do that willingly.” (Interview 1). Climbing Everest was the hardest and most dangerous mountain he had ever climbed. And he was using the strategy of relying heavily on the guides he hired to lead him up the mountain to cope with his fears. When asked how he coped with potential injury or death he shared, “I have a lot of confidence in the guides so that has taken one worry away completely.” (Interview 1).

Entrusting his life to the opinions of the guides was his way of coping not only with the inherent dangers of the mountain but it also helped his two, grown daughters cope with their fears. They worried about the possibility of losing their Dad to the mountain. When he told them

that he was going to listen to the guides at all times during the expedition and especially under questionable circumstances his children felt some sense of relief.

As the first day of climbing approached he began to experience negative thoughts. Focusing on his advanced age caused him to worry about how well he was going to perform. When asked to describe challenges that he has faced so far he shared, “You can’t help but be 63 and look at the statistics and say ‘we have a small probability here.’ (Interview 1). The thought of not being successful contradicted his perception of self as capable and successful. He worked hard at trying to talk to himself in a positive way to fight his negative frame of mind. He continuously reminded himself that he was capable of climbing the mountain. When asked how he coped with self-doubt he shared, “I keep on saying to myself ‘look at what I am doing at this age, there are not many people who have the courage to do this.’” (Interview 1). He was proud of himself for being the oldest climber on the mountain that season. When asked how he coped with the fact that he is at least ten years older than most of the other climbers on the mountain he shared: “I believe that the oxygen availability up high will compensate for my increase in age over the years.” (Interview 1). Knowing that he was going to use oxygen to climb the mountain helped him cope with the fact that he was significantly older than most of the other climbers. He was also relying on his past climbing achievements for inner confidence; knowing that he reached nearly 8,000 meters without oxygen in the past was providing him with the self-assurance that he could at least get to that elevation again.

After he made the decision to climb Everest he began to experience some self-doubt. He questioned if at his age he would be able to succeed. To help him cope he had various conversations with elite high altitude mountaineers that he knew to give him an honest assessment of his chance of success before leaving on the expedition. When asked how he coped

with thoughts of potential failure he mentioned that he tried to remind himself of what one elite climber and expedition leader in particular said to him: “I have guided a lot of old farts and most of them can’t walk the talk but when I look at your resume and how much you have done; I think you can do this.” (Interview 1). He was using positive affirmations from other climbers to help him cope with his decision to climb the mountain. This strategy helped him remain as positive as possible as he prepared for the journey ahead. Reflecting on the encouraging opinions of well-respected climbers was his way of dealing with thoughts of potential failure.

Sayeed

Since the moment he left the city of Katmandu he had been religiously following the advice of his guides.’ He drank water whenever they told him he needed fluids to stay hydrated and ate every time they told him he needed fuel to sustain his strength. He had been up several rungs of the high altitude ladder in the past. His experience reached about 7000 meters, which gave him an idea of how serious and demanding the environment was on the body, mind, and spirit but he did not have the confidence or experience above 7000 meters to rely solely on his own judgment. The one absolute truth he knew about climbing high on Everest was that he did not know enough. This realization was somewhat disconcerting for him. So, in an act of complete self-awareness and utter subservience he made the decision before leaving home that throughout the entire length of the expedition he was going to not only listen to his guides but also *act* on their every word. He shares, “I have to listen to my guides and do whatever they say” (Interview 1).

In a bizarre twist of logic he had convinced himself that he was taking responsibility for his success and survival on the mountain by absolving himself entirely of the decision making process for his success and survival. Within the climbing culture there is a high value placed on

self sufficiency and self reliance - arguably the highest regard is given to a mountaineer who solo's a mountain without any support. Consequently, most of his teammates tried to learn as much as possible about the climb they would be attempting as a means of garnering a deep well of information to draw from in the hopes of better decision making, which in turn, would increase their personal safety and chances of summit success. He, however, had made the decision to remain ignorant about the mountain he was about to climb. He shared,

To be honest, I didn't know anything about Everest and what the climb involved until Sterling sent me that Everest documentary. I was watching it and I said to myself 'what the heck is all this?' But in all honesty, I didn't really watch. I skipped most parts because I did not want to know. (Interview 1).

His need to acquiesce the responsibility for his life to a paid climbing leader facilitated his decision to not learn about the climb. When asked how he coped with his decision to consciously place himself in a dangerous environment he responded,

I didn't want to read anything about what it was going to be like. It was easier for me to do it this way and rely on the experienced guides to help me. If I find myself in a dangerous situation on the mountain then the guides will tell me what to do. (Interview 1).

He convinced himself that it was better to remain ignorant. He reasoned that the more he knew about the climb the more likely he would find himself in a position of questioning and in turn potentially disobeying the guides' decisions. Above all else, he didn't want to know because he believed that his guides knew better. When asked how he made sense of the realization that he could potentially die on the mountain he shared, "The guides have a lot more experience and knowledge than I have. They know way more than I do, so I will completely defer to them. And if it happens well then it happens." (Interview 1). Making the decision to give over complete

responsibility for his life to the guides helped him ease the anxiety he felt about climbing the mountain with little climbing experience. This pattern of thought stayed consistent with his deeply felt religious beliefs - to give over your life to something or someone else. Fate in the guise of a guide was his destiny and Allah had already authored the conclusion to this chapter of his life.

During his time spent on the trail to the base of the mountain and at Base Camp, he found it a difficult task to not have the peripheral information of climbing the mountain creep into his consciousness when living 24/7 in an enclosed, self- absorbed and singularly goal driven community. Nonetheless, it was a task that he embraced not as a chore but more of a mission. He blocked out the chatter and gossip that circulated his camp, which typically entailed stories of past climbing triumphs and tragedies, and challenges the team would face. He also spent a great deal of time preparing his mind for the summit push. Throughout the course of the day he would program his mind to succumb to the judgment of his guides. Every morning and afternoon he would repeat to himself like a mantra, ‘whatever my guides say to do I will do. I will not argue with them.’ (Interview 1). If he encoded his mind with enough thoughts of telling himself to listen to the guides then he believed he would be safe if he got into trouble up high on the mountain. In particular, the Hilary Step caused him a lot of worry. He often questioned how he was going to survive that section of the climb.

If truth were told he did not enjoy climbing and wasn’t particularly excited about spending two months on the side of a mountain. When asked how he wanted to feel while climbing he shared, “To be honest, I don’t like it. I would love to be scuba diving somewhere rather than miserable in the mountains.” (Interview 1). Nonetheless, he was climbing the tallest mountain in the world with the express purpose of being the first Jordanian to stand on the

summit. He believed that his life would change if he were able to reach the summit.

Opportunities would arise that otherwise would never have been made available. Even though he deeply yearned to wave the Jordanian flag on the summit he was not, however, going to do so at all costs. When asked how important it was for him to get to the top he responded: “I am not going to take unnecessary risks that might cost me my life. The mountain has been here for millions of years and will most probably be here for another million years. I can always come back.” (Interview 1). He rationalized potential failure by saying: “If it is not meant to be then I will not reach the summit and that is fine.” (Interview 1). He believed in fate and that ultimately the climb was out of his control.

Even though he adamantly believed in fate when he spoke of potential failure, he believed with all his heart that he was going to be able to reach the summit. He reckoned that success was all in his head. At one point in the interview he shared, “If I believe that I can do it then no matter what, my brain will force my body to continue until I reach the summit.” (Interview 1). He strongly believed that he would be successful as long as he programmed his mind. He continually engaged in self-talk using the mental strategy to remind himself that he was capable. He reasoned that if he were faced with adversity and struggled on the mountain to take the next step then his brain would automatically respond to the situation and send confident signals to his body. Success he believed was mind over matter. Not a single doubt entered his mind when he thought about the possibility of failure. When asked what his expectations were at this point in the journey he shared, “I believe 100% in my heart that I will do it.” (Interview 1). He also believed that even if he weren’t the first Jordanian to stand on the summit, one day, particularly on a Friday, he would get there.

At this point in the journey, his body seemed to be adapting fairly well to the lack of oxygen in the air, which had become increasingly thinner with each step closer to Base Camp. The only challenge he was facing was that he struggled to fall asleep at night. He was beginning to show signs of a mild case of insomnia. He knew that it was fairly common for people to experience disturbed sleeping patterns in high altitude, especially higher up on the mountain, but it bothered him when he lay awake for many hours into the night unable to drift off into an unconscious state. So, with the help of his guides he came up with a plan. He decided that if he were not able to fall asleep within the first hour that he went to bed then he would pick up his book turn on his music and try to exhaust himself to the point of oblivion.

Steven

He had been waiting for this moment for a long time and was excited to be at the base of the mountain. He had read and seen so many pictures of Base Camp but seeing it for the first time with his very own eyes was strangely surreal. It looked to him like a barren wasteland, capable of sustaining little. At 5,464 meters, more than three hundred tents lay scattered over the boulder-strewn ice. He found it hard to imagine that this sprawling settlement of nylon domes would serve as his home for the next six weeks.

There was no view of the upper section of the mountain but there was a magnificent view at the bottom of the icefall and up toward the summit. As he looked into the jaws of the *Khumbu* icefall he worried somewhat about the outcome of the climb, of being able to complete the task. Ultimately, however, he was there to experience and enjoy the process of climbing the mountain. He believed that the experience would provide him many opportunities to learn about himself no matter how things turned out. The team would be heading to Camp 1 in the next couple of days and even though his emotions oscillated between anxious anticipation and a nearly

overwhelming sense of trepidation he kept on reminding himself that he was there to enjoy it, be part of a team, feel challenged, and find out what he was capable of. He was not going to push himself beyond what he could handle. He shares, “I won’t take on a challenge that I can’t manage.” (Interview 1). Rather he was going to take a very cautious approach and on a day-to-day basis assess how he was feeling.

He made a promise to his wife before leaving home that he was determined to keep. He gave her his word that he would come back home safe and sound. When asked what his expectations were at this point in the journey he responds:

I have not done much high altitude climbing so my expectations are not great. I think it will depend on my comfort level. If I am in a situation where I have had enough practice and feel comfortable I would like to take the opportunity to go to the summit. But it is not an all encompassing desire. (Interview 1).

If the situation feels right then he will attempt the summit. If for whatever reason he feels uncomfortable in his surroundings he will willingly retreat. His ultimate objective was to return home safely.

He was not driven exclusively by attaining the summit of Everest. Rather, he was on the expedition because he was geared toward finding out what his capabilities were. He seemed genuinely happy to simply be there, to be part of an Everest expedition. He shares: “If I don’t get to the top of Everest it is not a failure, it is an experience.” (Interview 1). At the end of the day he was thrilled to finally be realizing his dream that he had been thinking about since childhood.

Allan

He knew that his first time through the *Khumbu* icefall was not going to be easy. He had climbed other mountains in the past but nothing as complex and difficult as scaling the world’s

tallest peak. As he readied himself for the first leg of the journey he thought about all the people he knew who had cancer. He often thought about them. They were a great motivator especially when he faced hardship. Thinking about their tremendous will to live gave him the courage and strength to compete against long odds and big obstacles. He had a feeling he would be thinking about them a lot during this climb. One of the reasons he came to the mountain was because he wanted to be tested and pushed in ways that were beyond imaginable.

He enjoyed the feeling he derived from breaking through barriers he thought existed. It made him feel strong and free. But above all else, he hoped his experience climbing the mountain would have a positive impact on people with cancer. When asked what his expectations were at this point in the journey he shared, "That my experience on Everest becomes a metaphor for beating cancer: That anything is possible." (Interview 1). Eight and a half years ago his sister was diagnosed with cancer and was given only six months to live. A few years ago he and his wife decided to create a non profit organization that raises money for the cancer foundation. His climb on Everest was a way for the foundation to raise money and awareness for the cause.

He believed that expectations set people up for failure and disappointment. So he tried hard to come to the mountain without any. Nonetheless, as he expanded further on what he hoped would result from his experience on Everest he shared,

The only expectation I have is to do my best everyday. I know that for some people getting to the summit is the most important thing. It's important to me. But, if I do my best and I don't make it to the summit, then I have done my best. (Interview 1).

He hoped he would be able to deliver his best under the physical and psychological demands of the environment and was not overly concerned about getting to the top. He often envisioned

himself performing to his capabilities and believed in his heart that he would be able to dig deep and overcome the hardship that most climbers faced on the mountain. He worried to a certain extent about his age. He knew he was one of the oldest climbers on the mountain and hoped he would be able to stand up to the adversity despite his age.

Camp 2 (6,400 meters) – April 24th

Once the climbers settled in camp at the base of the mountain, they set out on various acclimatization climbs where each time they attempted to reach a higher elevation – part way up the *Khumbu* icefall (5,700m), Camp 1 (6,000 m), and Camp 2 (6,400 m) before returning to Base Camp. An unacclimatized person taken from sea level directly to the summit, five and a half vertical miles, would pass out in about three minutes and die in roughly ten more from lack of oxygen (Hackett & Roach, 2001). As a result, each time the climbers set foot on the mountain they attempted to climb to a higher elevation before returning to Base Camp to allow their bodies to slowly adapt to the ever increasing lack of oxygen in the air.

The first acclimatization climb entailed climbing part way up the *Khumbu* glacier to an elevation of about 5,700m. The way up the mountain toward Camp 1, via the standard South Col route, meant following the *Khumbu* glacier up the lower half of the mountain. The climbers were forced to begin their climb navigating through the treacherous *Khumbu* icefall. This section of the climb is considered the most dangerous area on the mountain and consequently is feared greatly by most climbers. It is a massive jumble of broken pieces of ice that is in constant flux (interestingly some climbers will have to negotiate this river of ice at least ten times in preparation for the summit push). Due to the unstable nature of the *Khumbu* glacier, huge blocks of ice and snow called *seracs* have been known to topple over at any moment. Hence, the

climbers nervously and as quickly as possible made their way up and down the icefall before resting for several days at the base of the mountain.

The second acclimatization climb occurred several days later and entailed climbing to Camp 1. The climbers carefully made their way through the entire route of the *Khumbu* icefall, ascending steep ice faces that demanded expertise with ice axe and crampons and crossing chasms that were up to 50 feet wide and 300 feet deep in places using aluminum ladders. At times, four or more ladders were lashed end to end, their wobbly state demanding complete focus and utter balance. According to Krakauer (1997), the icefall moves at a rate of three to four feet a day. Consequently, ladders have been found either dangling in the air from an expanding crevasse or collapsed under the pressure of a compressing crevasse. Since 1963, when climber Jake Breitenbach was crushed by a falling *serac* to become the icefall's first victim, this dangerous area of the glacier has claimed the lives of nineteen climbers (Krakauer, 1997).

After climbing through the *Khumbu* icefall and spending a night at Camp 1, the climbers returned to Base Camp, for a couple of days, to allow their bodies to rest and properly adjust to the ever-increasing lack of oxygen in the air. As they rested at the base of the mountain an unfortunate event unfolded on the mountain. The researcher and her climbing partner were making their way down the mountain from Camp 2 when John seriously injured himself three quarters of the way up the *Khumbu* icefall. He stepped on a piece of glacier ice that collapsed beneath his feet. He fell to the side with one foot caught in the jagged ice breaking his left leg just above the boot line. Both bones snapped and the foot and lower leg turned 90 degrees to the side. Word of the incident quickly spread through Base Camp. Fortunately, groups of Sherpa and Western climbers formed a successful rescue attempt and the injured climber was carefully carried on the backs of the Sherpa climbers to the safety of Base Camp. The following day he

(and the researcher) was airlifted off of the mountain to Katmandu. This incident was the first reminder of what can happen to climbers who challenge their fate on the world's tallest peak.

After spending a few days resting at the base of the mountain, the next step in the journey entailed climbing to Camp 2. This required that the climbers retrace their steps through the Khumbu icefall, sleep overnight at Camp 1, and attempt to climb from Camp 1 to Camp 2 the following day. From Camp 1, the route to Camp 2, which is four miles and 1,700 vertical feet above Camp 1, passes through the Western Cwm. Surrounded by the 25,790 foot Nuptse to the right, Everest's Southwest face on the left, and the Lhotze Face straight ahead, a gentle upward sloping trail led the climbers to the glacier's edge where Camp 2 is found. Also known as advanced base camp, the climbers spent a few days acclimatizing at this elevation before returning to the base of the mountain to rest for several days.

The participants' subsequent journey up the mountain from Base Camp entailed climbing once again to Camp 2 in preparation for the climb to Camp 3 the following day. After a long day of climbing the climbers finally arrived at advanced Base Camp and rested for a few days at 6,400 meters. It was at this point during the expedition when another unfortunate and tragic event took place on the mountain. A Canadian professor from the University of Ottawa who was attempting to become the oldest Canadian to reach the summit died of an apparent heart attack. At 63 years of age he suffered from a respiratory infection and decided to move down the mountain from Base Camp where the air was 'thicker' making recuperation possible. He collapsed and died before he was able to make it. As with any fatal incident that takes place on the mountain, rumors of the accident quickly spread from tent to tent.

A few days after the sad incident occurred, the winds picked up with intensity and the snow began falling on the ground at Camp 2. The climbers who were preparing themselves at

Camp 2 for the climb to Camp 3 were forced to wait till the weather cleared before setting out on their final acclimatization sortie in preparation for the summit push. It was during this time, when the researcher had returned from Katmandu (after tending to her partner's injury) and continued her ascent, that the second interview was conducted at Camp 2.

Janette

It was the look in her eyes and the few words she cautiously uttered that gave away her true state. On the surface it was hard to read how she truly felt. She mostly spoke with determination and a firm commitment to completing the task at hand. But underneath the mask, she outwardly projected that she was beginning to struggle. She was not feeling strong. She was not feeling powerful. Her headaches, severe coughing fits, and difficulty breathing were slowly breaking her down. She was not used to feeling this way and struggled greatly to accept this novel state. On past climbing expeditions and adventure races, she had no problem withstanding the physical discomfort she experienced. Even more, she thrived on the fact that she was able to endure the discomfort. It separated her from her peers and provided her with a sense of competence and confidence. But what she was feeling at that very moment was entirely different and she was apprehensive about revealing her true colors to those around her (My field notes April 23rd).

The feeling of weakness she was experiencing grated her. It did not resonate with her sense of self and was beginning to make her feel psychologically ill at ease. She discusses,

I am disappointed in myself. I expected to be so much stronger. But I feel completely drained all the time and I struggle with my breathing. I often feel like I am drowning. I have always been strong in the past so I am not used to feeling this way. (Interview 2).

She desired to feel like she could climb the mountain with no effort. But the truth of the matter was that she struggled. She struggled to the point that she thought about giving up and going home to be with her kids. But, her strong belief against quitting what you first started kept her going. She continued to put one foot in front of the other because she believed in pushing herself, in fighting, and ultimately not letting herself down. She shares, “I don’t want to let myself down by quitting or stopping because I am tired. That would kill me.” (Interview 2). Clearly, she was determined to live up to her perception of self as strong and capable.

As the wind picked up with intensity and the snow continued to accumulate on the ground she sat in her tent at camp 2 talking about her reasons for being on the mountain. She was clearly baffled and wondered: “What the hell am I doing here?” (Interview 2). She had a beautiful home and three gorgeous children who loved her very much. Yet, she spent her days on the side of a mountain miserably cold and brutally uncomfortable all the time. And to make matters worse, she knew the discomfort was only going to intensify the higher she climbed. Clearly, climbing Everest was stirring up all kinds of emotions.

As she struggled to comprehend her reasons for being there, she began questioning her sanity. What was surprising to her was that she had paid a lot of money to be in her present situation. This realization made her feel foolish. She shares, “We sat around the dining table laughing and asking ourselves what was wrong with us. We paid a lot of money to be here and suffer. We are real idiots.” (Interview 2). Deliberately spending a large amount of money to experience tremendous levels of discomfort on the mountain conflicted with her perception of self as intelligent. Her sense of self was clearly in jeopardy. Yet, she continued trying to make sense of her actions and later expressed what it was that she enjoyed about climbing. She says, “I like being in a tent. I enjoy being in the mountains and the icefall is unbelievable. It feels really

good to be here.” (Interview 2). Her tone of voice and body language were reflective of this statement. It was like a surge of energy had shot through her body like an electric bolt. She sat upright, had a twinkle in her eye, and spoke with conviction about the joyous feelings she derived from the act of climbing.

Compared to other mountains she has climbed, her desire to reach the summit of Everest was great. It would be a huge accomplishment for her to stand on the top of the world’s highest peak especially now that she is realizing how difficult it is to complete the pursuit. She shares: “This is the hardest mountain I have been on and I think if I summit this one I will feel I have really accomplished something big in my life.” (Interview 2). She embraces the philosophy that to do anything great in life there is a price to pay:

I don’t believe that touching the summit of Everest comes free. You are going to have to pay somehow. The physical discomfort, the money spent, and time away from family are some examples. It can’t be easy because if it were everybody would do it. (Interview 2). She was prepared for the sacrifices and even though she suffered a great deal, she remained committed to continuing on. She says, “I have probably wanted to quit a hundred times now, but I will not quit, no way.” (Interview 2).

Nate

He spoke about the climb with a sense of purpose and inner confidence that was unshakable (My field notes April 23rd, 2005). He was feeling strong and ready for the next challenge, to the point that he longed to climb to Camp 3 and sleep there even though he knew he needed to stay at Camp 2 for a few days to allow his body to adapt to the lack of oxygen in the air before moving up to the higher camps. But he felt good and was not suffering from bouts of altitude sickness, the *Khumbu* cough, or fatigue. He knew he had to be patient, even though he

felt he could push harder. He had to temper his desires and learn to slow down. But he disliked hanging around camp doing nothing. It bored him and he was curious to find out what lay ahead on his journey toward the world's tallest peak.

Everyday he climbed he relished in the beauty of the mountains that surrounded him. They were breathtaking and absolutely stunning. And, their purity made him feel at peace with himself and the world around him. Except one day on his way through the icefall, when massive chunks of ice began letting go from a nearby *serac*, the inner harmony he usually experienced while climbing instantly vanished. Replaced with a sense of utter fear, the sound of the ice smashing into the ground was deafening. As the glacier under his feet began to tremble with the release he stopped dead in his tracks unsure of where to turn. The avalanche had shaken his confidence as much as it had shaken his senses. Suddenly he started to run unsure of which direction to go, listening to his internal voice screaming RUN! RUN! His basic instinct to flee was overwhelming, short circuiting any logical train of thought of where to go to gain safety. So much so that he was shocked to be yanked backwards in mid stride. It took him a couple of seconds to process the fact that he was still attached to the safety line. In other circumstances this could have a comic feel but in this instance it was deadly serious. Upon reflection, the anxiety that was created during the moment was the result of having lost complete control over the situation. He felt utterly helpless and vulnerable and loathed feeling that way. To cope with his situation he said, "I recovered from it. I am alive. That was all I kept telling myself to calm down after it happened." (Interview 2).

He was not a confrontational person unless he felt like he was forced to deal with a particular issue that he believed needed rectifying. His usual manner of coping with discord was to allow the problem to smooth over without interference, unless of course the issue had an effect

on his personal safety or took away from his enjoyment of climbing the mountain. Ultimately however he liked being a team player. When asked how he wanted to feel while climbing he shared,

As we are climbing and interacting I want to be able to help my team mates out as much as possible, especially if they are having difficulties. And, we have a lot of people experiencing troubles on the climb both physically and psychologically. (Interview 2).

As much as he desired to help out his fellow climbers he was beginning to struggle with the group dynamic. When asked to describe any important challenges he faced he spoke about the negative group dynamic that ensued. A number of his team members did not have the level of experience and strength needed for this climb and subsequently their pessimistic attitudes were having a negative impact on the group.

The fact that he met his team mates for the first time in Katmandu, rather than a group of friends with whom he has spent years climbing with, was bothering him. At this point, it was clear to him that some of them did not share the same positive outlook that he usually brought to a group. And, he worried how they may affect his safety and success on the mountain. He says, "Knowing that I am going to be tied to those people makes me question how they might affect me and my performance." (Interview 2). Even though it tested his patience, he worked hard at drawing positives from the situation. Because of his team's lack of climbing expertise, he had the chance to practice skills, like jumaring and repelling that he hadn't worked on in a while. The biggest lesson he learned thus far was about people and how different and difficult they can be.

Gordie

The night before he lay wide awake in his tent in the middle of the night thinking about the situation he was faced with. His body was beginning to seriously shut down from a lack of

fluid intake and proper nourishment and he knew without hesitation that he had to do something about it immediately or he'd be forced to abandon the climb. Consequently, he decided to set goals for himself. If he wanted to realize his dream of standing on the summit with his beloved wife he knew he had no other choice than to make some changes. Thus his plan was to eat three additional bites of food at every meal, drink one more ounce of fluids during the day, and take five extra gulps of water at night when he woke up to relieve himself. And the next day he planned on doing even better. But it was plainly obvious that his body was breaking down at a fairly rapid pace. He was struggling to maintain the physical condition required to excel on the mountain and was beginning to feel weak.

He knew without question that he had to keep himself hydrated and nourished so that he could sustain the hard work he was doing. Many weeks remained before the end of the climbing season and he wanted to be as healthy and strong as possible for the final push to the summit. But, the thirteen hour climbing days were extremely long and difficult on his body. And for some reason even though he knew how important it was especially in high altitude to remain hydrated, he resisted doing it. He couldn't stand the taste of the water. No matter what flavored drink crystals he put in his water to mask the chemicals that were used to treat it he despised. Every sip he took was unpalatable. And he never seemed to have an appetite. Even the look of food was unappealing. So he fought with himself every day to continue drinking and eating as much as he possibly could. But he didn't seem to be doing a particularly good job at it. His guides continually nagged at him to drink more. He was getting frustrated and felt self-conscious as a result. When asked to describe the inner conflict he experienced he shared: "I am so embarrassed all the time. I never seem to be able to meet the guides' expectations." (Interview 2). To cope

with the situation he reasoned: "I have to set my own goals. I mean I can't and I am not climbing for them. I have to do what I have to do. In due time, I will hopefully get there." (Interview 2).

Climbing Everest was turning out to be a lot harder than he had anticipated. He says, "I don't care who you are. Anyone has got to feel really satisfied with reaching the summit because of the arduousness of it all." (Interview 2). He often felt drained and lethargic. Even the thought of having to get out of his sleeping bag to go to the dining tent for lunch tired him. Even more challenging, however, was living with the discomfort for such protracted periods of time. And the discomfort came at him from all angles. Like a soldier caught in a cross fire he felt attacked from all sides. His head hurt, his stomach ached, his legs were sore, and his lungs burned. It was during these moments of absolute fatigue and discomfort that he began reevaluating his potential. When asked to describe important challenges he faced he said: "I have to admit that I have started thinking that I may not make this thing. Maybe I was unrealistic about what I was capable of doing and I bit off more than I could chew." (Interview 2). It pained him to think that he might not realize his goal. And as he began doubting his capabilities he wondered how he would ever deal with potential failure. He shared: "I have been really fortunate on all my expedition climbs. Only once before did I not reach the summit." (Interview 2). He was not used to failing and did not know how he would respond if it happened. The anvil of Everest was beginning to weigh heavily on his psyche.

At times during the expedition he felt strong and healthy. For instance, after spending time at base camp where he had access to Coca-Cola it was easy for him to remain hydrated and feel strong. And, as he regained his strength he also regained his confidence in his ability to achieve his goal. During these moments he believed he was going to be able to succeed. He reflects: "It is just a whole different feeling. A positive one that makes me believe that I am

going to make it to the top.” (Interview 2). These positive feelings helped him continue striving for his goal and cope with his concern of potentially falling short of his expectations. He was pleasantly surprised that at his advanced age he was performing as well as any other member on his team. He knew he was as quick and as strong as most of the people in the group. His earlier concern of not being able to keep up with his younger team mates vanished like a thief in the night.

During the afternoons as he rested in his tent he often thought about his home life including friends and family. Yet, these thoughts caused him some psychological discomfort. In particular he worried about his daughters. He knew they loved him very much and were tremendously concerned for his safety. Yet he did not want them to worry about him. It hurt him to know that his actions were causing his loved ones distress. Even worse, he had a terrible feeling that they would hear about the tragedy that unfolded on the mountain the other day. He knew the death of the 63-year-old Canadian who passed away due to heart failure would be a painful reminder for his daughters of what can happen to their father on the mountain. The man who died reminded his daughters of him. They are both the same age, extremely outgoing, and very driven individuals. To protect them from their worry he often said to them:

You should be really comforted that we will be climbing with very experienced guides and they call the shots. I am not going to have any independent control over it. They are going to tell me whether I am fit to make it and if the weather is good enough to go for it.

(Interview 2).

The tragic news that unfolded on the mountain regarding the death of the Canadian man profoundly affected him. He knew he was risking his life on a greater level than most of the

other climbers on the mountain. He was older and had experienced heart problems in the past.

Yet he coped with the Canadian man's death by saying:

At least I know what angina is and have experienced symptoms of it in the past. I don't think he had that experience before. I am sure that I will have brains enough to know that if I get a heart issue to get the hell out of here. But, I don't expect it at all. (Interview 2).

Reminding himself of his own experience coping with heart troubles reassured him that he would be fine.

Sayeed

He tried to convey his usual upbeat social self but the look on his face reflected the antithesis. He gave the impression of being profoundly tired. The dark circles under his eyes and haggard look on his face was suggesting a man losing at battle. He was becoming overwhelmed by the high altitude war of attrition. His body, mind, and spirit were beginning to crumble under the pressure of the environment. He desperately struggled to find the motivation to do anything other than lay motionless inside his tent. When asked if he had faced any challenges at this point in the expedition he shared, "the whole thing is a challenge - to get up in the morning, to eat, to drink enough fluids, to simply keep going" (Interview 2). He felt like his life force was slowly fading away like youthful energy that disappears gradually over the years. Clearly, the effects of high altitude were taking their toll. His bloom was fading.

He had to dig deep within to do anything. The fact that he was not able to sleep at night frustrated him. When the sun set he longed to shut down but his mind would not allow him. Instead, he lay awake every night in his sleeping bag shivering with fear from bad thoughts. When asked if he had experienced any inner conflict he shared,

It is like being on a bad *trip*. It is like nightmares of shit. I see images of bad things happening to people and it is all around me inside the tent. It is during this time that I want to go home (Interview 2).

He wished he could be somewhere else other than on Everest. When asked how he coped with such thoughts he shared, "I put myself into this mess. I am the one who came here. I need to see through till the end" (Interview 2). Clearly he was taking responsibility for his decision to climb the mountain. He was not blaming anyone else for his misery. His motives for coming to Everest in the first place were keeping him going. He shared, "I need to finish what I started. I made a promise to myself and to my fellow countrymen. I said I was going to climb the mountain" (Interview 2).

His philosophy at this point in the journey was to take the climb one day at a time. He focused his attention on getting to Camp 3, which was the next step of the journey. That day the team had taken a short walk up the Western Cwm to get a good look at the route to Camp 3. He was fully aware that it was going to be a very difficult climb. The route was extremely steep and icy. For that reason, he knew he needed to keep on reminding himself that he could get there. He also knew that his chances of sleeping during the night at Camp 3 were nil. Nonetheless, he kept thinking about arriving at the next Camp. He was not thinking about the summit. Even more, when asked what his expectations were at this point in the expedition he shared, "I know I am going to summit but I am not going to say the summit is mine 100%." (Interview 2). On the one hand he believed he was going to summit, conversely, however, he was not sure. He reasoned, "I am not a mountaineer. If it happens it happens. I am not a guy who has been dreaming for years of getting to the top. (Interview 2). If he failed, he would be fine in the knowledge that he gave it a try. Even more, he was not going to come back to the mountain for a second attempt if he did

not get to the summit. Two months was way too long to be in the mountains. He much preferred the typical three week long expeditions that he usually went on.

Considering he was at an elevation of about 6,400 meters he physically felt fine. He was not experiencing any serious effects of high altitude other than suffering from a typical case of mountain insomnia. Yet, he wished he could feel normal. When asked how he wanted to feel while climbing he shared, "I want to feel like I am eating and drinking properly. I want to feel normal like at sea level." (Interview 2). But, he knew it was impossible to feel the way he wanted to feel. The experience was teaching him that he had to be patient. He also had to learn to control his thoughts. His mind often deviated from the task at hand. He was trying to work on keeping his mind focused on the present.

Steven

He sat in his tent with a calm confident look on his face. He was feeling surprisingly good. Even though he had his share of bad days where he felt physically drained and lethargic he was doing remarkably well at this altitude. The past few days at Camp 2 had been easier for him than for some of his team mates. Other than suffering from a bad cough, he had an extremely healthy appetite and was not struggling to sleep at night. When asked to describe important challenges that he faced at this point in the journey, he never once spoke about his physical state. Rather, he talked about the climb through the *Khumbu* icefall. The size and scope of the glacier was like nothing he had ever imagined. It was so broken up and unstable. He knew from past experience that sooner or later sections that were threatened by ice towers were going to collapse. The only question was when. His worry caused him to feel a bit apprehensive. Whenever he was in the icefall he forced himself to pay full attention to what was going on around him. Yet, the fact that he was suffering to some extent, as all climbers do, from the effects of high altitude he found it

difficult to focus on the task at hand. He was finding the climb through the icefall quite nerve racking and was always happy to get out of there.

He thought a lot about his wife. He missed her very much. Instead of calling home every day like he had been doing since the onset of the climb, he now called her twice a day. He was finding that he longed to surround himself with the comforts of his home life. The dangers of the difficult and demanding environment were beginning to weigh on him psychologically. His incident a few days prior was not helping his fragile state. When asked to describe important challenges faced he shared, "I fell in a crevasse the other day but only up to my waist. I stepped off the track about three or four feet to the side and went straight down. It was quite scary. (Interview 2). The incident reaffirmed his belief in taking a very cautious approach when climbing the mountain. When asked how he sees himself now as a climber he shared, "If anything has changed in the context of climbing, it is to be more safe, more cautious, and be more careful." (Interview 2).

Climbing the mountain was teaching him how small and insignificant he was. The gargantuan presence of the mountain was powerful and was making him realize that he was only a tiny part of the gigantic puzzle of life. He was also learning to take an even more cautious approach than anticipated when climbing. The dangers and risks were very scary and real to him.

Allan

He sat on his sleeping bag inside his tent at Camp 2 thinking about how he was feeling at that moment. He had a toothache that was causing him some discomfort. But he was not overly concerned about it. He understood that the minor inconvenience was part of the game especially considering the amount of pressure his body was under due to the lack of oxygen in the air. Climbers often have problems with tooth fillings because of their tendency to loosen in cold

temperatures and high altitude. Yet even though he was not worried about having to endure a certain level of physical discomfort, he was by and large finding the climb extremely challenging. In particular the first part of the climb was testing his physical and technical skills to a new level. Before coming to Everest he had never done any repelling or ice climbing, which were techniques that were essential for successful navigation through the icefall. When asked to describe how he felt while climbing through the icefall he shared, “I actually felt that I was a little out of my league. I wasn’t sure if I could do it or not.” (Interview 2). A few days before the team set out for Camp 1 he learned a host of new skills that he needed for the climb. Applying the skills for the first time in the dangerous and demanding environment was overwhelming not to mention the size and scope of the icefall.

Even though he felt surrounded by an overwhelming sense of uncertainty as he climbed through the icefall he continued to put one foot in front of the other. He reasoned that he was there to push himself and that it would be a great feeling once he overcame the challenges he faced. When he arrived at Camp 2 he felt good about his accomplishment. When asked how he saw himself as a climber he shared,

I think I have improved as a climber. I feel better about myself. I think that anytime you put yourself in harm’s way or push yourself past your limits, you have to feel better about yourself as a person and climber. (Interview 2).

He felt proud for the hardship he endured and stressed that if any of his team mates did not reach the summit they would not be failures in his eyes. He respected anyone who set out to challenge themselves, including his fellow team mates and all the people who embarked on the two week trek to the base of the mountain.

As he thought about his motivation for climbing the mountain he became quiet and emotional. Tears of compassion gently rolled down his cheeks as he reminisced about the people back home whom he loved dearly and who climbed Mount Everest every day of their lives. He was deeply moved by their strength and determination to fight against all odds and spoke openly about one boy in particular who was diagnosed with terminal cancer. The boy's spirit encouraged him to fight the physical and psychological discomforts he experienced right till the bitter end. He made him want to be the best climber he could possibly be. He was propelled, thinking about all the people he knew who had cancer, to dig deep and find the inner strength to fight his own battle on the mountain.

He was learning how difficult it was to climb Everest. It was a lot harder than he had anticipated. When asked what he has learned so far he shared, "Everest is a horse of a different color." (Interview 2). He was also learning about friendships and how unique it was to develop deep interpersonal relationships with other climbers he hardly knew before coming to the mountain. Spending every hour of each day with his team mates in a close knit environment made it near impossible not to get to know them in an intimate way. Climbers have been known to talk about how the stressful and demanding environment of Everest strips away the veneer of their personality leaving the essence of the person exposed to those around them.

Preparing for the summit climb (5,464 meters) – May 8th

After the climbers spent many days at Camp 2 waiting for the weather to clear, they finally got their opportunity to climb to Camp 3. This part of the climb entailed ascending the last stretch of the *Khumbu* glacier's upper end. Slowly and methodically they made their way up the moderate incline of the glacier's upper end, which eventually led them to the *Bergschrund** – a giant crevasse usually situated at the base of a steep face, which often collects the fallen bodies

of climbers who have erred higher up on the mountain. Immediately above the *Bergschrund* lay the *Lhotze* Face, a sheer, immense wall of ice that rises a thousand feet up and in places slopes more than seventy degrees. The climbers ascended this steep pitch of the *Lhotze* Face on a fixed nylon rope using their jumar * – a climbing device that grips the rope by the use of a metal cam - to help them lift their weight up the mountains' continuous steep terrain. Upon arrival at Camp 3, they settled into their tents for the night before making their way back down the mountain to Camp 2 the next day and eventually to Base Camp. Their journey up the mountain to Camp 3 was supposed to be the climbers' last acclimatization climb before their final push to the summit.

During the climbers' journey to Camp 3, another disastrous incident unfolded on the mountain. A 39 year old American climber was making his way down the mountain from Camp 1 to Base Camp, with his brother, when he fell into a deep crevasse. The fall into the 40 feet wide and 40 feet deep abyss caused him to break his leg and several of his ribs. His brother quickly descended into the crevasse to see if he could stabilize him. As time passed, however, his condition took a significant turn for the worse. Sadly, he died several hours later inside the crevasse before anyone was able to rescue him.

During the descent from Camp 2 to the base of the mountain, after completing the difficult and challenging climb to Camp 3, one of the participants along with the primary researcher stumbled upon another terrible tragedy that unfolded on the mountain a few hours prior to their arrival at Camp 1. On the 5th of May, a big avalanche fell from the West Ridge of Everest and destroyed Camp 1, almost completely. The Camp consisted of about 60 to 70 tents and only five of them were unaffected. Other than little bits and pieces of tents and climbing equipment scattered everywhere, the camp looked like a barren winter wasteland. There were no deaths, however, 6 climbers were badly injured.

After all of the climbers arrived at the base of the mountain, five of them rested for a day and then headed down the Khumbu valley to a tiny village almost 1,500m below Base Camp to rest and prepare for the final climb to the summit. Before the summit bid, climbers have been known to descend below Base Camp where there is more oxygen in the air to recuperate after having spent several weeks high up on the mountain. Nate, however, chose to remain at the base of the mountain and wait for the first opportunity to climb to the summit.

After the climbers spent several days resting lower down the valley, they slowly made their way back to Base Camp in anticipation of the summit push. At this point in the journey an interview was conducted with Sayeed and Allan.

Sayeed

He was getting extremely frustrated by the monotony of day-to-day life at Base Camp. His routine was the same: he woke up in the morning, sponged down, read a book, and then found other climbers to talk with. Even his conversations were beginning to bore him. They always revolved around the same topics, which usually entailed the weather and stories of climbing. What was annoying him the most, however, was that he was unable to do things that he regularly did back home. In particular he talked openly about having to refrain from releasing sexual tension, which was driving him mad. When asked how he was feeling at this moment he shared,

It's driving me crazy and it is affecting my mood. There are people who can refrain from having sex for two months, but I can't. I miss the things that I usually do back home. I miss waking up and having a coffee, having a shower, eating normal food, watching TV, and sleeping in a bed. (Interview 3).

His disposition was changing. He was no longer his usual upbeat self. On the contrary, he was showing signs of being irritable, impatient, and apathetic.

He compared climbing Everest to other sports and reasoned that the enormous amount of time he spent on the mountain was why he struggled to such an extent to remain focused and strong. When asked how he wanted to feel at Base Camp, he shared,

I can't feel the way I want to feel because the climb is too long. Think of the minimal amount of time a boxer spends in the ring or a runner who runs a 100 meter sprint or even a goalkeeper in a final match. But a sport like this one, well it goes on forever. I mean I have lost so much weight. My body, mind, and heart are so involved in this and over such an extended period of time that I am breaking down. (Interview 3).

He believed it would be a much easier task if he could only keep his body, mind, and spirit in motion. He was frustrated by the fact that he spent so much time doing nothing as he waited at Base Camp for the weather to improve. He simply wanted to get on with the climb.

The weather was not cooperating. The wind continued to blow up high on the mountain at a speed of about 70 knots per hour. He knew how dangerous it was to climb in such conditions and persistently talked in a negative tone about his fears. It was as if he was trying to find reasons to admit that he may not reach his goal. He worried that a large number of people would be going for the summit on the same day when the weather improved. When asked if he had experienced any inner conflict he shared, "I mean if summit day is going to be on the 30th then we are going to have hundreds of people going up. That will make it very dangerous and hard to climb." (Interview 3). At this point in the season no one had attempted the summit due to the poor weather conditions. Consequently, scores of climbers would likely be climbing the mountain at the same time the first chance they got.

At this point in the season, due to the disastrous events that continued to unfold on the mountain and the poor weather conditions, the Sherpa climbers were wary. They believed the misfortune was a sign that the mountain was angry and therefore unsafe to climb. Their suspicious energy reflected this belief, which bothered Sayeed a great deal. He worried that the Sherpas knew something that he could not foresee and believed that the risk he was taking was not worth the reward. He did not want to lose any fingers or toes to get to the top. Even more, he feared losing his life. He felt particularly uncomfortable whenever he thought about his mother and the pain she would experience if he was to die in the mountains. He did not want her to have to live with the consequences of his actions and knew she would be crushed if he was to die. He was fully prepared to turn around at any point on the mountain if he thought his life might be in danger. When asked what his expectations were at this point in the climb he shared, “I will definitely not risk my life to try and go to the top. I will stop whenever my guides tell me to stop.” (Interview 3). He believed he would be fine if he were to not succeed in reaching his goal and thought that no matter how high he climbed it was an accomplishment.

He imagined what it was going to be like when he returned home after the expedition. He knew his arrival was going to unfold in one of two ways depending on whether or not he was successful. If he reached his goal of standing on the summit then he knew he would be greeted at the airport by the King of Jordan and crowds of people wanting to congratulate him including the media. Conversely if he failed to reach his goal then his Mom, Dad, sisters, and brothers would be waiting in the arrival lounge to drive him home. When asked how he felt about potentially not reaching the summit he shared,

To be honest, I don't care which way it happens. It would be nice to go back and have the country behind me, but it is not a national climb that I am doing. I am not trying to change

the Middle East. And anyways, my family and friends would be happy that I am simply home. (Interview 3).

All things considered, he wanted to summit the mountain. At one point he shared, “I really want to do it. I want to do it because I am here and I have been here for a long time enduring so much shit. That is why I want to do it. It must be a massive teacher for anybody who gets to the top and suffers that much to get to that point” (Interview 3). Even at this point in the expedition he was learning from his experiences. He was learning that he had physical limitations that were preventing him from attaining his goals. On the team’s second acclimatization climb to Camp 2 he suffered from stomach pains that caused him tremendous amounts of discomfort. Every time he tried to eat or drink he threw up. Consequently, his guides told him to turn around and head back down the mountain to Base Camp. He complied with their advice and upon reflection learned that it was not only will power that gets people to the top of the mountain. Rather, he was learning that a certain level of physical strength is also required for a successful bid. When asked what he had learned at this point in the climb he shared, “It does not matter how much will power you have. If you do not have enough fuel in your stomach you will never be able to do it.” (Interview 3). He used an analogy of car to explain what he had learned. He believed that a person could have the most reliable, efficient, well made car in the world but if they didn’t have any fuel then their car won’t be able to perform.

Allan

He had been struggling with the decision to stay on the mountain and continue striving for the summit till the very end of the climbing season or head home. He was physically and mentally worn out. Sleeping in a sleeping bag on a bed of rock and ice for 60 days, squatting every day over a garbage pail to go to the toilet, and eating Nepalese mountain cooking, which

primarily consisted of a variety of canned foods, was getting to him. Even more, he missed his wife. It was their 35th wedding anniversary and he spent the evening cold and tired on the side of a mountain without her by his side. On the one hand, he was ready to call it quits. He was feeling the pressure of being away from work for such a protracted period of time and felt the need to get back home to his normal routine. Yet, conversely he wanted to continue his journey toward the peak of the mountain. From a mental standpoint he felt up for the challenge and deeply yearned for a weather window of opportunity to attempt the climb to the summit.

Climbing Everest was the toughest thing he had ever done in his life. The wear and tear on the body, mind, and spirit over a 60 day period was extremely difficult for him. Yet at the same time, he felt proud in the knowledge that he was able to surmount the obstacles inherent in the high altitude environment. When asked how he saw himself as a person he shared, "I have done some difficult things in my life, but this brings a great deal of pride knowing that I am able to overcome adversity and discomfort." (Interview 3). Nonetheless the climb continued to be an ongoing challenging. The typical unending physical and mental challenges that almost every climber faced were pushing him to places he had never ventured. He suffered from a bad backache, a pulled muscle in his calf as a result of his poor climbing technique, and he experienced shortness of breath and headaches. Yet he coped with the discomforts by focusing on his reason for coming to the mountain in the first place. When asked if the way he wanted to feel while climbing impacted his decision to remain on the mountain he shared, "Yes. I mean my goal is to prove that a 59 year old man can do something extraordinary. There are a lot of cancer patients following me and they need that hope." (Interview 3).

He eventually made the decision to stay on the mountain and continue his journey. When asked how he felt after making the decision he shared, "I don't like to wrestle with a decision for

very long. I like to make a decision and once I make it that's it. I don't second guess." (Interview 3). He worried somewhat about large number of people who would be attempting the summit at the same time. He was not sure how fast he would be able to climb up high on the mountain and worried that he would be pressured by climbers who were faster than him. Nonetheless, he decided to tough out the climb a little longer in the hopes that he would get a shot at climbing to the summit.

The countdown (5,464 meters) – May 20th

At this point in the expedition every climber on the mountain waited at the base of the mountain for their chance to climb to the summit. Yet, the jet stream hovered, day after day, over the world's highest peak making it impossible for anyone to climb up high on the mountain without dying or becoming severely injured - weather patterns that were certainly not compatible with a summit attempt. It was well known among the climbing community that under dangerous circumstances it is extremely common for climbers to develop frostbite or get blown off the face of the mountain. Hence, the climbers waited impatiently for a good weather window of opportunity to arise so they could get into position for the final climb. However, with each passing day the weather continued to predict very strong winds (i.e., 70+knots) and cold temperatures (i.e., -37C). The climbing season was nearing its end. Due to the soon-approaching monsoon season the Nepalese government would be forced to close the mountain. The warm temperatures and heavy rains would make it too dangerous to climb, especially on the lower sections of the mountain. Consequently, rumors that no one was going reach the summit quickly spread like a cancer through the collective climbing body. The climbers trembled with worry that they may not get their chance to attempt climbing to the top.

Even though the weather reports predicted marginal conditions, many team leaders made the decision to get their team into position at Camp 2 in the hopes that the weather would break and they would get their opportunity to quickly climb to the summit. Hence, all of the climbers in the present study set out to Camp 2. After spending a few days at advanced Base Camp, however, the high winds and extremely low temperatures continued to prevail and the climbers were forced to return, once again, to the base of the mountain and wait for their window of opportunity to arrive. Only ten days remained in the climbing season. It was at this point in the expedition when the third or fourth (depending on the participant) interviews were conducted with all of the participants.

Janette

Her situation was worsening. She could not sleep and the deep, rasping cough she'd developed worsened day by day. She coughed all the time. And the pain in her stomach from the excessive coughing was excruciating. She felt weak. She could barely take it anymore and did nothing to hide her frustration. She believed her body had reached its maximum and put emphasis on the fact that it could no longer endure the stressful and demanding environment. She was also terrified of the icefall. It was beginning to deteriorate rapidly and she dreaded having to climb through it one last time. She felt like she was pushing her luck and it scared her. She witnessed the scene at Camp 1 immediately after the avalanche released and was learning how likely death is on the mountain. She said, "I can see how easily people die here. You are so cold, out of breath, and extremely tired. It is just way too easy to sit down and not get back up. It is really scary." (Interview 3). She always thought her willpower was so much stronger; that it could overcome any force larger than her. But she was quickly learning how powerful the

mountain was and ultimately how vulnerable she was. She was feeling utterly exposed and frightened of the mountain and its potential to destroy.

About ten days remained in the season and she felt confused. She did not know if she should stay, try and wait out the weather, and maybe get a shot to climb to the summit, or go home and be with her children. The decision was creating confusion. She shared,

What the heck am I doing here? I've had it. Mothers should not be climbing 8000 meter peaks. It is just so selfish of me. I should go home. I should stay. I should go home. I talk to my kids on the phone and I am leaving. I talk to someone else and I am staying."

(Interview 3).

It was obvious that she was gravely conflicted. She did not want to have to face the realization that she was falling short of her expectations, but she also did not want to feel guilty by not being at home with her kids. The confusion had become cancerous to her psyche. The tumor created by her guilt of absentia was malignant, growing steadily by constant reminders of phone calls from her kids. It had reached critical mass to the point that it was overtaking her desire to attain the summit. Her dream was becoming terminal. She finally decided that if the weather did not improve by the 28th of May she was leaving. It was time to get home and be with her kids.

If the weather did not improve by the 28th of May and it was still important for her to reach the summit she would come back to Everest in five years when her kids were older. At this point in the expedition it seemed like she was preparing herself to go home. Her priorities were beginning to change. She said, "Mountaineering isn't as important in my life as I thought it was." (Interview 3). Rather, she wanted to go home and be a Mom. She reasoned that she valued her home life much more than she ever had in the past. It was clear, however, that no matter how much she tried to focus on the values that she believed were most important to her she struggled

to make her final decision to abandon the climb. She revealed, "I am already here and I should finish what I started. But, I guess the question I should be asking myself is: Do I see myself as a mountaineer or as a mom? And my answer is a mom." (Interview 3). After speaking these words with a sense of conviction, she tried to convince herself that she would be able to live with her decision and accept the consequences if she chose to call off the climb.

She continued to talk about the weather, stressing the fact that it was an element in the sport of high altitude mountaineering that was out of her control. Nonetheless, it was obvious that she was angry and frustrated by its lack of cooperation over last few weeks. Realizing that she may not get the chance to stand on the summit, she admitted it would be hard to face her children and copes:

I will be so disappointed, but yet it wasn't my doing. It was the weather. There is nothing I can do about it. I am not making the jet stream sit on top of the summit. It is just there.

Even more the summit is not a guarantee. (Interview 3).

Even though she understood that at this point her chances of reaching the summit were very slim, she desperately held on to the possibility that the weather would clear and she would get a window of opportunity to attempt the summit before the 28th of May arrived. Potentially having to admit defeat fueled her desire to stay on the mountain and attempt climbing to the summit.

Nate

The self-imposed anxiety he was feeling weighed on him like a ten pound brick. Physically he felt great but because the weather was not cooperating he was getting frustrated. Everyday new weather reports would come in, all revealing different forecasts. One forecast would predict fairly low wind speeds and no precipitation. The other one would predict the exact opposite. And the hype that ensued every time a new weather report came in irritated him. The

entire base camp would get on the radio in a frantic search to find out who might be moving up the mountain and on which day. The energy was too much for him. And anyway, he believed that the weather reports yielded nothing. In effect he believed it would be better for him to just step away from the mass confusion all together. He wanted to stay focused and channel all of his energy on the summit push and not get distracted by things that were out of his control.

He had been pushing himself quite hard since the moment the struggling climbers on his team abandoned the climb and went home. The only people who remained on the expedition after their departure was his two guides and one other experienced climber who he thoroughly enjoyed spending time with. But, because they no longer had to wait every hour or so to assist the slower climbers the team moved quickly up and down the mountain. He was therefore beginning to climb at a pace that was considerably faster than he would have liked and was pushing himself quite hard. When asked to describe any challenges faced he said, "I am probably climbing a bit faster than my normal pace. I mean there were times when I saw green blotches and it was at that point that I knew I had to be tired." (Interview 3). But he pushed on. His team had gotten into a pattern of only stopping once they reached their final destination at the end of the day. They rarely ever stopped to take breaks. Nonetheless, the time he experienced the most physical discomfort occurred when he climbed above 6,800m. When asked if he had experienced any feelings of discomfort he shared:

When I climb toward Camp 3, I can really feel the pain. It is the same feeling that you get when you run sprints. It hurts inside. But it is a good kind of pain even though you want it to stop." (Interview 3).

The physical discomfort he felt was motivating him to begin the push toward the summit. He shared, "I feel an anticipation of, 'let's start the pain.'" (Interview 3). The tremendous levels of

discomfort that he knew he was going to face during the summit bid were motivating him to get started.

Since he returned to the base of the mountain after climbing to Camp 3 he was no longer his usual social self. Instead, he focused his every waking moment on getting to the top of the mountain. When asked if he had behaved in any way that he regretted based on his personal values or philosophy, he talked about being short tempered and irritable. He preferred not to mingle and socialize with those around him. And if he did, he wanted it to be with other climbers who were also focused on getting to the summit. To succeed he believed he needed to conserve his energy and remain focused. He felt confident that he would be able to realize his goal of reaching the summit. When asked what his expectations were at this stage of the journey he shared, "I mean there is not a question as to whether we feel we can get there. If we can just get the weather to cooperate we will knock this off." (Interview 3). His self-assurance, however, was not the only thing that motivated him. His desire to reach the summit was intensifying over time. He said, "We have been out here a really long time now and reaching the summit is a big part of it. And I think that actually it has become more important for me to get to the top." (Interview 3). Now that he had only one thing to consider, one last piece of the puzzle to put together he felt intently drawn toward completing the quest he started. It was like his pulse was quickening in anticipation of clear skies and a chance to make the summit. The only concern he had at this point was the way his expedition was being run. He had certain expectations of how an expedition should be run and did not agree with all of the decisions that his expedition leader was making.

Gordie

Because there were only about ten days left in the climbing season, he was experiencing a lot of internal torment. He was beginning to feel anxious about the realization that he may not get his shot at the summit. And, he was disappointed with the way things had been unfolding over the past few days. He was frustrated that his guides made the decision to set out for Camp 2 with the expectation that they would attempt the summit, even though it was plainly obvious to him and others that the weather forecasts were not ideal for climbing. He knew the forecasts continued to predict very high winds and extremely low temperatures, weather patterns that were certainly not compatible with a summit attempt. He was frustrated with the energy he expended and the fear he experienced in the icefall for no real reason. The team spent an enormous amount of time and energy getting to Camp 2 only to be turned around and told to descend to Base Camp the very next day.

The route through the icefall was deteriorating rapidly and it made him nervous to think that he would have to navigate through it one more time if he wanted to get to the summit. When asked how he was feeling at that moment he shared: "It is getting scarier, slushier, there is more crap breaking away, and the routes are getting real soft. It is kind of freaky to think I will have to do this again." (Interview 3). Not to mention the 13 hour day he would have to endure for a third time. He was becoming frustrated to the point that he thought about quitting. His wife had decided to pull the pin and he seemed to be not far behind. In a conversation with his wife he said: "Linda, I am with you. I think I have had it. I can't rally myself to do this again." (Interview 3). But something deep within held him back from admitting that he may not fulfill his expectations.

The next day after his return from Camp 2 he sat on the fence thinking about whether he should stay and wait for a turn in the weather or head back to Katmandu toward home. The decision was weighing on him heavily. On the one hand he wanted to stay. He believed he had it in him to give it one last shot. And ultimately he did not want back down. Conversely he had reservations about being able to muster up enough energy and solve his problem with dehydration for a summit push. Yet he questioned how he would feel if he gave up before giving one last shot. With a level of intensity, he shared: “How am I going to feel if I bail out now. Am I going to regret it in two months from now and wonder why I didn’t give it one more shot?” (Interview 3).

At this point in the expedition it seemed like he was preparing for defeat. He believed that if he decided to leave the mountain in the next day or two he would have a good enough excuse that would justify to others why he did not reach his goal. He shared: “I could tell friends and family that the weather was terrible and therefore we ran out of time, you know it is a pretty good excuse.” (Interview 3). As he thought about how hard he had worked up to that point, he tried to convince himself that if he walked away from the mountain before the end of the season he would be satisfied with his experience. He shared:

I feel vindicated in my own conscious for the work I have done and the effort I have made.

I think it was just bad luck. The avalanche at camp one and the bad weather patterns are greatly to blame. (Interview 3).

He began focusing on the positive aspects that would arise if he chose to abandon the climb. He said:

In some ways it would be a more relaxed trip down. I love to take pictures and could go down and enjoy that. Linda and I could stick with our U.S. return date and go to Thailand and an island for a few days and get a vacation out of it. (Interview 3).

At the end of the day he wasn't able to follow through with his thoughts of abandoning the climb. He made the decision to stay on the mountain till the bitter end.

Even though he thought his chance of making it to the top was slim, he said: "I would feel good about getting as high as I can. If I get to the South Col and the weather turns us back or I am too sick, it would still be a great feeling of accomplishment." (Interview 3). He wholeheartedly hoped that the weather would take a turn for the better and his dream of standing on the summit would become realized.

Although he decided to remain on the mountain till the end of the expedition and wait for the weather to improve he began trying to make himself feel better about potentially not getting to the top and shared:

Peter Athens, an American climbing legend, failed seven times before reaching the summit on his eighth attempt. It makes sense to me. Between the weather and your health, there are just so many things that have to come together on the right day. (Interview 3).

Thinking about climbers who did not make it to the summit on their first attempt, made him feel better about his doubtful situation. Nonetheless, a week later his chance at reaching the highest point on the planet had arrived. He set out for Camp 2 and prepared himself for one of the biggest moments of his life.

Sayeed

He was beginning to have serious problems with his stomach. At this point in the expedition he had lost 15 kilos and he continued to lose weight rapidly. He didn't have an

appetite and when he did eat or drink water he vomited. He had known for a while that something was wrong with him, but he did not want to accept the reality of his situation even though he was about 99% certain that the ulcers in his stomach had progressively worsened due to the effects of high altitude. They had begun to bleed. He told no one about the severity of his physical state. He feared his health had deteriorated beyond the point that it would be safe for him to climb and was reluctant to accept that possibility. Yet, he knew he was going to have to eventually make the final decision to call off the climb. When asked how he was feeling at this point in the expedition he shared, "It is not in my heart any more." (Interview 4). Making the decision to give up on his idea, however, weighed on him heavily. It was causing him to feel mentally and emotionally drained. He knew that people back home in Jordan were following the climb and consequently he felt a sense of self imposed anxiety. When asked how he coped with the inner conflict he was experiencing he shared,

Getting to the top does not mean much to me. It didn't mean anything to me when I climbed in Antarctica or on Denali for the first time. It wasn't really something that I was looking for in my life even though there are so many people in Jordan and the Middle East who are waiting for me to get to the summit. And that is the big stress that I have been thinking about way too much, to the point that I forgot about myself and my health.

(Interview 4).

He simply wanted to go home and get healthy. He believed he was young enough that he could come back to the mountain and try again. Yet, he struggled greatly to make the final decision to turn his back on the climb.

He did not enjoy the process of climbing the mountain. He disliked most aspects of the sport. When asked if climbing had enlightened him in any way thus far he shared,

Sometimes I think why the fuck am I here? I hate it. I hate being in a tent, I hate being in a sleeping bag, I hate the food, I hate everything. But for whatever reason I am still here.

(Interview 4).

He believed he had no control over his physical state. He had listened to his guides throughout the entire length of the expedition and did what he could do to prevent his ulcers from further breakdown. But with each passing day his situation was worsening. Up to this point, he had convinced himself that his health would get better if he simply tried harder to look after himself. But eventually the ulcers in his stomach grew excruciatingly painful and he made the decision to pack up and head home. When asked if any of his values or beliefs had been tested thus far he shared,

It took me so long to make the decision because I knew deep inside that I was not going to be able to climb. There was no way I was going to get better. I was totally lying to myself.

(Interview 4).

He believed in being truthful and was shocked that he had lied to himself. But he tried to convince himself that he felt better in the knowledge that he was drawing lessons from his experience. The climb was teaching him a lot. In particular he was learning that he needed to take responsibility for his actions and not ignore important signs that he may not want to face. He was also realizing how important it was for him to not overstep his limitations. When asked what he had learned thus far he shared, "I am realizing that there comes a time when I have to stop and turn around and not waste any more time. I have to take responsibility for my decisions."

(Interview 4). Long before he made the final decision to call off the climb he knew in his heart that because of his physical condition he would not be climbing to the summit.

At the end of the day, he assumed that if he had not developed any stomach problems he would have gotten to Camp 4. All things considered he convinced himself that due to his poor health he made the right decision to call off the climb. When asked how he coped with his decision to go home he shared,

You know, sometimes I feel like I am a loser for not doing it, but in the end I won because I was not feeling well. You can't beat a mountain this size. You can run a marathon if you have stomach problems because you know it will only last about 2 or 3 hours, but you can't beat something like this. I believe in God so much and think that whatever happens is meant to happen. If you really give your heart to God completely then things will happen for you. And I think I did not do that. (Interview 4).

Moreover, he began feeling better about his decision when he found out that more and more of his team mates were also making the same decision to leave the mountain. Out of the 12 member climbing team 9 of the climbers decided to abandon the climb and head home. He shared, "I thought to myself, okay if these people are coming down and they don't have the same health problems that I have then I made the right decision to come down as well" (Interview 4). He also added, "If I had gone up there I could have killed myself. So, I made the right decision to go down." (Interview 4).

He believed that he no longer had it in his heart to climb and convinced himself that he felt good in the knowledge that he had done his best. When asked how he felt the moment he made his final decision he shared,

I felt so much better after making the decision to come down. It was just an idea that I had sitting in my office one day. The idea should not control me. I can make other decisions and do other things in my life. (Interview 4).

He reasoned that it was not his year to summit yet at the same time he questioned how he was going to feel when he returned home. When asked how he saw himself now as a person he shared, “I am just getting fucking skinny and hungry and I don’t see myself. I look in the mirror and think who the fuck are you? You know I am still Sayeed but I’ve gotten skinnier and uglier.” (Interview 4). His values were changing. He believed that there were many more important things in life other than executing his idea to climb the highest peak in the world. He wanted to spend time with his friends and family and stressed how important they were to him.

Steven

The cough he’d developed was beginning to irritate him. It never seemed to get better and he was getting frustrated by its severity. He was finding it hard to be patient and wait for good weather to arrive. He found the last journey to Camp 2 particularly challenging and extremely long. He not only became extremely tired and suffered from bouts of hypothermia upon his arrival at Camp 2, but as he made his way up the mountain he pulled a muscle in his back from coughing so hard. Ultimately he wished he would have felt stronger and more confident throughout the climb.

When asked if he had experienced any inner conflict as a result of not feeling the way he wanted to feel while climbing he referred to the first night he spent at Camp 2 when he lay awake in his bed unable to sleep. He shivered with uncertainty wondering whether he was actually going to be able to carry on. At that moment, he did not know that the team would be descending the following day to Base Camp due to poor weather conditions, which allowed him a few more days at lower elevations to recover from his severe cough. That night in his tent he thought:

I thought that the best thing for me to do was to go back down to Base Camp and go see the doctors to get rid of this cough. I tossed and turned all night thinking about this. It was the first time on this whole trip that I've felt some sort of doubt or inner conflict. (Interview 3).

He struggled with the thought of potentially having to abandon the climb. When asked how he made sense of his situation he shared, "I believed at that moment that I was not fit to climb the mountain because I was not healthy, physically speaking." (Interview 3).

The moment he returned to Base Camp with the rest of the team he called his wife. She helped him make sense of the situation. He continued,

She was extremely supportive. She told me to be patient and reminded me that I have put a lot of investment into the climb in terms of time and so not to worry about the money or time spent away from home. She told me to just wait and see if my cough at the same time the bad weather gets any better (Interview 3).

He usually remained positive in uncertain situations but clearly he was beginning to experience some concern.

When asked if any of his values or beliefs had been tested thus far he shares, "I think this climb is the most difficult thing I have ever done. It is physically extending and mentally challenging." (Interview 3). He was beginning to seriously question his chances of reaching the summit and began to think about going home. It was at this point in the journey that his expectations began to change. He shared, "My expectations have been tempered somewhat. I've even started to think that if the weather continues like it is, maybe Camp 3 is the maximum that I will achieve." (Interview 3). He was worried and adamant about not getting frostbite on his fingers like he did when he climbed Mt. McKinley the year before. He rationalized potential disappointment and shared: "Having achieved nothing more than Camp 3 is fine with me

because I think coming back with everything in tact is much more important.” (Interview 3). His expectations to reach the summit were lessening. He shared, “The summit is optional whereas before it was much more paramount.” (Interview 3). His desire to succeed was beginning to wane.

He was beginning to see through his disguise of self-deception. The experience of climbing the mountain was allowing him to see his true colors. When asked how he saw himself as a person he shared,

Everest is one of those mountains that make you realize who you are. I am not a strong climber; I am a reasonable climber. I came here wanting to climb Everest and face all the challenges, but I am just one of the ordinary guys, nothing special. I think I see who I am much more now than when I first came here. (Interview 3).

He was taking an honest look inside himself and learning that he was not as experienced and strong as he thought he was. He openly admitted that his dependency on the Sherpas and the guides with whom he climbed was a humbling experience.

His outlook of life was changing since his arrival at Base Camp. When asked how he was feeling at that moment he shared,

I am looking forward to being with my wife. I think my perspective of things has changed over time. I have spent a lot of time here, thought a lot about what my values are, and how I want to be when I get back. (Interview 3).

He was unwavering in his belief that what people value when they are at home and what they value while they are on the mountain should be the same. He was afraid of acting in a manner while he was on the expedition that he would regret when he got home.

Allan

He made the climb to Camp 2 with the team in the hopes that the weather would clear and they would make their final push to the summit. But, he was feeling tired and disappointed. It became obvious to him that if he got the chance to climb to the summit it would not be till the very end of the climbing season. The weather reports were predicting high winds and cold temperatures for the next couple of days. Before leaving his home in Florida his goal was to reach the summit no later than the 31st of May and arrive home on the 9th of June. But his plan did not look hopeful. The jet stream continued to hover over the apex of the mountain. Consequently it was too dangerous to climb and he made the final decision to head home. When asked to describe difficult decisions that he made he shared, “the difficult decision was to give up and come down.” (Interview 4). He wanted to get the opportunity to climb to at least 8000 meters and learn if his body could withstand the pressures of the environment. He climbed to Camp 3 a few weeks prior for acclimatization purposes and knew his body could perform to at least 7, 300 meters. But, he wanted to know what it felt like higher up on the mountain. But that was not going to happen for him.

When asked how he coped with his decision to turn around he shared:

I am comfortable with my decision. I need to be home, and also it just didn't feel right to me. I don't think the mountain wanted anybody to summit on the South side this year. I think there is danger up there and I worry that somebody's going to get hurt or killed.

(Interview 4).

His rationale for turning around stemmed in part from his belief that the icefall was too dangerous to climb. The last time he climbed through the dangerous section of the mountain he saw four pickets come loose and pop out of ice. The route through the Khumbu icefall - one of the most

risky sections on the mountain - was deteriorating rapidly because of the warm weather that continued to prevail. He worried that someone was eventually going to get badly injured somewhere on that section of the mountain.

At the end of the day he believed there were too many signals pointing to reasons not to climb the mountain. The avalanche that released at Camp 1, the numerous tragedies on the North side, the deaths in the icefall, and the poor weather patterns indicated to him that the mountain was not safe to climb. Thinking about all these tragedies made him question the importance of reaching the summit. He shared, "I mean you just say to yourself; is the summit that important? I have come here and done something extraordinary that 99.9% of people never do, and that should be enough." (Interview 4). He was not disappointed that he didn't get to the summit and believed that his experience climbing the mountain was enough.

He believed he accomplished his goal of giving cancer patients hope that anything is possible. When asked if his philosophy of life or climbing enlightened him in any way he shared, "I think I achieved my goal because I wasn't stopped by anything that I did or didn't do." (Interview 4). He believed that his reason for not getting to the top was out of his control. He was physically and mentally ready for an opportunity to try and reach the summit but he was never given the chance because of the poor weather conditions that continued to persist.

He believed he was 'pushing the envelope' by climbing the mountain at his age and was never going to come back to the mountain to try again to reach the summit. He wanted to continue climbing and raising money for his foundation but never on a mountain as big and dangerous as Everest. He was proud for having the courage to overcome adversity on the tallest mountain in the world but at the same time he felt selfish for the worry and hardship his wife had

to endure while he was fulfilling his dream. When asked how his wife felt about him climbing the mountain he shared:

I still feel very selfish that I left and put her through this. It's a huge responsibility to run the household. She's an attorney too, so she's very busy. And to run the household and be alone, she deserves a bow. (Interview 4).

He learned that he was building character from his experience on the mountain. He was developing a sense of pride from pushing through barriers and improving his level of patience. His wife often complained that he was not patient enough. But after spending two months in the mountains he began to grow more tolerant about things in life that can't be controlled. He was also growing as a climber. He had learned a host of new skills. When all's said and done he simply hoped to walk off the mountain in one piece.

The Return to Base Camp – May 24th

The climbers waited at the base of the mountain for the weather to improve in the hopes that they would get their chance to climb to the summit. Eventually however five of the climbers made the decision, at different points in the journey, to abandon the climb and head home. The remaining participant (Nate) stayed on the mountain and waited for his chance to arrive. It was at this moment, a day after Steven made the decision to call off the climb, that a fourth interview was conducted with him.

Steven

The look on his face did not correspond with the words he spoke. He appeared distressed and disappointed. Yet he talked about how great it felt to be alive and how happy he was to be going home to his wife and family. He shared, "It is wonderful to be going back to the family. But, I guess I have mixed emotions." (Interview 4). He took responsibility for his decision to

turn around when he did. His decision was based on the weather reports that continued to predict low temperatures and high wind speeds. He was not comfortable climbing in such conditions and even more he knew that because there had not been a weather window of opportunity to climb to the summit before that point, too many people would be attempting to get to the top on the same day. He reasoned, "That didn't give me a good feeling, so I took my own decision to come down." (Interview 4). When asked how he made sense of his actions he responded:

Sometimes you can't. I think that is a conflict because you think about your life and then think 'what the hell am I doing here?' In these conditions it did not make sense to me. If the conditions had been good and you go quickly and come back, and everything works out o.k. that's fine. But do you question your sanity? For sure. (Interview 4).

Yet he continued to try and make sense of his decision and discussed:

I have retreated many times on past climbs and I always stop when I know that it is not a good idea to continue climbing. And maybe that is why I have survived so long. Because I think you have to have the courage to make those decisions. (Interview 4).

When asked how he felt about the decision that he made he responded:

I phoned my wife and sister this afternoon and they are delighted that I am coming home in one piece. So, I feel o.k. about it. I guess it is still possible that some of the team might still summit, but it would be in really difficult conditions. (Interview 4).

The fact that his team mates still had a chance to climb to the summit sat on him. However, he continued to try and reaffirm his belief that climbing Everest was not just about getting to the summit. He shared, "It is about learning to be in harmony with the mountain even though it was difficult to achieve that this year because the mountain was not particularly happy." (Interview 4).

The physical problems he experienced throughout the expedition including his bad cough and persisting stomach ache made him think that he would not return a second time to the mountain to climb. Even though he enjoyed the experience he was likely going to focus on climbing smaller mountains, more of the 4000m peaks. Yet, as he tried to accept the decision he made to abandon the climb, he experienced felt tension and tried to make peace with the knowledge that he was not successful in reaching the top. He shared, "It would be nice to go to the top, but it is not necessary. That is one of the greatest things I have learned here." (Interview 4).

Summit Climb – May 30th

Nate remained on the mountain desperate for a chance to climb to the top. Several days later, his chance arrived. The weather reports predicted a break in the weather patterns. The winds were reported to subside long enough so that climbers could make a proper attempt at reaching the summit. So the next day, he, along with the primary researcher, set out for Camp 2 and subsequently Camp 3 a day later. The following day, after spending the night at Camp 3, they climbed together to Camp 4 and waited several hours at 8,000m for their chance to climb to the top.

Waiting at Camp 4, the weather appeared conducive for a summit push. The winds had finally ceased. Consequently, that same night several hours after Nate and the primary researcher arrived at Camp 4 they readied themselves for the climb to the peak. Thirty-five minutes past ten o'clock in the evening, they strapped on their oxygen, switched on their headlamps, and ascended into the darkness in a race against the clock. Survival above the South Col, up in the Death Zone, was tenuous. The climbers instinctively sensed the importance of getting up and down the mountain as quickly as possible. Yet, they were the first climbers that season to climb

above Camp 4. Consequently, they were forced to climb at an excruciatingly slow pace to break trail and allow the strongest of the Sherpa climbers and Western guides to install some fixed line to the summit. Eleven hours later, at 9:30am, after a long and difficult climb the remaining participant and the primary researcher stood together on the summit along with several other climbers.

Standing on the summit was only the half way point of the climb. After spending 15 minutes at the summit taking photos, the climbers had to make the long, dangerous descent to Camp 4. Fifteen minutes after leaving the summit, the winds picked up with intensity and the visibility began to deteriorate. The climbers reached the top of the Hilary Step - a pronounced notch in the ridge that demands ice and rock climbing skills - where they encountered a clot of Iranian climbers making their way up the step pitch. Their climb quickly came to a grinding halt. An hour went by as they waited for the group of climbers to pass. Soon after, they carried on their journey toward Camp 4. About five hours later, exhausted and cold, they finally reached the safety of camp 4. The next day they made the journey down the mountain toward Camp 2 and eventually to Base Camp.

The expedition had come to a conclusion and few days later the climbers packed their bags and headed down the valley one step closer to their homes. One month after all six of the participants returned home the final interview was conducted with the primary researcher.

The Aftermath (sea level) – July 2nd – 8th

Janette

Her decision to leave the mountain before attempting to reach its summit was extremely difficult to make. When the 28th of May arrived and no good weather had appeared she stood by her original plan, packed her bags, and headed down the valley toward the city of Katmandu one

step closer to her home in Malibu. But with each step closer to home she got farther and farther away from her dream of standing on the summit. And when she arrived home she felt depressed. It made her sad to think that her dream was over. Like an injured athlete she felt empty by the realization that she no longer had the chance to win. She could only stand on the sidelines and wait and see what would happen to her teammates who remained on the mountain.

She questioned her decision to go home and reflects: "I should have stayed. I wish I would have stayed especially knowing now that some of my teammates reached the summit after I left." (Interview 4). Yet immediately her thoughts turned to the reasons why she left. She reflects:

I would have been two weeks late and that was not an acceptable option. I told my kids that I would be home by June 1st and so I did what I had to do as a mom. If I had stayed, my kids would have hated me. What is more important, an Everest summit or your kids not trusting you? Had it been any other responsibility I would have blown it off. (Interview 4). The guilt she experienced on the mountain as a result of being away from her kids disappeared when she arrived home. By changing her behavior she was able to eliminate the psychological discomfort she felt. She shares: "The feelings of guilt disappeared as soon as I got home."(Interview 4).

She found solace in that fact that she had enough money and was young enough that she could go back to the mountain another year. And that was her plan. She would go back to Everest in a couple of years. She reasons: "I mean I was in a place I had never been before. And now when I go back I will be more confident, know what to expect, and be armed with good information." (Interview 4). The discomfort she felt as a result of not being successful on the mountain was somewhat diminished as she focused on having the chance to be successful in the

future. Yet, deep within she continued to be haunted by the fact that she did not triumph. She shares, “I really miss Everest and can't wait to go back. That mountain for whatever reason won't leave me alone.”

Nate

Other than the 70 hour work weeks he was putting in at the office he was feeling great since his return from the mountain. He felt like he was living on cloud nine. The memories of the experience were heart-warming and very profound. It was an important moment in his life that would stay with him for a long time. And he thought a lot about the mountain especially what it felt like to be up high. He was fascinated by the upper camps and wanted like to go back. He attributed his reason for wanting to return to the fact that he never felt fully exhausted when he was there and didn't suffer from the effects of high altitude in the same way most of the other people did. He shared: “I would love to go back up high and hang out. When you do well boy it feels great.” (Interview 4). When he was at Camp 4 he found some interesting trinkets including an old ice axe and a pair of crampons and that dated almost 50 years back. He wanted to go back to the mountain to further explore the area.

During the climb to the summit seeing the remains of climbers who never succeeded in making it off the mountain alive is more common than it is rare. During his time spent up high on the mountain Nate had seen several dead bodies. When asked how he coped with it he shared:

That is the cost of being up there. I was prepared for it and knew the risks I was taking. The three people, who quit on my team, got up high on the mountain and figured out the risks once they were there. You know you think that everyone who goes there would know what the risks are and I think you read about risk but maybe it is not until you are there that some

people realize they are not ready to undertake the risk. It was very clear that with all three of my team mates who bailed that they did not want to take the risk. (Interview 4).

When asked how he himself prepared for the risk he faced, he shared:

I felt like unless something weird would happen like an avalanche, I would be o.k. For some reason I had a very calm feeling about where I was and what I could physically take on. I didn't feel like something really bad would happen to me but at the same time if it did I was o.k. with it. I love mountaineering and to me that wouldn't be a bad way to go. I don't want to die in an old age home. I would rather die on Everest. I would rather go big. (Interview 4).

When asked if he had behaved in any way that he regretted during the expedition he referred to an incident when he stood on the summit of the mountain with his team mates. He had gone into the last phase of the climb at odds with his expedition leader and when they arrived on the summit he felt like he was being managed. Like a svengali his expedition leader tried to control every aspect of his summit experience including where to stand, when to take a photo, and how long to stay on the summit. He thought to himself at the time: "Hey, you be you and I will be me, but don't manage me up here because I don't need managing." (Interview 4). As a result, he told his team leader to fuck off. And the result of his actions made him feel childish. He shared, "The thing is, I should not have said that. I felt like that was a very childish thing to do. Instead I should have said 'chill out Bill'" (Interview 4). He attributed the outburst to stress and the fact that he had already been having some problems with his team leader throughout the expedition. He explained his frustration by saying, "All I wanted him to do was be professional with what we were trying to do. I took it very seriously both the achievement as well as the risk. I wanted his head to be fully in the game." (Interview 4). Clearly, he wanted to

live up to his perception of self as sensible and moral. He also highlighted the fact that he was suffering from the effects of high altitude and fatigue when he was on the summit.

He did not want to have any negative memories associated with his summit achievement. Rather he wanted to remember it as a good positive moment. To do so he found ways to reduce the anger he felt toward his team leader by stressing the fact that his team leader had a lot of good leadership qualities and that he just needed to focus them on the team and the ultimate goal. He shared: "I think I may have elevated him to a status that was beyond his own human faults, of which we all have. So, it is possible as I look back on it that I expected too much from him." (Interview 4). At the end of the day he did not want to experience any negative feelings as he looked back on his summit achievement.

Gordie

Since the moment he arrived at Base Camp after his attempt to climb to the summit he began experiencing psychological discomfort as a result of the way things unfolded that day on the mountain. And the inner turmoil continued to haunt him weeks after his return from the mountain. When asked how he was feeling at the moment he said:

I am still really struggling with the psychology of not making it. I think you (i.e., the primary researcher) have been there and know what it is like and you know it wears on you. I have got to somehow deal with this. It has not been easy to accept the fact and get on with it." (Interview 4).

It drove him crazy to think about the exact moment when he decided to turn around at the base of the Lhotze Face. He continued:

I keep reliving the moment when I turned back. What if I hadn't turned around and I could have done it? Of course it does not help that my compatriots did make it after I turned back.

I keep on reliving that decision. What if I hadn't, could I have made it? The doubt haunts me. (Interview 4).

The inner conflict he was experiencing was overwhelming and seemed to never go away. He says: "I keep on trying to justify my decision and then another side of me thinks that I bailed out too early. I don't know. It is a tough back and forth in my mind." (Interview 4). Clearly the decision to abandon the climb was a difficult one to cope with.

Before setting out for Camp 3 on the summit push he felt reasonably good. He was positive and excited about what was to come. He says: "I was really pumped and excited. I believed we were going to do this. I was just very positive and optimistic." (Interview 4). A few hours into his climb, however, he began to experience pain in his lower back. He continued climbing despite the anguish he felt and hoped that his back troubles would improve somewhat over time. But it didn't seem to be getting any better and after about three hours into the climb he decided he couldn't take it anymore. He remembered thinking: "I didn't want to climb on the steep icy pitch of the Lhotze Face and be slow or in pain all the time." (Interview 4). Consequently, he made the decision to turn around. As soon as he turned around and headed back toward Camp 2, he wondered if maybe he was making the pain worse in his mind than it really was.

Soon after he made the final decision to turn around he did not doubt that he had made the right choice. That is, until two days later when he arrived at base camp and learned that his teammates had reached the summit. When asked how it made him feel to learn that some of his team mates reached the top he shared:

Having found out later that Jerry and Martin did make it on the 30th and then subsequently on the 2nd of June when three other of my teammates made it, I began to question my

decision. On the one hand I am happy for them, but it also makes me more jealous to know that I could have. (Interview 4).

The thought of going back to the mountain another season for a second attempt crossed his mind. He held on to the belief that he could make it to the summit. He believed that he had the physical and mental abilities to get to the summit.

During the walk out from base camp to Lukla his back problems continued to persist, which was strangely comforting for him. He said to his wife:

This is so bad that had I gotten up there I don't know if I could have dealt with it. And that helps soften it a bit for me. I mean I could have gotten up there and had a hell of a time getting back down or something. (Interview 4).

Since he returned home he used his back problems as a way of coping with his psychological discomfort. He said: "When I get this back pain it reminds how serious it is and how painful it would have felt climbing on the Lhotze Face and that makes me feel a bit better." (Interview 4). As he tried to convince himself that he made the right decision he experienced an inner torment like never before. Nonetheless, he tried to focus on the fact that it was a tremendous experience. He got some wonderful slides and beautiful pictures and was an experience he would never forget.

Sayeed

Since his return home from the mountain he was feeling lost. When asked how he coped with this feeling he shared, "Well you know shit happens. Shit always happens. I still have my ten toes and ten fingers. It is not easy climbing the mountain and then coming back to reality" (Interview 5). As soon as he got back to Jordan he had an operation on his stomach and was slowly beginning to feel like his normal self. His ulcers were healing and his energy gradually

returned. He soon after decided that he needed to go back to Everest for a second attempt. When asked how he was feeling at that moment he shared, “I am sure that I definitely need to go back and do it. I need to.” (Interview 5). But he was uncertain about how to make the next steps happen. He did not know how to proceed to find the necessary funds that would enable him to go back to the mountain. The sponsors who gave him money to climb the mountain in the first place were not cooperative or willing to fund a second attempt. And he believed that not until he had a plan in place to go back to the mountain would he feel contented.

Upon reflection he realized that his only limitation, which held him back from reaching the summit, was fear. The problems with his stomach resulted from the tremendous levels of stress that he felt, which in turn stemmed from the fact that he was afraid of overstepping his limitations. He was not directly scared of the mountain and its potential to kill. But rather he was scared that he would push himself beyond what his body and mind could handle, which consequently could lead to serious injury or death. When asked what exactly it was that led him to make the decision to turn around he shared, “the fear in my mind that I might not have stopped when I should have. Not to know where my limitation is.” (Interview 5). He made a promise to himself that the next time he goes to the mountain to climb he will be prepared and fully ready for the challenge. It was more important for him now than ever to get to the summit. When asked about his expectations at this stage he responded, “I didn’t do it last time so it is like a bug. I want it more now. When you set a goal you just want to get there.” (Interview 5).

He learned from his experience climbing the mountain that he was not true to himself. From day one, he believed he was going to be able to succeed and denied, throughout the expedition, the problems he was experiencing with his stomach. The moment he came to realize that he was not fit to summit the mountain rather than admitting he could not reach his goal and

accept the reality of his situation, he fought with himself to continue on. He disliked seeing himself in the light of a person who did not succeed. He often set goals for himself throughout his life and was used to achieving them. At this point, however, he would have to learn how to cope with not reaching his goal of being the first Jordanian to stand on the summit of Mount Everest.

Steven

The thoughts and emotions that he experienced since he arrived home from Nepal were a mass of contradictions. From the satisfied sensation of being safe and sound at home with his loved ones to the profound sense of regret he felt for having not reached his goal the inner turmoil he experienced weighed heavily on his psyche. On the one hand, he questioned his decision to abandon the climb, especially after realizing that a few of his teammates safely reached the summit about a week after he packed his bags and made his way down the valley toward his home. He truly believed his chances of getting to the summit were high and knowing that he had been consistently faster and stronger than some of his teammates who succeeded in reaching the summit added salt to his wound of returning around. He shared:

When the others got to the top I was a bit disappointed that I hadn't gone. It is difficult to make that sort of a call. You sort of call it the way you see it at the time. But then if others are successful it can be pretty disappointing. So, I have sort of had mixed feelings since I have gotten back. (Interview 5).

The success of his teammates brought home the hard reality of what could have also been a victory for him. Clearly, making the decision to bring to an end his lifelong dream of standing on the apex of the world's tallest peak was dragging him down. When asked how he has been coping with his decision to abandon the climb he shared: "The first two or three weeks I kept

waking up in the middle of the night and thinking Jesus why didn't you just do it? So, emotionally I was fairly ragged." (Interview 5). To cope with the psychological discomfort he felt, Steven reflected on his experience and came to the conclusion that he made a conservative decision, which was sensible taking into consideration the circumstances of the environment in which he found himself. He shared: "And I know it was a sensible thing to do because I am fairly risk adverse." (Interview 5).

Despite trying to convince himself that he made a proper choice to call off the climb he continued to experience psychological discomfort. This inner turmoil stemmed from the realization that he may have been too cautious in making the decision to stop climbing toward the summit. As a result, he struggled in his attempts to lower any uneasiness he may have been feeling. When asked to describe the decision making process with regards to turning around at Camp 3 he shared:

I called my wife and we discussed it for quite a while on the phone and then ultimately I decided not to go. I must say that I had been through quite a lot of periods of sickness. I had lots of problems with my stomach. I had gastro enteritis a couple of times and then finally I got bronchitis and I kept loosing my voice so I was a bit concerned about going from that point of view but also because of the weather. The window of opportunity appeared to be so small to me. But, ultimately you have got to decide if you want to take that risk or not, I guess. And in hindsight when people come back safely you think 'shit why didn't I do it?' But, at the time, it seemed to be too risky. (Interview 5).

Reflecting on the consequences of his decision at Camp 3 bothered him. In retrospect, he tried to interpret his decision in a way that helped him experience inner peace. When asked to expand on what too risky meant to him he shared:

Um, I think I was concerned with going over 8000 meters with the way my breathing was going. I was also concerned with coming back through the icefall because to me it was sort of getting a bit too late. There were other problems as well Shaunna. I had mixed feelings about how the Sherpas were feeling because the Sherpas had not sort of come back so late through the icefall before and the icefall doctor seemed to be a bit nervous about keeping the icefall open. So, there were a lot of things to weigh up. (Interview 5).

Highlighting his physical troubles, the deteriorating conditions of the lower section of the mountain, and the uneasiness that the Sherpas felt regarding the unstable conditions of the icefall helped him come to terms with the fact that he did not reach his goal. Overtime, he slowly began to feel better about his predicament. He shared:

I was pretty disappointed for a few weeks, what is it now 10 weeks since I got back. For the first three weeks and particularly in the days while I was still in Nepal I went over and over and over it in my mind until I was exhausted you know. But I have sort of gotten back to a sort of more rational thought process. (Interview 5).

The money he spent to climb the mountain did not effect his decision to abandon the climb. Upon return home, however, thinking about not succeeding in relation to the large amount of money he paid to climb the mountain bothered him. He shared: "I thought about it when I got back, 'oh Christ I have just blown \$80,000 and I didn't get to the top.' I didn't however actually think about that when I got to camp 3." (Interview 5). Failing to reach the summit sparked his desire to go back to Everest to make another attempt. He was very concerned, however, about returning to the mountain and making ridiculously high risk or poor decisions due to his overwhelming desire to succeed. Walking down from base camp he swore he would never set foot on the mountain again. Now, he is planning his return.

Allan

Looking back he realized that he may have made a poor decision to abandon the climb when he did. As it turned out the weather reports were wrong and the conditions up high on the mountain improved a few days after he headed for home. In retrospect he should have stayed on the mountain. When asked how he was feeling at that moment he shared, “Well as it turned out the weather reports were wrong and I should have stayed.” (Interview 5). As he read about the climbers who stayed on the mountain and were not as fortunate as he was - some of them lost their lives and others lost fingers and toes – he counted his blessings and made the conscious decision to appreciate the experience he had. He believed in moving on and not dwelling on the past. When asked how he coped with his decision to come home he shared:

If I felt it was a failure on my part then I would have had a tough time with it. But all you can do is analyze the data you have at the time and make the best decision. Barry, Steven, and I analyzed everything... And the guides said it wasn't going to be before the 31st. If I had hung around till the 2nd of June it would have been great and I knew there was a possibility of that but I made a promise to my wife that we were going to have a recommitment ceremony to recommit our wedding vows and I said that was important so there is no looking back. (Interview 5).

He continued reasoning that it was a great experience that most people never get to do and that he was happy because he raised about \$175, 000 for the charity. He shared, “we raised an awful lot of money and it was all worthwhile because of that.” (Interview 5). Even more he reckoned that people didn't care whether he reached the summit or not. Yet in the same breath he also shared:

There will always be something in the back of my head you know that it there, but I am not going back. I am too old. I am going to be 60 in October. If I were 30, I would be on the plane next year but not at 60. (Interview 5).

Clearly, he continued to be bothered by the final decision he made on the mountain to call off the climb.

Cross Case Study Findings

The richness and complexity of the data obtained from the in-depth discussions with each climber provided opportunities to explore the patterns of similarity and difference between accounts or themes expressed. According to Sparkes (2002), how one says something is an essential part of what is said. Consequently, a focus on the content of the stories was carried out. This type of analysis focused on what the climbers said. Comparing all of the six participant narratives revealed that at various points throughout their journey all of the climbers experienced cognitive dissonance both on and off the mountain (see Table 4 for examples of sources of psychological discomfort and dissonance reduction methods). General knowledge about the main themes that make up the content of the climbers' narratives of experience with the cognitive dissonance phenomenon is provided below. Themes that emerged from the narratives included (a) self-concept; (b) feelings; (c) effort expenditure and; (d) consequences of decisions (see Table 5 for a summary). The themes are presented and discussed in conjunction with direct quotes from the interviews in order to present the participants' perspectives in their own words.

Self-Concept as the Root of Dissonance

The cognitive dissonance experienced by all of the six participants occurred when their self-concept was involved. When the climbers perceived a discrepancy between their behavior, and their personal standards for competence and morality they experienced psychological discomfort. Specifically, the dissonance involved was between a specific cognitive element that constituted the climbers' self-concept and cognitions about a freely chosen behavior

Table 4. Sources of psychological discomfort and dissonance reduction methods

| Sources of adverse self-directed feelings of psychological discomfort | Dissonance reduction methods |
|---|--|
| Janette: Neglecting responsibilities | Changing behavior <i>("The feelings of guilt disappeared as soon as I got home.")</i> |
| Nate: Expending tremendous levels of energy | Increasing the importance or value of the end result <i>("We have been out here a really long time now and reaching the summit is a big part of it. And I think that actually it has become more important for me to get to the top.")</i> |
| Gordie: Acting weak-willed | Placing blame from self to various aspects of the situation <i>("I feel vindicated in my own conscious for the work I have done and the effort I have made. I think it was just bad luck. The avalanche at Camp 1 and the bad weather patterns are greatly to blame.")</i> |
| Sayed: Falling short of expectations | Reducing the importance of the dissonant act <i>("Getting to the top does not mean much to me. It didn't mean anything to me when I climbed in Antartica or on Denali for the first time. It wasn't really something that I was looking for in my life even though...")</i> |
| Steven: Making a poor decision | Reconstruction of the past <i>("...I have sort of settled down since then. I mean I know that it was the sensible thing to do for me...")</i> |
| Allan: Self-centered behavior | Reconstruction of the past <i>("we raised an awful lot of money and it was all worthwhile because of that.")</i> |

| | Self-concept | Feelings | Effort Expenditure | Decision Making |
|---------|--|---|--|---|
| Janette | "I am <i>disappointed</i> in myself. I <i>expected</i> to be so much stronger." | "The <i>feelings</i> of guilt disappeared as soon as I got home." | "This is the hardest mountain I have been on...if I summit this one I will feel I have accomplished something big." | I told my kids I would be home by June 1 st so I did what I had to do as a Mom." |
| Nate | "I felt that was a very <i>childish</i> thing to do. Instead I should have said 'chill out Will.'" | "Taking out an insurance policy ...makes me <i>feel</i> better." | "We have been out here a really long time now...it has become more important for me to get to the top." | |
| Gordie | "How am I going to feel if I bail out now? Am I going to regret it from two months from now..." | "I <i>feel</i> vindicated in my own conscious for the work I have done...I think it was just bad luck." | "I don't care who you are. Anyone has got to feel really satisfied with reaching the summit because of the arduousness of it all." | "I keep on reliving the moment when I turned back." |
| Sayeed | "Sometimes I feel like a <i>loser</i> for not doing it." | "I <i>felt</i> so much better after making the decision to come down." | "...been here for a long time enduring so much shit. It must be a massive teacher for anyone who gets to the top" | "I could have killed myself, so I made the right decision." |
| Steven | "You think about your life and then think, 'what the hell am I doing here?'" | "As a person, part of me <i>feels</i> much better because I made a sensible decision." | "Having reached nothing more than Camp 3 is fine with me...coming back with everything in tact is more important." | "I kept on waking up in the middle of the night thinking why didn't you just do it." |
| Allan | "I still feel very <i>selfish</i> that I left and put her through this." | "I certainly want to <i>feel</i> proud of myself." | "Anytime you push yourself past your limits you have to feel better about yourself as a person." | "The weather reports were wrong and I should have stayed." |

Table 5. Cross-Case Study Narrative Themes

that violated this self-concept. Consequently, manifestations of pressures to reduce the dissonance occurred. That is, the climbers were motivated to try and reduce their dissonance through a process of self-justification. This process entailed reconstructing reality in a way that restored their pre-formed notion of self.

All six of the climbers experienced cognitive dissonance when they experienced a threat to an important element of their self-concept. For instance, before the onset of the expedition, Janette believed she was a strong and competent climber. She identified with the fact that she was able to handle physically and psychologically uncomfortable situations that most people couldn't tolerate. She believed that her strength of character separated her from her peers, which in turn provided her with a sense of confidence and competence. Near the beginning of the expedition, however, her physical and mental state began to deteriorate due to the demands of the difficult environment. Consequently, she did not feel strong or powerful and subsequently the threat to her sense of self created psychological discomfort. She shared:

I am disappointed in myself. I expected to be so much stronger. But I feel completely drained all the time and I struggle with my breathing. I often feel like I am drowning. I have always been strong in the past. (Interview 2).

The feeling of not being powerful and able seemed to conflict with her sense of self as strong and competent. To try and cope with this threat to her self-concept, Janette continued to put one foot in front of the other. Continuing to climb the mountain helped her restore her sense of self as strong. She shared, "I have probably wanted to quit a hundred times now, but I will not quit, no way." (Interview 2). She continued: "I don't want to let myself down by quitting or stopping because I am tired. That would kill me." (Interview 2). Continuing the climb appeared to allow her to live up to her perception of self as strong and capable.

When Nate stood on the summit of the mountain he felt like his expedition leader was managing his every move. Consequently, he experienced psychological discomfort as a result of having told his expedition leader to ‘fuck off.’ He shared, “the thing is, I should not have said that. I felt like that was a very childish thing to do. Instead, I should have said ‘chill out Bill.’” (Interview 4). Acting in this manner conflicted with his sense of self as decent. To reduce the psychological discomfort that he experienced he tried to reconstruct the past in a way that restored his sense of self as respectable. He rationalized his behavior and shared, “All I wanted him to do was be professional with what we were trying to do. I took it very seriously both the achievement as well as the risk. I wanted his head to be fully in the game.” (Interview 4). He attributed his outburst to stress and the fact that his expedition leader was being unprofessional. In effect, he was reconstructing his reality in a way that enabled him to reduce his psychological discomfort and live up to his self-concept as decent.

Gordie experienced a threat to his self-concept after he made the final decision to abandon the climb. At the comforts of his home, he recounted: “I keep on trying to justify my decision and then another side of me thinks that I bailed out too early. I don’t know; it is a tough back and forth in my mind.” (Interview 4). Making the decision to abandon the climb created psychological discomfort because his decision seemed to have threatened his sense of self as intelligent and courageous. To cope with the threat to his self-concept he spoke about his back pain and shared:

This is so bad that had I gotten up there I don’t know if I could have dealt with it. And that helps soften it a bit for me. I mean I could have gotten up there and had a hell of a time getting back down or something. (Interview 4).

He tried to convince himself that he made the right decision to call off the climb by thinking about the potential negative outcome that could have transpired if he had attempted to climb to the summit.

After Sayeed finally made his decision to abandon the climb he also experienced dissonance arousal. One month after he returned home he shared, “sometimes I feel like I am a loser for not doing it.” (Interview 4). Turning around and giving up on his goal to stand on the summit appeared to have conflicted with his sense of self as intelligent and successful. To cope with his discomfort immediately after he made his final decision he shared, “If I had gone up there I could have killed myself. So, I made the right decision to go down.” (Interview 3). Thinking about the potential of dying on the mountain helped him cope with the threat to his sense of self. That is, he coped with the psychological discomfort that he experienced by convincing himself that he made the correct decision. He added: “I thought to myself, okay if these people are coming down and they don’t have the same health problems that I have then I made the right decision to come down as well” (Interview 4).

Making the final decision to abandon the climb conflicted with Steven’s sense of self as capable because he believed in his heart that he had the physical ability to make it to the top. One month after he returned home, he shared: “The physical part of me says, ‘well you actually could have done that so you have to go and do it again because you are actually capable of it.’” (Interview 5). To lower the psychological discomfort that he experienced, he shared:

The first two or three weeks I kept on waking up in the middle of the night and thinking ‘Jesus why didn’t you just do it?’ So, emotionally I was fairly ragged. But I have sort of settled down since then. I mean I know that it was the sensible thing to do for me. But, um, I still find it difficult to reconcile at times. Some days are better than others. (Interview 5).

Trying to convince himself that he made a wise decision to call off the climb helped him restore his sense of self as capable and intelligent.

Allan experienced psychological discomfort immediately after he made the decision to climb the mountain. Leaving his wife at home alone for a protracted period of time placed his sense of self as supportive and caring in jeopardy. His decision appeared to have sat on him throughout the entire length of the expedition. At the end of the expedition he shared:

I still feel very selfish that I left and put her through this. It's a huge responsibility to run the household. She's an attorney too, so she is very busy. And to run the household and be alone, she deserves a bow. (Interview 4).

To reduce his psychological discomfort it appeared that he tried to restore his sense of self as empathetic and caring by focusing on his reason for climbing the mountain. He continued to remind himself that he was climbing the mountain because he wanted to give hope to people with cancer that anything is possible.

Feelings

Feelings played a role in the climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance. At various points throughout their journey, all of the climbers seemed to have experienced specific adverse self-directed feelings that were brought on as the result of inconsistent cognitions directed at the self. Consequently, the climbers were motivated to reduce their psychological discomfort as they wanted to feel better about themselves. Engaging in various dissonant reduction strategies was the vehicle used by the climbers to try and reduce or eliminate adverse feelings in order to feel the way they wanted about themselves both on and off the mountain. Feelings appear to play an important role in the arousal and reduction of cognitive dissonance.

One month after Janette returned home from the mountain she talked about how much better she felt about herself as a mother. On the mountain, she was unable to live up to her expectations as a responsible caregiver and therefore experienced pangs of guilt. Being at home with her three children, however, eliminated the guilt she experienced while she climbed the mountain. Upon arrival back home she shared: “The feelings of guilt disappeared as soon as I got home.” (Interview 4). Physically being at home with her children helped Janette rid herself of the adverse feelings she experienced on the mountain.

Nate talked about reducing his psychological discomfort in relation to how he wanted to feel after he made his decision to climb the mountain. He tried to cope with the psychological discomfort associated with the realization that he may potentially leave his wife and three children financially ruined if he died on the mountain by sharing: “Taking out an insurance policy makes sure that that won’t happen and makes me feel better at the same time.” (Interview 1). Taking steps to financially protect his wife and children allowed him to reduce his psychological discomfort and help him feel better about his decision to climb the mountain.

Gordie tried reducing his psychological discomfort surrounding his decision to call off the climb in relation to feel and shared:

I feel vindicated in my own conscience for the work I have done and the effort I have made. I think it was just bad luck. The avalanche at Camp 1 and the bad weather patterns are greatly to blame. (Interview 3).

Rationalizing his failure by highlighting aspects of the climb that were out of his control helped him feel justified in his own mind for having made the final decision to abandon the climb. He could not change the outcome of the incident to reduce his dissonance. Upon reflection however he focused on the unlucky aspect of the situation, which in turn, allowed him to reduce the psychological discomfort he was experiencing and feel the way he wanted to feel.

Sayed tried reducing the dissonance he experienced in relation to feel after he followed through with his decision to abandon the climb. He felt better about himself by convincing himself of the following:

I felt so much better after making the decision to come down. It was just an idea that I had sitting in my office one day. The idea should not control me. I can make other decisions and do other things in my life. (Interview 5).

In effect, Sayeed tried to reconnect with how he wanted to feel by downplaying his idea to climb the mountain in the first place and focusing on the possibility of making other decisions in his life. This cognitive change coupled with his affective response to the situation allowed him to reduce the feelings of psychological discomfort he was experiencing.

After Steven returned home he continued to experience psychological discomfort as a result of having made the decision to abandon the climb. He could not change the outcome of his decision to restore a sense of self-consistency. Instead, he tried lowering his dissonance in relation to feel by convincing himself that he made the right decision. When asked how he saw himself as a person, he shared: "As a person, part of me feels much better because I made a sensible decision." (Interview 5). Trying to uphold his self-concept as a sensible person enabled him to feel the way he wanted to feel.

At one point during the expedition Allan struggled to decide if he should abandon the climb. He was clearly at a cross roads as to whether he should stay on the mountain and continue the climb or head home. Soon after he made the decision to continue the journey toward the peak, he tried to reduce his psychological discomfort in relation to how he wanted to feel about himself. He shared, "I certainly want to feel proud of myself and want to know I am

accomplishing the goal of proving that anything is possible and giving hope to cancer patients.” (Interview 5).

Dissonance Resulting From Effort

All of the climbers who were involved in the present study expended tremendous levels of effort in their attempt to reach the summit. Consequently they experienced cognitive dissonance. The five climbers who prematurely terminated the climb before reaching the summit likely experienced dissonance because the cognition that they worked hard conflicted with the cognition that they were not rewarded. Regardless of the outcome of the climb, however, all six of the climbers seemed to have experienced dissonance as a result of the hard work exhausted in their efforts to succeed. That is, the cognition that the environment was difficult and demanding conflicted with the cognition that they chose to endure it. In order to reduce their psychological discomfort the climbers appeared to have engaged in various dissonance reducing strategies. Direct quotes from the interviews are used to highlight, in their own words, the climbers' experiences lowering their dissonance.

In the early stages of the climb Janette began experiencing tremendous levels of physical discomfort on her journey to Camp 2. Consequently, she highlighted the value of reaching the summit of Mount Everest. She shared: “This is the hardest mountain I have been on and I think if I summit this one I will feel I have really accomplished something big in my life.” (Interview 2). Convincing herself that reaching the apex of the world's tallest peak was a noteworthy achievement helped her justify the discomfort she endured and energy she expended. Conversely, as Janette began realizing that she was not going to succeed in reaching her goal, she tried to reduce her psychological discomfort by diminishing what the activity of high altitude mountaineering meant to her. She shared: “Mountaineering isn't as important in my life as I

thought it was.” (Interview 3). Convincing herself that she didn’t really value the activity, she was able to somewhat justify her failure despite having undergone lots of hard work.

For Nate, the more time he spent in the difficult and demanding environment the more his desire to reach the summit intensified. He shared, “We have been out here a really long time now and reaching the summit is a big part of it. And I think that actually it has become more important for me to get to the top.” (Interview 3). Nate justified the uncomfortable grind of everyday life on the mountain by highlighting what reaching the summit meant for him. Also, Nate experienced dissonance during the onset of the expedition when he struggled with the negative team-dynamic that permeated his surrounding. The inexperienced climbers in his group were demanding and emotionally draining, threatening his chances of reaching the summit. In an attempt to cope with the effort he exhausted to improve the group morale he shared: “And since we’re in a situation where you meet your team in Katmandu for the first time versus a bunch of guys you’ve climbed with forever, you test your patience. But at least you get to practice some of those skills that you haven’t used in a while.” (Interview 1). Believing that he was refining his skills by assisting his team mates in developing their skills helped him justify his frustration.

To justify the hardship involved in the pursuit, Gordie tried to convince himself that there was a payoff to be had in return for his efforts. He shared: “I don’t care who you are. Anyone has got to feel really satisfied with reaching the summit because of the arduousness of it all.” (Interview 2). Allan shared a similar outlook: “I think that anytime you put yourself in harm’s way or push yourself past your limits, you have to feel better about yourself as a person and climber.” (Interview 2). For both climbers, the return for their efforts was justified by experiencing positive self-directed feelings.

At the onset of the climb, Sayeed also believed that there was a payoff involved for enduring hardship. For him, however, the reward was disguised in the form of a teacher. He shared:

I really want to do it. I want to do it because I am here and I have been here for a long time enduring so much shit. That is why I want to do it. It must be a massive teacher for anybody who gets to the top and suffers that much to get to that point (Interview 3).

Expending effort and enduring discomfort increased Sayeed's desire to reach the summit. That is, the summit became more attractive to him the more he suffered. When Sayeed began realizing that he was not going to be able to stand on the world's tallest peak, however, his outlook toward reaching the summit changed. He shared: "Getting to the top does not mean much to me. It didn't mean anything to me when I climbed in Antarctica or on Denali for the first time. It wasn't really something that I was looking for in my life even though there are so many people in Jordan and the Middle East who are waiting for me to get to the summit. (Interview 5).

Like most of the participants, Steven found the climb grueling. By the end of the expedition he shared: "I think this climb is the most difficult thing I have ever done. It is physically extending and mentally challenging." (Interview 3). To try and cope with the conflict between the knowledge that he was exhausting himself both physically and mentally and the realization that he was likely not going to reach the summit he shared: "Having achieved nothing more than Camp 3 is fine with me because I think coming back with everything intact is much more important." (Interview 3). To help him try and come to terms with the effort he put into the climb, he tried to remind himself that his physical safety superseded reaching the summit.

To reduce his dissonance after failing to reach the summit of the mountain, Allan undervalued the importance of reaching the top. He highlighted his belief that simply partaking

in an elite endeavor such as climbing Everest was a privilege. He shared: “I mean you just say to yourself; is the summit that important? I have come here and done something extraordinary that 99.9% of people never do, and that should be enough.” (Interview 4). Reducing dissonance in this way seemed to have helped Allan justify the effort he expended.

Dissonance as a Consequence of Decisions

Out of the five participants who abandoned the climb, all of them seemed to have experienced cognitive dissonance before and after they fully committed to their chosen course of action. The process of making their decision began with the climbers feeling conflicted. The decision, of whether to continue the climb to the summit or not, pushed them in two directions simultaneously. Subsequently after making their decision to abandon the climb, they experienced feelings of psychological discomfort and, in turn, manifestations of pressures to reduce the adverse feelings occurred. Interestingly, the dissonance was manifest before the climbers fully committed to the chosen course of action. The moment they followed through with their decision, the climbers continued to show signs of psychological discomfort and efforts to try and eliminate or reduce it as a result of rejecting the alternatives which were involved in the decision. Direct quotes from the interviews are used to highlight the patterns of similarity among the climbers.

Pre-decision conflict

At some point near the end of the climb five out of the six climbers were seriously confused. Like the Clash's famous song, ‘should I stay or should I go now?’ the climbers were completely flummoxed with the decision placed before them. They were uncertain as to whether they should carry on and attempt climbing to the summit or abandon the climb and begin their journey toward home. Sayeed shared, “It took me a long to make the decision because I knew

deep inside that I was not going to be able to climb, but at the same time I really wanted to do it. (Interview 4). Janette was equally conflicted. At one point before making her final decision to abandon the climb she said:

What the heck am I doing here? I've had it. Mothers should not be climbing 8000 meter peaks. It is just so selfish of me. I should go home. I should stay. I should go home. I talk to my kids on the phone and I am leaving. I talk to someone else and I am staying. (Interview 3).

Thinking about the colossal repercussions involved between the two alternatives created a palatable state of confusion.

Clearly, the climber's decision on what course of action to follow created a state of discord. As Steven thought about potentially abandoning the climb he shared, "I tossed and turned all night thinking about this. It was the first time on this whole trip that I've felt some sort of doubt or inner conflict." (Interview 3). As he reflected on the decision making process he shared:

I was stuck in the middle. In fact, I was the last one to speak because I found it so difficult to sort of weigh my emotions between wanting to get to the top and wanting not to take too much risk. (Interview 5).

Gordie was also pulled between two directions simultaneously and shared: "How am I going to feel if I bail out now. Am I going to regret it in two months from now and wonder why I didn't give it one more shot?" (Interview 3). When Allan was asked if he made any difficult decisions up to this point in the expedition, he shared:

Yes, the decision on whether to continue or not from the standpoint of being physically and mentally worn out. And, from a time standpoint, the pressures of knowing that you work for a living and that you have been gone for two months. (Interview 3).

All of the five climbers who made the decision to call off the climb lived in a state of flux before making their decision to abandon the climb and committing to the chosen course of action. They were at a cross roads and truly confused on what was the right course of action to follow.

Post- decision dissonance

At some point near the end of the climb, the five climbers struggled greatly to follow through with their decision to abandon the climb. They never openly admitted that they had called off the climb, however, it was clear that they were preparing themselves for this to take place. That is, pressures to reduce the feelings of psychological discomfort they experienced were manifest. Before Janette acted on her decision to abandon the climb she shared:

I will be so disappointed, but yet it wasn't my doing. It was the weather. There is nothing I can do about it. I am not making the jet stream sit on top of the summit. It is just there.

Even more the summit is not a guarantee. (Interview 3).

Even though she had not yet followed through with her decision to abandon the climb, she was looking for ways to reduce the psychological discomfort that she experienced. It is possible that she sensed deep inside that she was not going to reach her goal of standing on the summit.

Before Gordie fully committed to his decision to call off the climb he shared: "I could tell friends and family that the weather was terrible and therefore we ran out of time, you know it is a pretty good excuse." (Interview 3). He continued:

I feel vindicated in my own conscious for the work I have done and the effort I have made. I think it was just bad luck. The avalanche at Camp 1 and the bad weather patterns are greatly to blame. (Interview 3).

When the time arrived and he was forced to take the next step by either ascending the mountain to Camp 2, for his last opportunity at climbing to the summit, or returning home, he reduced his discomfort by continuing the climb. Before he set out for Camp 3, on the summit push, he shared: “I was really pumped and excited. I believed we were going to do this. I was just very positive and optimistic.” (Interview 4). A few hours into the climb to Camp 3 he committed to abandoning the climb and descended the mountain to Base Camp.

Before he fully committed to his decision to abandon the climb, Steven began reducing the psychological discomfort he was experiencing. Focusing on the importance of safety helped him cope with the realization that he might not be successful. He shared, “Having achieved nothing more than Camp 3 is fine with me because I think coming back with everything in tact is much more important.” (Interview 3). He also began placing more emphasis and value on his home life to cope with the unpleasantness of his impending decision. He shared: “I am looking forward to being with my wife. I think my perspective of things has changed over time. I have spent a lot of time here, thought a lot about what my values are, and how I want to be when I get back.” (Interview 3).

Even though Allan spent several days wrestling with his decision as to whether he should continue the climb or not, before making his final decision to abandon the expedition, he chose to stay and continue the climb. Acting in this manner remained consistent with his self-concept as competent, which in turn helped him lower the psychological discomfort he experienced. He shared, “I want to feel proud of myself and know that I am accomplishing the goal of proving

that anything is possible and giving hope to cancer patients.” (Interview 3). Continuing to put one foot in front of the other helped him cope with the realization that he was struggling to reach his goal of standing on the summit.

Ongoing post-decision dissonance

After fully committing to their decision to abandon the climb, all five of the climbers continued to experience psychological discomfort, which persisted one month after their return home from the mountain. When Janette arrived home after abandoning the climb she felt depressed and shared: “I should have stayed. I wish I would have stayed especially knowing now that some of my team mates reached the summit after I left.” (Interview 4). Failing to reach her goal of standing on the summit seemed to conflict with her perception of self as competent and successful, creating lasting psychological discomfort. She tried to cope with the fact that she did not reach her goal by saying:

I would have been two weeks late and that was not an acceptable option. I told my kids that I would be home by June 1st and so I did what I had to do as a mom. If I had stayed, my kids would have hated me. What is more important, an Everest summit or your kids not trusting you? Had it been any other responsibility I would have blown it off. (Interview 4).

In this way, she tried to restore her sense of self as moral and descent by convincing herself that she did the responsible thing to abandon the climb when she did.

Gordie continued to experience psychological discomfort one month after he made the decision to turn around half way up the Lhotze Face. From the comforts of his home, he shared, I am still really struggling with the psychology of not making it. I think you have been there are know what it is like and it wears on you. I have got to somehow deal with this. It has not been to accept the fact and get on with it. (Interview 4).

Failing was a new experience for him. He continued:

I keep reliving the moment when I turned back. What if I hadn't turned around and I could have done it? Of course it does not help that my compatriots did make it after I turned back. I keep on reliving that decision. What if I hadn't, could I have made it? The doubt haunts me. (Interview 4).

The fact that some of his team mates succeeded in reaching the summit added to the psychological discomfort he was experiencing. He shared:

Having found out later that Moe and Mark did make it on the 30th and then subsequently on the 2nd of June when three other of my team mates made it, I began to question my decision. On the one hand I am happy for them, but it also makes me more jealous to know that I could have. (Interview 4).

The inner conflict he experienced as a result of turning around and calling off the climb was overwhelming and he struggled greatly to come to terms with his decision. At the end of the day, he questioned whether or not he was a coward. He shared: "I still wonder, God, did I really wimp out." (Interview 4). His decision to abandon the climb likely conflicted with his sense of self as strong and courageous.

When Gordie decided to call off the climb, he believed he made the pain in his back worse in his mind than it really was. He shared: "It wasn't getting any better, maybe worse in my mind. I was making it worse anyway. So after two and a half or three hours, I can't remember exactly, I decided I couldn't do it." (Interview 4). He appeared to be using his back troubles as a way of justifying his reason for not succeeding and shared:

This is so bad that had I gotten up there I don't know if I could have dealt with it. And that helps soften it a bit for me. I mean I could have gotten up there and had a hell of a time getting back down or something. (Interview 4).

He continued: "When I get this back pain it reminds how serious it is and how painful it would have felt climbing on the Lhotze Face and that makes me feel a bit better." (Interview 4). He tried to convince himself that he made the right decision to abandon the climb by adding a new cognitive element that stayed consistent with his perception of self as intelligent. He also used the poor weather conditions to help him cope with failing. He shared:

The weather wore on everybody. I think that is why we had so many people bail early. They were just getting tired of the anxiety. Frankly, if we had a normal weather season, I think our summit day would have been on the 22nd or 23rd and I think the whole group would have made it. (Interview 4).

Sayed continued to experience psychological discomfort one month after he returned home as a result of having abandoned the climb. He shared, "Well you know shit happens. Shit always happens. I still have my ten toes and ten fingers. It is not easy climbing the mountain and then coming back to reality" (Interview 5). He added, "You know, sometimes I feel like I am a loser for not doing it" (Interview 5). Failing to reach the summit conflicted with his sense of self as capable. To cope with his discomfort while he was still on the mountain he shared "I thought to myself, okay if these people are coming down and they don't have the same health problems that I have then I made the right decision to come down as well" (Interview 4). He added: "If I had gone up there I could have killed myself. So, I made the right decision to go down." (Interview 4). In addition, he relied on his religious beliefs to help him rationalize failure and shared:

In the end I won because I was not feeling well. You can't beat a mountain this size. You can run a marathon if you have stomach problems because you know it will only last about 2 or 3 hours, but you can't beat something like this. I believe in God so much and think that whatever happens is meant to happen. If you really give your heart to God completely then things will happen for you. And I think I did not do that. (Interview 4).

The psychological discomfort that Steven experienced after he made his final decision to pack his bags and head home stemmed from a threat to his sense of self. When asked how he made sense of his actions he shared:

Sometimes you can't. I think that is a conflict because you think about your life and then think 'what the hell am I doing here?' In these conditions it did not make sense to me. If the conditions had been good and you go quickly and come back, and everything works out o.k., that's fine. But do you question your sanity? For sure." (Interview 4).

He continued to experience psychological discomfort one month after he returned home and shared: "The first two or three weeks I kept waking up in the middle of the night and thinking Jesus 'why didn't you just do it?' So, emotionally I was fairly ragged." (Interview 5). To cope with his psychological discomfort, he rationalized:

I have retreated many times on past climbs and I always stop when I know that it is not a good idea to continue climbing. And maybe that is why I have survived so long. Because I think you have to have the courage to make those decisions. (Interview 4, Line).

He also convinced himself that his decision to abandon the climb was based on the fact that he was diminished physically and the poor weather reports, which continued to predict low temperatures and high wind speeds. He shared:

I had gastro enteritis a couple of times and then finally I got bronchitis and I kept losing my voice so I was a bit concerned going from that point of view but also because of the weather. The windows of opportunity appeared to so small to me. (Interview 5).

Upon reflection Allan believed he made the wrong decision to abandon the climb. From the comforts of his home he shared, “Well, as it turned out the weather reports were wrong and I should have stayed.” (Interview 5). The consequences of his actions created inner conflict. He said:

There will always be something in the back of my head you know that is there, but I am not going back. I am too old. I am going to be 60 in October. If I were 30 I would be on the plane next year, but not at 60. (Interview 5).

The consequences of his actions conflicted with his perception of self as sensible. He took steps however to reduce the dissonance he was experiencing by thinking about what he accomplished despite not reaching the summit. He shared: “I mean you just say to yourself; is the summit that important? I have come here and done something extraordinary that 99.9% of people never do, and that should be enough.” (Interview 5). He added a new cognitive element (related to what he accomplished on the mountain) that was consonant with his perception of self as courageous and successful. He also made sense of his decision by believing that his reason for not getting to the top was out of his control. He reflected, “I think I achieved my goal because I wasn’t stopped by anything that I did or didn’t do.” (Interview 5). He also reasoned that despite not reaching the summit he was happy because he raised about \$175, 000 for his charity. He shared, “we raised an awful lot of money and it was all worthwhile because of that.” (Interview 5).

All five of the climbers experienced dissonance arousal and tried using dissonance reduction strategies to reduce or eliminate the psychological discomfort they experienced as a

result of choosing to abandon the climb. Once they arrived home, they could not change their behavior (i.e. continue climbing the mountain) to reduce their dissonance. Consequently, they engaged in other dissonance reduction strategies to try and help them cope with the unpleasantness of their situation. For instance, many of the climbers reconstructed the past in a way that restored their pre-formed notion of self.

Interestingly, four out of the five climbers who did not succeed in reaching the summit considered returning to the mountain for a second attempt at climbing to the top. It is likely that focusing on the possibility of reaching their ultimate goal helped them diminish the psychological discomfort they experienced as a result of not being successful. Janette shared: “I really miss Everest and can't wait to go back. That mountain for whatever reason won't leave me alone.” (Interview 4). Gordie said:

At the time there was no way I thought I would ever try it again. I don't have the money to do it again but maybe I can get sponsors. I don't know, I really think I can make it. I have the confidence that I have the physical ability and mental part to do it. (Interview 4).

Sayed shared: “I am sure that I definitely need to go back and do it. I need to. I am going next year.” (Interview 5). When Steven was on the mountain he made a promise to himself that he would never go back to Nepal to try and climb the mountain again. Yet, he believed he could have made it to the top and once he returned home he began considering climbing the mountain a second time. He shared: “In fact, I will probably think about going back. I am going to wait a year and probably do it again in 2007” (Interview 5).

The following section will discuss the findings from an ethnomethodological perspective.

DISCUSSION

As evident in the findings section of this doctoral dissertation, the frameworks upon which this study was founded afforded a deep understanding of how cognitive dissonance was experienced in the minds of the Mount Everest climbers involved in the present study. Aronson's (1968/1992) self-consistency perspective and the Resonance Performance Model (Newburg, et al., 2002) were kept in the foreground of the investigation, with the climbers' narratives of experience situated in ethnomethodological landscapes. Using the ethnomethodological worldview, which enabled the researcher to climb on the mountain with the participants to chart their lived experiences with dissonance, arguably provided a unique window into the cognitive dissonance phenomenon and the culture of high altitude mountaineering. Consequently, the discussion chapter focuses on an interpretation of the findings through the lens of the ethnomethodological worldview, which emerged in relation to the grand tour research question: "How do Mount Everest climbers experience cognitive dissonance?" Four of the principal ideas that characterize the ethnomethodological tradition were selected for discussion: (a) the documentary method; (b) reflexivity; (c) indexicality and (d) membership. The following section discusses the findings from the perspective of the ethnomethodological school of thought and concludes with a brief discussion of the limitations of the present study.

Cognitive Dissonance from an Ethnomethodological Perspective

The findings in this study provide support for the interpretive philosophical assumption, which denies the existence of an external reality and embraces the idea that knowledge and meaning are an act of interpretation; hence there is no objective knowledge that is independent of thinking, reasoning humans (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The social reality of the climbers who were involved in the present study was likely an act of interpretation. Through their experiences with cognitive dissonance, which were defined by an ongoing reconstruction of meaning, they produced a sense of order within the everyday world of high altitude mountaineering. The

present study lends support for Aronson's self-consistency revision of Festinger's (1957) original theory of cognitive dissonance and fills in an important gap in the literature by showing how dissonance was aroused in the minds of the climbers and the manner in which they reduced their psychological discomfort from an ethnomethodological perspective.

To date, much of the research on dissonance has focused on the precise understanding of the conditions under which cognitive dissonance is likely to occur (Aronson, 1968; Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962; Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Nel, Helmreich, & Aronson, 1969; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). There is little or no empirical research demonstrating how the processes underlying the cognitive dissonance phenomenon are experienced in the minds of people who go about their day-to-day activities from an ethnomethodological perspective. Perhaps one of the reasons why dissonance theory has primarily focused on the outcome, that is, being in a state of psychological discomfort or not, is because of the limited nature of the methodological tools that have been used to test dissonance assumptions (Devine, et al., 1999). Tools that have been used to measure attitude change or other effective dissonance reduction strategies may not be able to provide this type of evidence because such measures may be ineffective in exploring dissonance-related processes (Devine et al., 1999). In the present study, a qualitative methodology provided the flexibility and freedom to explore how Mount Everest climbers experienced cognitive dissonance both on and off the mountain. Specifically, an ethnomethodological narrative case study approach afforded a unique way of understanding the processes underlying the dissonance phenomenon. This section will discuss the findings from the standpoint of four ethnomethodological concepts. It will begin with a discussion surrounding the documentary method of interpretation, followed by reflexivity. The concepts of indexicality and membership will thereafter be presented.

The Documentary Method

As previously mentioned in the methodology section of this paper, the documentary method of interpretation is a method that we use in our daily lives to reconstruct a social reality and make sense of or bring order to the world around us. The concept is defined by Garfinkel (1967) in the following way: “The method consists of treating an actual appearance as ‘the document of,’ as ‘pointing to,’ as ‘standing on behalf of’ a presupposed underlying pattern. Not only is the underlying pattern derived from its individual documentary evidences, but the individual documentary evidences, in their turn, are interpreted on the basis of ‘what is known’ about the underlying pattern” (p.78). The findings that emerged in the present study are consistent with this view point. Reducing cognitive dissonance was a pattern of everyday behaviour that climbers experienced for making sense of and coping with the variety of situations they regularly encountered both on and off the mountain. More precisely, any time the climbers’ actions threatened their self-concept they experienced psychological discomfort and attempted to reduce their dissonance through a process of self-justification, which involved reconstructing the past in a way that restored their self-concept. In this instance, it is likely that self-discrepant acts or self-discrepant information (that lead to inconsistent cognitions related to the self-concept) are the guiding phenomenon underlying the pattern of self-justification that climbers use to bring order to their world. This finding is consistent with Aronson’s (1968, 1992) revision of Festinger’s (1957) original dissonance theory, which states that at the very core of dissonance theory is a person’s self-concept, and discounts alternative dissonance perspectives (Beauvois & Joule, 1996; Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Festinger, 1957; Steele, 1988).

Reducing Cognitive Dissonance

Garfinkel (1967) argues that from the point of view of any actor, society is encountered as an external, given, pre-formed reality because the world is full of routine ways and familiar scenes that provide people with a *sense* that there is a ‘real’ reality out there. The documentary method of interpretation is the method that allows people to construct believable, acceptable, and

defendable accounts of what social life 'really' is (Have, 2004). It is often used by people to make sense of other people. The findings in the present study lend support to the suggestion that the method of documentary interpretation is used by people to create a reality that appears normal, natural, real, and feels good to them. That is, reducing cognitive dissonance was an everyday occurrence that the climbers experienced to allow them to reconstruct a relatively positive and consistent self view. According to Aronson (1968, 1992), people want to see themselves as competent, moral, and able to predict their own behaviour – standards that they hold for their own behaviour, which are based on the conventional morals and prevailing values of society. The findings of the present study suggest that the climbers not only reduced their psychological discomfort to align their sense of self in accordance with the most fundamental and important of collective values, but also subscribed to a sub-culture of their own. That is, most of the climbers took steps to see themselves not only as competent, moral, and able to predict their own behaviour, but also as strong, courageous, and disciplined – principles that characterize the activity of high altitude mountaineering.

The internalized self-view of the climbers arguably led to the experience of a distinctive reality that they strived to uphold especially when behaviour was in violation of their self-concept. For instance, in Janette's case, deliberately spending a large amount of money to climb the mountain and suffer made her feel like an idiot – a feeling that did not correspond to her self-concept. Consequently, she highlighted the joyous feelings she derived from the act of climbing in an attempt to re-establish her self-concept as intelligent. This finding falls directly in line with the suggestion that cognitions about the self serve as standards or expectancies in the dissonance process, acting as guideposts for evaluating the meaning and significance of behaviour (Aronson, 1968; Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962; Duval & Wicklund, 1972). Whether climbers' perception of

self is 'accurate' or 'inaccurate,' by some other standard, is not the point. The key is that self-concept defines reality in the sense that climbers act on the basis of what they believe is accountable in the situation of their action. Thus, it is likely that when behaviour is interpreted as self-discrepant, climbers are motivated to restore the threatened element of their self-concept so as to not only reduce or eliminate their psychological discomfort but also experience a *sense* of a stable reality.

The findings in the present study show that when the climbers engaged in a self-discrepant act, they tried to restore cognitive consistency by engaging in a process of self-justification. Specifically, the climbers attempted to reduce their psychological discomfort to achieve a sense of self that appeared normal and felt good to them by reconstructing their understanding of a self-discrepant act, and they did so in one of four ways: (a) Changing a behavioural cognitive element. For instance, at one point during the expedition, to help him cope with thoughts of failure, Gordie positioned himself at Camp 2 for the summit push even though he had already decided to abandon the climb; (b) Reducing the importance of the dissonant belief. For instance, to help her cope with the disappointment of not reaching the summit, Janette claimed that mountaineering was no longer as important in her life as it used to be; (c) Removing the dissonant belief. For instance, to cope with the realization that he had limited climbing experience, Sayeed dissolved himself of taking responsibility for his actions by giving over to his religious beliefs and deferring completely to the advice of his guides and; (d) Adding a new cognitive element. For instance, Allan focused on the good work and money he raised for his charity to help him cope with the fact that he did not reach his goal of standing on the summit.

The above mentioned ways in which the climbers tried to reduce or eliminate existing dissonance occurred because they wanted to not only restore the threatened element of their self-

concept but also make sense of their behaviour. For instance, as most of the climbers exerted tremendous levels of physical, psychological, and emotional effort, they began exaggerating the desirability of reaching the summit to justify the effort. Interpreting their behaviour in this way may have helped them to not only restore their self-concept as rational and intelligent people but also make sense of their actions. This finding lends support to Handel's (1982) suggestion that people engage in the documentary method of interpretation by "searching for an identical homologous pattern underlying a vast variety of totally different realizations of meaning" (p.57). In this instance, reconstructing their understanding of a self-discrepant act in a way that restored the climbers' self-concept was the pattern used for bringing order to their world. Self-concept therefore characterizes climbers' direction of attention. The following section will discuss the role of feelings in dissonance processes.

The role of feelings. The findings in the present study suggest that the climbers tried to make sense of self-discrepant acts through dissonance reduction strategies so they could experience both cognitive and affective self-consistency. That is, the climbers were motivated to reconstruct the past in such a way so as to not only understand but also feel a certain way about themselves. For instance, after making the final decision to call off the climb, Sayeed downplayed the importance of climbing the mountain to help him not only regain an understanding of his self as winner but also feel like a winner again. That is, the climbers in the present study appeared to be motivated to regain pleasant self-feelings associated with either kinesthetic sensations (i.e., feel strong) or cognitive impressions (i.e., feel competent, feel courageous) when they experienced a threat to an important element of their self-concept. In effect, they were motivated to feel a sense of "congruency" *within* their 'self.' This finding lends support to the suggestion that self-concept is "a system of affective-cognitive structures...about

the self that lends structure and coherence to the individual's self-relevant experiences" (Markus and Nurius, 1986, p. 955). According to Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976), whereas a cognitive facet of self-concept consists of awareness and understandings of the self and its attributes (Shavelson et al., 1976), an affective facet of self-concept encompasses one's feelings of self-worth (Covington, 1984) and refers to approval or disapproval of the self in any given situation (Bong & Clark, 1999).

It appears that the method used by climbers to construct believable, acceptable, and defensible accounts of 'reality' is driven by a need to experience not only cognitive self-consistency but also consistent self-directed feelings. This finding lends support to the RPM (Newburg, et al. 2002). As previously mentioned in the conceptual framework section of this study, the RPM suggests that performers want to feel a certain way when they engage in their particular activity. They have established preparation strategies that allow them to feel the way they want to feel as consistently as possible and are aware of potential obstacles that might prevent them from experiencing their sought out feelings. They have also formulated strategies that they rely on to help them reconnect with desired feelings when they are lost. In the present study, reconstructing one's understanding of a situation lends support to the 'revisit how you want to feel' component of the RPM. When the climbers in the present study experienced psychological discomfort, their typical response was to reduce or get rid of it by reconstructing their reality to try and restore consistent self-directed feelings. Thus, justifying a self-discrepant behaviour is likely a 'revisiting strategy' that climbers use to replace adverse dissonance-aroused feelings with more desired ones that mirror one's pre-formed notion of self. More research should be conducted using the RPM combined with Aronson's self-consistency perspective with performers to explore how they reconnect with desired feelings when they are lost.

In the present study, it seemed that self-discrepant acts were obstacles that prevented the climbers from feeling the way they wanted. According to Newburg et al (2002), the obstacle component of the RPM represents setbacks or difficulties that people experience in their daily life that prevent them from experiencing how they want to feel. The psychological discomfort that the climbers experienced when they acted in a way that violated an important element of their self-concept was likely a specific adverse self-relevant feeling, that is, a feeling of psychological discomfort specific to an important element of one's self-concept. For instance, some of the climbers talked about feeling like an idiot, feeling childish, or feeling like a loser. Elliot and Devine (1994) define the psychological discomfort component of dissonance as elevated feelings of general discomfort (i.e., uncomfortable, uneasy, or bothered). The findings in the present study support the suggestion that psychological discomfort is a feeling of general discomfort but also fall in line with Aronson's (1992) suggestion that dissonance leads to specific feelings of psychological discomfort (i.e., feel guilty) directed toward the self and not just a general sense of being in discomfort. According to Devine, et al., (1999), most research investigating the cognitive dissonance phenomenon *assumes* that the tension created is psychologically distressing. Very few studies have set out to explore the exact nature of psychological discomfort.

Clearly, feelings played an important role in the climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance. Very few of the dissonance perspectives (Beauvois & Joule, 1996; Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Festinger, 1957; Steele, 1988), including Aronson's (1968, 1992) version of self-consistency, discuss the affective processes that appear to be involved in peoples' experiences with cognitive dissonance. Seeing that self-concept includes both cognitive and affective responses toward the self (Pajares, 1996; Ruble, Parsons, & Ross, 1976; Scheirer & Kraut, 1979;

Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976), more research should be carried out using Aronson's dissonance perspective to explore the affective experience involved in the dissonance phenomenon.

The role of behaviours. It is possible that while climbers perform in the difficult and demanding environment of high altitude climbing, they need to orient their 'selves' in the setting by continually reconstructing their understanding of a situation to mirror their self-concept because their behaviours are governed by the methods they use to make sense of a situation. This finding does not fully support the suggestion that people's perceptions of themselves are thought to influence the ways in which they act, and their acts in turn influence the ways in which they perceive themselves (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). Rather, it appears that how climbers reconstruct their understanding of a situation mediates behaviour and behaviour in turn mediates how climbers reconstruct their understanding of a situation. It is important to note, dimensions of time and space may contribute to this dynamic interplay. That is, the experience of time and entry into a different space may be integral components involved in the reconstruction of reality and mediated behaviour. For instance, three out of the five climbers who failed to reach the summit swore to themselves, as they were leaving Base Camp, that they would never again return to the mountain to climb. One month after returning home, however, after the climbers reconstructed their understanding of the situation surrounding their decision to abandon the climb they had convinced themselves that they possessed the necessary physical, technical, and psychological skills to complete the task. Consequently, they changed their minds and began positioning themselves to go back to the mountain for a second attempt. In effect, their decision to return to the mountain was mediated by the way they interpreted the situation in which they found themselves from the beginning. In this instance, reconstructing a sense of competency was

not the only thing that allowed them to reconsider risking their lives, money, and effort to climb the mountain another time. The amount of time that had passed between the moment they experienced a threat to their self-concept and their arrival home may also have contributed to their reconstructed reality.

The findings in the present study show that behavior and feelings as well as the process of self-justification are inextricably linked to one another. As previously stated, competence was an important element of the self-concept that the climbers internalized. Competence is defined by Harter (1985) in the following way: "it is that part of the self-concept that contains both the perception and evaluation of the person's own competences in different fields" (p.8). As the climbers reconstructed their understanding of self-discrepant acts, they tried to uphold their self-concept as competent. For instance, before Gordie fully committed to abandoning the climb, he convinced himself that he was strong enough to carry on and thus decided to continue the climb in his attempt to restore his self-concept as competent. In particular, he likely continued the ascent toward the top of the mountain as a way of trying to reduce his feelings of psychological discomfort, which resulted from the realization that he was not going to reach his goal of standing on the summit. It is possible that his behavior of continuing to climb toward the top was mediated by the manner in which he interpreted his predicament.

According to Reeve (2004), individuals attempt to create social environments that feedback self-confirmatory information. A process called 'selective interaction' has been widely used to explain this phenomenon (Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 1992; Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989). For these authors, 'selective interaction' occurs when individuals deliberately choose to interact with others who confirm their self-view and deliberately avoid others who treat them in ways that are inconsistent with their self-view. Perhaps climbers intentionally act in ways in their social environment that allow them to engage in a process of congruent self-reconstruction and intentionally avoid acting in ways or situations that make it harder to be congruent with their self-concept in this process. In this way, climbers' self-concept is an ongoing reconstruction of

meaning created by their actions, thoughts, and feelings. It is widely known that climbers actively seek a high level of physical risk for personal purposes. Climbers may intentionally engage in the activity of high altitude mountaineering and take risks while climbing on the mountain to help them reconstruct a particular threatened element of their self-concept. This interpretation of the findings may help explain why people climb mountains.

It is possible that when climbers experience a threat to their perceived sense of competence, they need to restore this element of their self-concept by reconstructing their understanding of a situation to remain motivated and overcome the daily challenges they face in the difficult and demanding environment. For instance, at one point during the expedition, Gordie began struggling with the effects of high altitude to the point that he refused to eat and drink. Consequently, during moments of absolute fatigue he began doubting whether or not he was capable of reaching the summit. To cope with thoughts of potential failure, he reconstructed his understanding of the situation to restore his self-concept as capable by highlighting that he was performing as well as any other member on his team, even at his advanced age. This finding is consistent with Harter's (1978) competence motivation theory, which states that people's desires to put forth effort, to seek challenges, and to persist even in the face of unsuccessful outcomes occurs only when they believe they have the "requisite competence and situational control to obtain desired outcomes" (Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001, p. 605).

Due to the high risk nature of high altitude mountaineering, it is likely that, above all else, climbers need to feel like they are interacting effectively with the environment in order to persist in the face of adversity. These findings lend support to Tenenbaum's (2001) suggestion that the greater an individuals' perceived competence in a specific task or activity, the better the ability to cope with its physical demands. In the present study, compared to the five climbers who made the decision to abandon the climb, the climber who reached the summit rarely experienced dissonance in relation to his perceived sense of competence throughout the duration

of the expedition. It is likely that compared to the other climbers, Nate's self-assurance with respect to his sense of competence within the environment was high and therefore he never felt threatened to the point that he needed to reconstruct his understanding of a situation to restore his self-concept. This finding supports Swann and Ely's (1984) finding that when a person's self-concept certainty is high, their self-schema - cognitive generalizations about the self that are domain specific - tends to be deep-rooted and stable. As previously mentioned in this dissertation, the term 'self-concept certainty' has been used to describe a person's confidence in his or her self-schema (Swann & Ely, 1984). It is likely that Nate was successful in coping with the demands of the environment due to his unwavering belief in his ability to complete the task.

Behaviors that violate a climber's self-concept seem to point to the presupposed underlying pattern that is used to make sense of a senseless encounter in the cognitive dissonance process. That is, self-discrepant acts lead climbers to experience feelings of psychological discomfort and, for that reason, they engage in a process of reconstructing their understanding of the situation in their attempt to restore cognitive and affective self-consistency. In the present study, it is likely that the climbers who failed to reach the summit did not have the necessary confidence or perceived competence to master the climb, likely attenuating their motivation toward mastery. Failing to continue the climb toward the summit, due, in part, to their lack of confidence, likely conflicted with their sense of self as courageous, strong, and able. Consequently, when the climbers experienced psychological discomfort they tried to implement dissonance reduction strategies to restore their sense of self as competent and make sense of their behavior and feel competent again. For example, rather than admitting that they may not have had the necessary physical and mental skills to complete the task, which would likely have led them to feel incompetent and weak, some of the climbers convinced themselves that the poor weather conditions were the reason why they failed to reach the summit. On the contrary, Nate's knowledge of and belief in his ability to complete the climb likely fueled continued motivation

reaffirming his self-concept as competent. Consequently, he did not experience dissonance to the same level as the other participants.

The climbers who did not succeed in reaching the summit likely interpreted certain acts as self-discrepant – acts that Nate interpreted in a different way. For instance, in Janette and Gordie's cases, the wear and tear on their bodies and minds, due to the effects of high altitude, was interpreted as a threat to their self-concept; that is, they both doubted their ability to climb the mountain. It is likely that over time the continued threats to their self-concept eventually led them to make their final decision to call off the climb. The climbers may have entered the climb believing, with assurance, that they could complete the task. In this instance, however, because their sense of perceived competence may not have been secure they continued to experience psychological discomfort, unable to restore their self-concept as competent. According to Swann (1983, 1999), when people's self-concept certainty is moderate, discrepant feedback can instigate a 'crisis self-verification' whereby the person seeks out additional self-relevant feedback. If the additional feedback is discrepant, Swann argues that the self-view does not change but instead self-concept certainty is lowered, which in turn can make the person vulnerable to self-concept change in the future. If, however, the additional feedback is self-confirmatory, the self-verification crisis concludes by strengthening self-concept certainty. The findings of the present study suggest that the climbers may have searched for additional self-relevant feedback in the environment that could help them restore the threatened element of their self-concept. This feedback, however, may not have been self-confirmatory consequently they continued to experience feelings of psychological discomfort lowering their confidence in their perceived sense of competence.

One month after the climbers (who did not reach the summit) returned home from Nepal they continued to experience psychological discomfort. In effect, the methods they used on and off the mountain to try to reduce their dissonance did not seem to allow them to properly restore the threatened element(s) of their self-concept. Ironically, however, they considered going back

to the mountain to try again. This finding is consistent with Festinger's (1957) suggestion that cognitive elements may be resistant to change creating lasting dissonance. He believes the primary sources causing the resistance of change include: (a) the change may be painful or involve loss; (b) the present behavior may be otherwise satisfying and (c) making the change may simply not be possible. In the case of the five climbers, who made the decision to abandon the climb, the extent of the threat to their self-concept was likely very high. It is possible that their sense of validation was tied to the pursuit. In addition, the climbers not only spent a significant amount of money and time training to climb the mountain, but they also endured a tremendous amount of physical, emotional, and psychological hardship positioning themselves for the summit push. Calling off the climb entailed enduring the discomforts of financial loss, unpleasant efforts expended without the desired return, and failure to meet their and others' expectations.

The climbers could not change their behavior and continue climbing the mountain to lower their dissonance and so were left to deal with the consequences of their decision in other ways. Interestingly, once they returned home, they were able to reconstruct their understanding of the situation to the point that they convinced themselves they were capable of getting to the top and they actually began seriously contemplating returning the mountain to climb the following year. However, their experiences with psychological discomfort continued to prevail. In this instance, it is likely that in order for them to effectively reduce or eliminate their psychological discomfort, they will need to return to the mountain and successfully climb to the top.

Reflexivity

As previously discussed in the methodology section of this paper, ethnomethodologists argue that all 'accounts' about society and its workings are reflexive. The concept of reflexivity refers to the ways in which our interpretations of social realities simultaneously describe and constitute the realities (Garfinkel, 1967). Garfinkel's (1967) notion of reflexivity is defined by

Handel as: “all accounts have a reflexive relationship with themselves and take some action upon themselves, regardless of their content and regardless of the medium in which the account is expressed and regardless of their grammatical structure, if any” (Handel, 1982, p.35). Arguably, the findings in the present study reflect this view. How the climbers’ interpreted their experiences climbing on the mountain simultaneously explain and comprise those experiences.

To arrive at a certain ‘account’ of a situation that not only appeared to them as normal, natural, and real but also felt good to them, most of the climbers in the present study seemed to have engaged in a process that involved reconstructing the past. Garfinkel’s (1967) example of retrospective interpretation in jurors, described below, not only mirrors the interpretive processes that the climbers in the present study experienced to try and restore cognitive and affective self-consistency, but also can be used to highlight the methods likely involved in cognitive dissonance processes:

Jurors commonly provide retrospective justifications for decisions which they have already made. They look backward in producing a quasi-legal rereading of the available evidence after having already decided upon a person’s guilt or innocence...They reorder their understanding so as to suggest that ‘fair deliberations’ were guided by the same logic from the beginning – logic which was, in fact, after the fact. (Pfohl, 1985, p.295)

Several of the climbers in the present study seemed to have provided retrospective self-justifications for actions or decisions they had already taken to try and help them reduce or eliminate the threats to their self-concept. For instance, after calling off the climb, all five of the climbers tried reconstructing the past in such a way that their decision no longer conflicted with their self-concept. That is, they tried to reorder their understanding of events leading to their final decision so as to convince themselves that ‘calling off’ the climb was guided by the same

judgment from the beginning. For example, Steven convinced himself, one month after he abandoned the climb, that he had made a sensible decision by giving greater emphasis to the declining condition of the icefall, his difficulty with his breathing, his concern that the Sherpas were accurate in their belief that the mountain was angry, and the issues that caused the dynamic within his team to breakdown – judgements which were not, in fact, emphasized before making his decision while he was on the mountain. In effect, Steven tried reconstructing the past so as to convince himself that he made the right decision. This method or process for making sense of his actions not only existed simply in relation to his prior understanding of the situation but also explains and constitutes his perception of reality.

The climbers' experiences providing retrospective self-justifications, which seem to involve a temporal dimension, lend support to the manner in which the high altitude climbers in their autobiographical accounts (Boukreev & DeWalt, 1997; Gammelgaard, 1999; Krakauer, 1997; Norgay & Coburn, 2001; Pfetzer & Galvin, 1998; Weathers, 2000) appeared to have described how they reduced their psychological discomfort after experiencing a threat to their self-concept. This method or process of reconstructing the past through retrospective self-justifications, which appears to be important in restoring a sense of a congruent self, simultaneously describes and constitutes the climbers experiences with self-consistency. That is, how the climbers experienced cognitive dissonance was a reflexive process.

It is important to point out that the climbers in the present study were not necessarily aware of both their motivations and the reasons for their actions when they took steps to reduce their psychological discomfort. That is, it is unlikely that the climbers engaged in a conscious process of reflection on their behaviours when they experienced a threat to their self-concept. They likely arrived at an interpretation of a dissonant-related situation without reflective query

into their own conduct, using feelings as a predominant sign that something was not congruent. Exceptions to this unconscious process may be when the primary researcher specifically enquired (i.e., asked challenging questions) about a self-discrepant act or their actions were so disruptive that reducing their psychological discomfort became near impossible. For instance, both Gordie and Steven struggled greatly to accept the realization that they did not reach the summit, to the point that one-month after the expedition they continued to experience tremendous levels of psychological discomfort – reliving their decision over and over again in their minds. Subsequently they deliberately began carrying out a reflexive introspective inquiry into their own conduct. They analyzed their reasons for making their final decision, aware on some level that they were justifying their behaviour. Their reflexive interpretations of their actions and the actions of others were based on the routine patterns they used to structure their world (Garfinkel, 1967). Generally speaking, however, the climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance were a form of day-to-day social occurrences devoid of any prolonged conscious attention.

The findings in the present study are re-descriptions of the climbers' everyday interpretations of cognitive dissonance – accounts that were created during the process of interaction between researcher and participants. The primary researcher partook in the everyday social world of climbing on Everest in order to grasp the socially constructed meanings of the climbers' experiences and then reconstructed these meanings into a social scientific language. Thus, the primary researcher's scientific interpretation of the climbers' experiences with dissonance is reflexive. The ways in which the researcher interpreted the stories based on her values, experiences, self-concept, and beliefs simultaneously explain and constitute the findings of the present study. The climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance, therefore, only

existed in relation to the interpretive meanings that the primary researcher beheld. In other words, the climbers' narratives of the dissonance phenomenon were created by the ways in which the primary researcher constructed and expressed her understanding of the phenomenon. Not just that, but the moment in time in which this study was conducted is reflected in the research. The following section will discuss the notion of indexicality and describe how it is an integral component in the climber's experiences with cognitive dissonance.

Indexicality

The ethnomethodological school of thought argues that 'orderliness' or structure be looked at as arising from within activities themselves due to the work done by parties to that activity (Benson & Hughes, 1983). Garfinkel (1967) dismisses the traditional sociological strategy that seeks to explain social order by attempting to identify conditions and causes outside of the activities themselves. He argues, rather, that reality is constructed through the social settings in which it occurs. The findings of the present study appear to support this claim. The climbers incorporated their personal backgrounds, interactions with others, and the contingent elements of the situation to make sense of their actions. For instance, to help her make sense of her failure to reach the summit, Janette highlighted the fact that she was in an environment where she had never been. Reminding herself of her limited experience climbing Everest helped her reduce her psychological discomfort. In Allan's case, he attributed not reaching the summit to the poor weather reports unique to the Spring 2005 season on Everest. He shared:

If I felt it was a failure on my part then I would have had a tough time with it. But all you can do is analyze the data you have at the time and make the best decision. Barry, Steven, and I analyzed everything (Interview 5).

The self-justification given by Allan made sense to him based on the information made available to him in the moment. The climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance were characterized by not only the individualistic elements of their self-concept (Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992), location, and people involved in the climb, but also the point in time in which their psychological discomfort occurred. Clearly, this finding suggests that cognitive dissonance is a subjective experience deeply entwined with the setting in which it occurs.

The findings in the present study suggest that climbers reduce their psychological discomfort through a process of contextual (or indexical) interpretation of a situation. That is, rather than suggesting that context has a cause and effect relationship with how people make sense of their actions, this study shows that reality is constructed through the setting in which it occurs. The language used by the climbers to reduce their psychological discomfort supports this claim. The climbers seemed to have shaped the words they used to the situation at hand, and used the situation at hand to, in turn, understand the meaning of words. For instance, at one point during the expedition Janette shared: "You are going to have to pay somehow. The physical discomfort, the money spent, and time away from family are some examples. It can't be easy because if it were everybody would do it." (Interview 2). The words used by Janette 'fit' the situation she was in and display a certain understanding of what is happening in the moment – to achieve something exceptional Janette convinced herself that sacrifice was unavoidable. Furthermore, Janette likely tailored her talk to take into consideration the person to whom she was speaking in the circumstances in which they were being spoken with. The above mentioned quote was spoken to the researcher at Camp 2. Thus, her words likely reflected the fact that, like her, the researcher is also a climber who is enduring a great deal of discomfort while attempting to reach the summit.

The sense and meaning not only of indexical expressions like ‘these,’ ‘those,’ or ‘they,’ but of all expression and action is for the most part vague (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Barnes & Law, 1976). The findings in the present study support this view point. Without knowing the particulars of the environment in which the climbers were performing, the quotes given by them are ambiguous. Take, for example, the words of Janette:

I am disappointed in myself. I expected to be so much stronger. But I feel completely drained all the time and I struggle with my breathing. I often feel like I am drowning. I have always been strong in the past so I am not used to feeling this way. (Interview 2).

A person who is not familiar with the activity of high altitude mountaineering may be at a loss to comprehend the meaning of this expression. Conversely, however, high altitude climbers (who know what it feels like to perform in an environment with a lack of oxygen) would have no trouble knowing exactly what ‘this’ refers to. This finding suggests that language and reasoning are indexical in the sense of being meaningfully rooted in lived local context. Research exploring the words people use in their experiences with cognitive dissonance is sparse. Further research should be carried out to explore the role of language in dissonance processes; that is, how is language being used by people in the context of an unwanted behaviour.

The findings in the present study confirm Stone’s (1999) suggestion that the role of the self in dissonance is a function of the context. He believes that something in the context needs to draw attention to the self for the reduction of dissonance to occur; that is, cognitive dissonance likely “depends on the information made accessible in the context of an unwanted behavior” (p.197). In this study, the cognitive dissonance experienced by the climbers were inextricably linked to the setting in which it occurred. Through language-in-use, the climbers experienced psychological discomfort and attempted to reduce their dissonance, after engaging in a self-

discrepant act. In this way, the climbers' self-expectancies were used to determine the psychological meaning of their behaviour. The Mount Everest culture made salient the relevance of a self-discrepant or unwanted behaviour to self-evaluation (Stone, 1999). With that said, if the role of the self in dissonance is mediated by the setting in which a self-discrepant act takes place, further research should be conducted to explore how climbers are thinking about what they have done.

Thus, to investigate the cognitive dissonance phenomenon we cannot step outside the setting in which language occurs. That is, climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance are produced by when, where, and with whom on the mountain they think about themselves in the framework of having experienced a discrepant act. Very little research using dissonance theory to explore the setting as part of dissonance related processes has been conducted.

Membership

The activity of climbing Mount Everest is performed with reference to others or in an environment that involves and is made possible by other people. For instance, the findings in the present study show that, for the most part, the expedition leader played an integral role in making decisions and the Sherpa climbers executed most of the day-to-day tasks. Without the expert assistance of the aforementioned people, many of the participants involved in the present study may not have attempted to climb the mountain. Albeit most people consider scaling the world's tallest mountain to be primarily carried out by a single individual, what is done, and how it is done is shaped by the fact that the activity is part of a shared social life. According to Francis and Hester (2004), activities carried out alone "are informed by our membership of society and our social relationships with others" (p. 2). Climbers, as members of the Mount Everest culture, are able to identify and describe the host of activities that characterize the pursuit. Not only this, but

climbers have learned how to do things – from pitching a tent to lead climbing – through dealings with other people. Furthermore, other members of society are able to recognize the activity of climbing Mount Everest as the activity itself. In effect, climbing Everest is socially organized and socially sanctioned. It is made achievable by the interactional nature of our social lives.

The concept of member(s) is used in ethnomethodological studies to refer to the competencies involved in being a bona-fide member of a collective (Have, 2004). The term is not used to refer to a ‘person’ or ‘individual.’ It refers instead to capacities or competencies that people have as members of a particular society; “capacities to speak, to know, to understand, to act in ways that are sensible in that society and in the situation in which they find themselves” (Have, 2004, p. 8). According to Garfinkel and Sacks (1970), through mastery of common language, members engage in the production of everyday sense making activities as observable and reportable phenomena. In the present study, the participants and the primary researcher were both members of the culture of high altitude mountaineering, and Mount Everest in particular. That is, we belonged to a subculture or life of our own that was meaningful and normal to us. The language that we used to communicate with one another is not only reflective of this suggestion, but the interpretations of our day-to-day behaviours also suggested that we were members of the culture of high altitude mountaineering. For instance, the act of enduring tremendous levels of physical and psychological distress for extended periods of time while climbing on the mountain was considered routine and ordinary to us. In addition, risking our lives as we made our way up and down the mountain was considered a natural and normal part of the activity. Interestingly, our experiences with cognitive dissonance likely helped us develop the shared knowledge that characterizes the culture of the activity.

Climbing on the mountain with the participants throughout the duration of the expedition and submitting oneself in the company of the members to the daily challenges and struggles to which they were subject, allowed the primary researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of how they ordered their sense making activities of daily life. In particular, how the climbers arrived at an interpretation of their day-to-day activities that appeared normal, natural, real and felt good to them was observed and reported through language. The findings of the present study reveal that the climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance provided opportunities to interpret and produce a shared understanding of daily life. Specifically, reconstructing their understanding of situations so that their self-concept mirrored the conventional morals and prevailing values of the culture of high altitude mountaineering to which they belonged helped create a collective understanding and sharing of that culture and its norms. For instance, the climbers appeared to have socially organized risk-taking behaviour and prolonged physical discomfort as a commonplace activity by convincing themselves, through talking to and with others, that climbing the mountain was a valuable and meaningful experience. Sayeed's comment to me reflects this point:

I really want to do it. I want to do it because I am here and I have been here for a long time enduring so much shit. That is why I want to do it. It must be a massive teacher for anybody who gets to the top and suffers that much to get to that point (Interview 3).

In this instance, through language, taking risks and enduring discomfort was routinely manifested in climbers' interpretation of reality. This finding supports Francis and Hester's (2004) suggestion that "it is in and through language that most of the actions we perform are done" (p. 8).

Using language to reconstruct reality via the cognitive dissonance method of interpretation was the window that allowed the primary researcher to observe and describe the ongoing interpretational processes of cognitive dissonance that sustained knowledge as shared knowledge among members throughout the inquiry. As members of the Mount Everest culture, language was used to reconstruct their understanding of a situation based on the collective values of the culture of high altitude mountaineering and White climbers in particular. This process in turn allowed the members to feel congruent with their environment and sustain social life. The conventional morals and prevailing values of the culture of high altitude mountaineering, and White climbers in particular are a negotiated reality, and through its negotiations members produce a sense of an orderly and shared world (Garfinkel, 1967). That is, the language that the climbers used to interpret their behaviours allowed them to produce ongoing stories of specific individuals engaged in specific activities within the context of particular situations. For instance, after swearing at his expedition leader on the summit, Nate reconstructed the past to no longer feel like he acted childishly by focusing on the perceived irresponsible conduct of his leader. Interpreting the situation in this manner allowed him to reconstruct a sense that his expedition leader's actions were 'outside' the norm of acceptable behaviour from the onset, thus producing a shared understanding of the reality of acceptable behaviour. This finding supports Francis and Hester's (2004) suggestion that people achieve interpersonal understanding through language.

The process of continually negotiating the boundaries of normative behaviour through experiences with cognitive dissonance helps explain how the conventional morals and prevailing values of the world of high altitude mountaineering emerge. The findings in the present study suggest that to make sense of situations in which self-discrepant acts have taken place, members of the culture of high altitude mountaineering share a process for interpreting their dissonant

world, which is based on the negotiated morals and values of the culture of high altitude mountaineering. That is, climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance are created by their social relationship with the membership involved in climbing. In effect, social reality is a feature of the socially organized world in which it is constructed. It is not some 'thing' that is separate from social interactions; rather, it is those socially reconstructed interpretations that make it real (Garfinkel, 1967).

Limitations

Any discussion of the findings in this study would be incomplete without considering the limitations of this doctoral dissertation. Consequently, this section will briefly highlight some of the restrictions of the present study.

Climbing on the mountain with the participants allowed the researcher to document each cultural member's lived experiences with cognitive dissonance 'in situ.' By placing the life of the research on the mountain in order to try and reach the same goal as the participants, similar cultural experiences were shared. That is, belonging to the Mount Everest culture and taking part in every aspect of the present climb, brought the researcher extremely close to the participants and their experiences with cognitive dissonance. This relationship based on shared experience fostered trust and an ability to access deeper levels of meaning pertinent to the challenges they faced climbing the mountain. However, according to Francis and Hester (2004), "viewing social life from within...leads the ethnomethodologist to become lost in the detail and provides no means by which to put that detail into perspective" (p. 209).

Although the researcher was viewing social life from 'within,' and was intimately intertwined with the participants' struggles, frustrations, and hardships of climbing the mountain, there were moments when she had to know when to distance herself from being immersed to the

point of a fellow climber forgetting the job of researcher. To prevent losing detachment from the spirit of research, the researcher wore two symbolic hats. One hat was worn when any aspect of the study including interviews, observations, and field notes were carried out. The other hat was worn when the researcher had to go through the physical exertion necessary to climb the mountain. Wearing two hats allowed the researcher to enter back and forth between the mindset of researcher and climber. This research strategy was carried out to help the researcher maintain an investigative attitude from within the Mount Everest culture.

The findings in the present study were represented using the realist tale. Using the realist tale limits the findings to this type of representation. It is important to note that alternative and legitimate forms within the narrative approach could have been used in this study to represent the findings including autoethnography, confessional tales, poetic representations, and ethnodrama. Employing an alternative form of representation to highlight the climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance may have offered different insight into the topic of inquiry.

CONCLUSION

My intention in this doctoral dissertation has been to gain a better understanding of how cognitive dissonance is experienced by mountain climbers as they engaged in the activities of their daily lives while attempting to scale Mount Everest. In this process, important contributions to the fields of psychology, sport and physical activity, and education as well as directions for future research were realized. Accordingly, to bring this study to a close, this section will attempt to open a window on the present study's major contributions to existing literature on cognitive dissonance, mountaineering, and education, and implications for future research.

Contributions to Literature on Cognitive Dissonance, Mountaineering, and Education

The findings in the present study provide empirical support for the widely held belief that cognitive dissonance is a common, daily experience. Human beings regularly do things that lead to experiencing dissonant relations among cognitions and then engage in all kinds of cognitive and behavioral acts aimed at justifying their own behavior. Support for Aronson's (1968, 1992) proposition that self-concept is central to people's experiences with cognitive dissonance is also provided. That is, cognitive dissonance is not the result of just any two inconsistent cognitions (or the result of a discrepancy between a cognition and behavior). Rather, it is experienced when a person thinks or behaves in a way that is inconsistent with his or her self-concept.

The present study's unique contribution to existing cognitive dissonance, mountaineering, and education literature stems from the methodological approach and conceptual frameworks that were used to gain insight into climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance. To begin with, this study opens a window on Aronson's self-consistency perspective in two ways: (a) from a methodological standpoint, using an ethnomethodological narrative case

study approach to guide the present study helped to fill a gap in the literature with respect to the ways in which cognitive dissonance is experienced in people's minds and; (b) combining Aronson's perspective with the RPM (Newburg et al., 2002), insight was gained on the role of feelings in dissonance processes. This study also adds to the limited mountaineering literature in that cognitive dissonance was examined for the first time in the field of sport and physical activity and high altitude mountaineering in particular. Using Aronson's perspective with Mount Everest climbers helped us gain an understanding of the cognitive processes and feelings that are experienced as high altitude climbers strive to reach the difficult and demanding goal of climbing the mountain. Lastly, a link from the present study to the field of education is provided. That is, the findings of this study may help teachers better understand what could be happening in the minds of students who are under pressure to achieve academic success. The following section focuses more specifically on the contributions of the present study to the three aforementioned fields.

Contributions to Cognitive Dissonance Literature

This section will begin by discussing how the methodological approach used in this study increases our understanding of how cognitive dissonance is experienced in people's minds. Subsequently, the knowledge gained from using the RPM in this study to explore the role of feelings in dissonance processes will be addressed.

Underlying processes of cognitive dissonance

To date, most cognitive dissonance researchers have depended entirely on using outcome measures (e.g. attitude change) in laboratory-based settings to examine the nature of the motivation driving the cognitive changes that result from dissonance. Much has been learned about human psychological functioning in this regard. There are still aspects of the theory,

however, that have never been explored due to the limited nature of the methodological tools and approaches that are used in dissonance research. In this study, an ethnomethodological approach, which encourages researchers to immerse themselves in the culture under study, enabled the primary researcher to climb on the mountain with the participants to chart their lived experiences with cognitive dissonance from a sociological perspective. Consequently, this study has stretched the methodological boundary of existing dissonance research.

Using the above mentioned type of methodology enabled the researcher to obtain rich, in-depth information and gain knowledge about the chosen phenomenon within a natural context, leading to a more complete understanding of the theory of cognitive dissonance. That is, this study provides a first step toward unraveling how cognitive dissonance is internalized in the subjective consciousness of climbers. In particular this study shows: (a) knowledge of how routine patterns are used in dissonance processes to structure one's world; (b) knowledge of how the specific features of the setting are intertwined with people's experiences with cognitive dissonance; (c) knowledge of the ways in which people's experiences with cognitive dissonance are reflexive and; (d) an increased understanding of the ways in which dissonance processes are socially constructed by the high altitude mountaineering culture as risks, dangers, and responsibility are faced on the mountain.

In a nutshell, cognitive dissonance is an ongoing process of reconstructing meaning through various methods of interpretation. These methods include the documentary method of interpretation, reflexivity, indexicality, and membership. That is, the above mentioned ethnomethodological concepts are likely fundamental processes involved in the everyday practical reasoning that takes place as climbers experience psychological discomfort and then attempt to reconstruct a self view that not only appears normal but also feels good to them.

Exploring people's experiences with cognitive dissonance in a real life setting provided insight not available when using standard methodological laboratory designs and tools that are usually used in dissonance research. As a result, much has been learned about the processes involved in climbers' everyday experiences with cognitive dissonance.

The role of feelings

Combining Aronson's (1968, 1992) self-consistency perspective with the RPM (Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2002) led to valuable insights into the role of feelings in dissonance processes. Using a model that focuses on desired feelings and ways to experience them on a regular basis allowed us to explore the important role played by feelings in two important ways. For one, the psychological discomfort emerging from self-discrepant thoughts and/or behavior is likely experienced as specific adverse self-relevant feelings (i.e. feelings of guilt). This finding supports Aronson's (1992) speculation that psychological discomfort is experienced as an unpleasant feeling of an exact nature and not just global discomfort. Very little research, however, has been carried out using Aronson's self-consistency perspective to confirm this view point.

This study also shows that people are motivated to feel a certain way about themselves. Consequently, when they experience self-relevant feelings of psychological discomfort, which conflict with how they want to feel about themselves, they take steps to get rid of these adverse feelings and bring back pre-established feelings that they are comfortable experiencing. The underlying nature of the motivation driving cognitive dissonance may therefore be more in line with the affective component of our makeup than any other of the well-known constructs outlined by dissonance researchers. That is, cognitive dissonance is not simply the result of cognitive inconsistency (Festinger, 1957), self-inconsistency (Aronson, 1968, 1992), feelings of

personal responsibility for producing aversive consequences (Cooper & Fazio, 1984), or a threat to one's sense of moral and adaptive integrity (Steele, 1988). Rather, inconsistent feelings relevant to the self may be the root of people's experiences with cognitive dissonance. That is, people may be propelled to reduce or eliminate felt discomfort because they are motivated by feelings of self-consistency.

The present study describes the experience of cognitive dissonance as resulting from a need for affective self-consistency that follows a contradicting relation among self-relevant cognitions. The present study goes beyond merely supporting previous studies that have shown that when people engage in counter attitudinal acts, dissonance reduction strategies are implemented in an attempt to reduce the psychological discomfort: it demonstrates both the role of the self and feelings in dissonance processes. To this end, new key questions to better understand the cognitive dissonance phenomenon may be generated.

Contributions to Mountaineering Literature

Cognitive dissonance theory has been studied in a variety of cultures. There is a clear absence of research, however, in the area of sport and physical activity and high altitude mountaineering in particular. Applying the theory to the Mount Everest culture, which lends itself to experiencing inconsistent cognitions due to the life threatening, stressful nature of the pursuit, this study provides a first glance at how climbers make sense of their day-to-day lives when striving to reach an important and difficult goal. Specifically, some of the insights obtained in this study included: (a) how climbers coped when they experienced a threat to an important element of their self-concept; (b) how they felt when they acted in ways that contradicted how they typically saw themselves; (c) how the dissonance effects of effort expenditure were experienced in climbers' minds and; (d) the processes and consequences involved in decision-making. These insights gained may be of practical value for expedition leaders and resource staff such as sport psychologists and educators involved in helping climbers learn how to cope with

the challenges they may face off and on the mountain.

In addition to the above mentioned contributions, this study provides important insight into existing mountaineering literature with respect to goal achievement. In most performance domains including the sport of high altitude mountaineering striving to achieve a goal (i.e. winning the game, achieving a personal best, completing the task at hand) is usually key in the process of performance. For instance, the objective for all of the climbers in the present study was to try and reach the summit. Often, however, people do not reach their goals. This study has shown that climbers are prone to experiencing cognitive dissonance after making decisions that prevent them from achieving their expectations. Understanding how climbers reconstruct their reality when they fall short of their goals, may help not only high altitude climbers but also people in other performance cultures effectively cope with disappointing performances. Understanding the human need to see and feel a certain way about the self may prevent climbers from making excuses or rationalizing self-discrepant behavior in ways that hinder learning from past performances. For instance, some climbers blame their disappointing performances on elements within the environment that are outside of their control including the weather. This manner of coping with disappointment may not be helping future performances (if the reason they struggled to reach their potential was not the weather but some other element that was in their control). It is impossible to learn from past performances and improve physical, technical, mental, or emotional aspects one's game if climbers do not look within and honestly face what is was that lead them to fall short of their expectations.

Contributions to Education Literature

A link from the present study to any performance culture where an important element of a person's self-concept may be violated can be made. For instance, the knowledge gained in this study may help teachers in the field of education better comprehend and deal more

effectively with students who are under pressure to succeed in the classroom. Whether self-imposed or culturally driven, some students feel the weight of expectation to achieve top marks. Carrying the load of trying to achieve academic success is a metaphorical mountain that has to be climbed. This study may help teachers gain insight into the internal workings of the mind of those students who are trying to live up to their academic expectations and pre-formed notions of self as intelligent and successful including the decisions they are making. It also may help teachers understand what students are feeling after they have been unable to fulfill their expectations. Most importantly, however, understanding how students reconstruct their reality after their self-concept has been threatened (i.e. how they make sense of new knowledge after feeling stupid because they are struggling to grasp a new concept) is critical to effective learning. For instance, students who feel inadequate because they are unable to comprehend a particular concept or theory the teacher is explaining may reorder their understanding of the classroom situation by dismissing what the teacher said in order to restore their self-concept as intelligent. In effect, how students reorder their understanding of a particular self-discrepant situation may help teachers better understand whether learning is properly taking place. It is important therefore for teachers to know if and when students are experiencing cognitive dissonance, what they are feeling in this process, and how they attempt to reduce it. In conclusion, classroom teachers can benefit from this study by understanding that cognitive dissonance is likely occurring in the minds of students who engage in learning.

High altitude mountaineers can be also taught about cognitive dissonance and made aware that they are likely going to experience it as they succumb to the call of ascending a mountain. If climbers are made aware of the potential of experiencing the phenomenon then they would be more apt to prepare and better deal with it when it happens to them. Foreseeing

possible situations, behaviors, or thoughts that may create psychological discomfort while on the mountain and developing strategies, before leaving for the mountain, that may help reduce or eliminate it in the moment would likely help climbers not only perform better on the mountain but also garner a sense of self-control over their thoughts, actions, and feelings. Furthermore, teaching climbers about the cognitive processes that often take place while striving to reach the difficult and demanding goal of reaching the summit of a mountain will likely ensure that better decisions are made on the mountain.

Implications for Future Research

The present study has contributed to our understanding of how a group of Mount Everest climbers striving to reach the goal of standing on the summit routinely experienced cognitive dissonance in their natural setting. Much has been learned about the phenomenon by studying it in the real world. At the same time, this study has opened a window on various avenues for future research. This section will begin by discussing the importance of carrying out further cognitive dissonance research in the fields of sport and physical activity and education. Subsequently, this section will highlight avenues for future research that deserve further exploration in the hopes of advancing our understanding of the theory of cognitive dissonance. Lastly, this section will outline the direction of the researcher's future post doctoral work.

Sport and Physical Activity and Education

The fields of sport and physical activity and education are areas ripe for cognitive dissonance research. From the standpoint of researchers in the area of sport and physical activity, a much richer picture of the interplay between cognitions, motivation, and feelings of athletes can be obtained through future cognitive dissonance studies. While the present study has shed light on the cognitive and affective processes of athletes involved in a high risk activity,

further research needs to be carried out in other sporting domains. Using dissonance theory in different sporting cultures may increase our understanding of what is happening in the minds of athletes after they exert tremendous levels of energy, make decisions, and act in ways that conflict with their beliefs and attitudes during their performances. In effect, studying cognitive dissonance with athletes across the sporting spectrum may provide insight into performance excellence. In turn, these types of studies may extend important knowledge on the theory of cognitive dissonance.

In the field of education, studying cognitive dissonance in the classroom could advance our knowledge of learning and teacher's role in facilitating development. In particular, gaining an understanding of what is happening in the minds of students and what they are concurrently feeling when they are exposed to information inconsistent with prior beliefs, values, and cognitions could contribute important knowledge to the field of education. Conducting research that explores the role of cognitive dissonance in the classroom may improve teacher-student interactions thereby contributing to a more effective learning environment. Also, it may help us gain a better understanding of the experience of being a student, how students make sense of the world around them in this process, and how teachers can create an environment conducive to student development.

Furthering our Understanding of Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Exploring the theory of cognitive dissonance within its real-life setting, focusing on both the phenomenon and its context helped broaden and enrich our understanding of the cognitive dissonance phenomenon. To continue pushing the boundaries of knowledge, cognitive dissonance researchers need to venture into less known territory and use diverse methodologies. Because this study has stretched the methodological limitations of dissonance research, various

avenues for future dissonance research have become obvious. This section will attempt to outline these avenues that may contribute to a better understanding of the theory of cognitive dissonance.

A much richer picture of the theory of cognitive dissonance may emerge if researchers investigate the role of age, experience, self-awareness, gender, religion, and culture in dissonance processes. To further expand on this point, all of the climbers in the present study shared a similar goal of trying to reach the apex of the world's tallest peak, despite their varied backgrounds. Throughout their effort to succeed, they all lived through cognitive dissonance – a psychological process that transcended age, experience, gender, religion, and culture. In effect, cognitive dissonance was experienced in the routine activities of the climbers as the result of engaging in a litany of self-discrepant behaviors, a metaphorical climbing rope that tied together this disparate group of people. Their experiences with cognitive dissonance, however, may have been colored depending on the lens of personal history they were using to see and feel their way through the pursuit. Gender, experience, self-awareness, age, and religion are elements that may contribute to processing cognitive dissonance differently and will be discussed below in the order present to the reader above.

Gender

In the case of gender, it is possible that the gendered politics of climbing affect men and women's experiences scaling the mountain. If men and women climbers embrace different expectations and value systems prescribed by the Mount Everest culture then it is possible that lived experiences with dissonance are unique to one's gender. For instance, it is possible that Janette's experiences with cognitive dissonance may have been different from the ways in which the remaining participants lived the phenomenon. That is, if Janette's self-concept was based on

the prevailing values of the prescribed gender roles and expectations of the Mount Everest culture, then being a woman may have not only defined what was dissonant but it may also have been linked to the ways in which she reduced her feelings of psychological discomfort. Research exploring how gendered spaces interact with climbers' experiences with cognitive dissonance needs to be carried out to better understand how cultural norms organize people's experiences with cognitive dissonance.

Experience

Experience is another element that may be intertwined with climber's lived encounters with cognitive dissonance. It is possible that elite climbers do not experience cognitive dissonance to the same degree or extent as novice climbers. In the case of Nate (who has more experience climbing in difficult and unstructured environments than the remaining participants), it appears that his experiences with dissonance were not as common or intense as those of the remaining participants in this study. It is likely that he is better able to cope with self-discrepant situations on the mountain because he has experienced and overcome them on past climbs. Or, because of his past experience climbing other mountains, he may not be taken completely by surprise when his self-concept is violated because he expects to act out of character in certain situations. One's level of experience may determine whether a climber is susceptible to experiencing cognitive dissonance or not. It would be interesting to explore whether levels of experience affect how climbers experience the phenomenon. Future research should be carried out to explore whether people with lots of experience in a particular domain experience dissonance in the same way as less skilled individuals.

Self-awareness

A climbers' level of self-awareness may play a fundamental role in the way he or she experiences cognitive dissonance. For instance, a climber who is self-realized is likely to be more realistic about his or her strengths and weaknesses than a less self-aware climber and therefore acting in ways that conflict with his or her self-concept would be less likely to occur. That is, if one's expectations are more in line with what can be achieved then self-discrepant situations would be a rare occurrence. It is important to point out, however, that it may be more than simply knowing one's self. If a person does not embrace their flaws and virtues then self-awareness alone may not affect the process of cognitive dissonance. Research needs to be carried out to explore the role of self-awareness in cognitive dissonance.

Age

How people experience cognitive dissonance may also be mediated by one's age. In the present study, Gordie was significantly older than most of the other participants. It is possible that his wealth of life experience led him to experience dissonance in a different manner than some of the younger climbers in this study who had similar climbing backgrounds. It is likely that Gordie has experienced cognitive dissonance throughout the course of his life in a variety of domains (i.e. older people may be better at coping with distressing situations because as time passes the more difficult life events take place). His coping mechanisms may therefore be engrained, more effective, and different from younger climbers because he is able to draw on past life experiences whenever he faces a threat to an important element of his self-concept. Ironically, however, Gordie (who has rarely failed anything in his life) struggled tremendously to come to terms with the fact that he did not reach the summit. It is possible that the ease of reducing cognitive dissonance may depend on having already experienced psychological

discomfort in similar life experiences (i.e. failing at a certain task). Further studies should be conducted with climbers of different ages and experiences to explore whether the ways in which cognitive dissonance is experienced are different.

Religion

How a person deals with beliefs, values, and existential questions may colour their experiences with cognitive dissonance. For example, Mostafa, a fundamental Muslim saw his experiences climbing Everest through the lens of his Islamic religion. His faith and beliefs allowed him to offer his success or failure over to Allah. In doing so, he was able to lower his dissonance related to potential death and injury. It is possible that climbers of different religious backgrounds process cognitive dissonance differently. Research along religious lines may prove a fertile area for further research.

In conclusion, as we are dealing with increasing numbers of novice adventurers who are risking their lives on the slopes of the world's tallest peak, we have to look systematically at the ways in which high altitude climbers are making sense out of their environment and their behavior when under tremendous physiological and psychological pressure. Mount Everest climbers continue to climb themselves into life threatening situations that are outside of their realm of expertise or die of exhaustion or mountain sickness because they are obsessed with summits. Sadly, this type of behavior has a direct impact not only on the life of the climber, but also that of other climbers who are in close proximity. This study has provided some of the first empirical evidence toward understanding how climbers produce a sense of order when immersed in the stressful and demanding environment and may help safeguard climbers against making extreme decisions that may cost them their lives. More research, however, needs to be carried out to push the boundaries of our understanding of cognitive dissonance in extreme environments.

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Appendix A: Perspectives of Cognitive Dissonance Theory

| Festinger (1957) | | Aronson (1968, 1992) | | Steele (1988) | | Cooper and Fazio (1984) | |
|--|--------------------------------|---|--|---|--|--|---|
| Dissonance Arousal | Dissonance Reduction | Dissonance Arousal | Dissonance Reduction | Dissonance Arousal | Dissonance Reduction | Dissonance Arousal | Dissonance Reduction |
| Inconsistent Cognitive Elements | Changing one of the cognitions | Perceived discrepancy btw a behavior or cognitive element and aspect of the self-concept | Justification of the discrepant behavior or belief | Perceived discrepancy btw a behavior or cognitive element and global self-worth | Restore a sense of general goodness by focusing on other positive aspect of self | Feel personally responsible for producing an aversive event | Cognitive change to render the consequence non aversive |
| <p>Example: A person were standing in the rain and yet could see no evidence that he was getting wet</p> <p>He may very well turn around and go home</p> | | <p>Example: A person believes he is a nice person and yet deliberately inflicts pain on another person</p> <p>He may very well convince himself that his victim is a dreadful person who deserved to suffer</p> | | <p>Example: A person believes he is smart and competent and yet makes a stupid decision</p> <p>He may rationalize the threat to the self by focusing on the fact that he is a good parent or community member</p> | | <p>Example: A person dupes a fellow student in an experiment and feels personally responsible for harming him</p> <p>He may justify the act by believing that he helped out the researcher</p> | |

Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

Acclimatize: Adapt to a new climate or condition; in climbing most typically associated with the progressive adaptation required for high-altitude peaks.

Alpine Style: A style of climbing in which a typically small team ascends a peak from bottom-to-top in one continuous push, without fixed ropes, carrying all the necessary equipment themselves.

Alpinism: The philosophy and practice of climbing high mountains.

Avalanche: Snow or ice sliding down a mountain.

Belay: To tend the climbing rope, ready to immediately put enough friction on the rope to hold the climber in case of a fall. Belay also refers to the entire system set up to make belaying possible, including the anchor that holds the belayer in place.

Bergchrund: A giant crevasse found at the upper limit of a glacier, formed where the moving glacier breaks away from the ice cap.

Big walls: A steep cliff or face, vertical or nearly so that is 1,000 feet or more from bottom to top.

Bivouac (bivvy): A sleeping place in the middle of a route with makeshift shelter.

Bouldering: Climbing unroped on boulders or at the foot of climbs to a height where it is still safe to jump off.

Col: A low point between two mountain peaks.

Crampons: Spikes or points attached to the bottom of boots that allow a climber to walk and climb on snow and ice.

Cwm: The Welsh word for cirque.

Death zone: The high altitude point at which energy expenditure always exceeds possible intake. Deterioration is inevitable and will eventually necessitate descent.

Free climbing: Climbing rock using only hands, feet, and natural holds for forward motion. Ropes and 'pro' are only used for protection of the climber and not for progression.

Glacier: A slowly moving permanent mass of ice.

Guide: Professional climber hired to take others into the mountains.

Harness: Nylon safety webbing sewn to fit the climber's body, into which the rope is tied.

Hypoxia: Lack of oxygen.

Ice Ax: A mountaineering tool two-to-four feet long, pointed at the end with a head consisting of a pick and an adze.

Ice Climbing: Climbing vertical or overhanging ice formations, often frozen waterfalls.

Ice Screw: A protection device for ice climbing. It looks like a large bolt that can be screwed into hard ice.

Jumar: A type of rope ascending device.

Karabiner: Aluminum alloy ring equipped with a spring-loaded snap gate.

Mixed Climbing: Climbing with a combination of different methods of ascent; e.g., mixed free and aid climbing, mixed rock and ice climbing, etc.

Mountaineering: The practice of climbing mountains.

Peak Bagging: Climbing peaks or groups of peaks in order to complete a set or add a climb to a list of accomplishments.

Porters: Individuals hired to carry equipment on a climb, especially on expeditions.

Protection: Anchors placed during the climb to protect the leader.

Pulmonary Edema: Potentially fatal collection of fluid in the lungs as a result of too-rapid ascent of high altitude or failure to properly adapt.

Rappel: To descend a rope by means of mechanical brake device.

Rock Climbing: A branch of climbing focused on ascending rock walls.

Serac: A block or tower of ice on a steep glacier or an icefall.

Snow Bridge: A temporary covering of a crevasse by snow.

Solo Climbing: Climbing alone, though not necessarily without the protection of a rope.

Appendix C: Examples of common frameworks used in dissonance research
The Free-Choice Framework

J.W. Brehm (1956) conducted the first experiment using the free-choice paradigm to test predictions derived from dissonance theory. In his experiment, which was presented as market research, he had women rate how desirable they found eight different products (e.g. toaster or coffee maker) and then gave each of them a choice between two products that were close in desirability (difficult decision) or between two products that were not close in desirability (easy decision). After choosing which of the two products they would keep, the women re-rated the desirability of the products. Results indicated that the women who made a difficult decision changed their evaluations of the products to be more positive about the chose product and less positive about the rejected product. Spreading of alternatives was less for the women who made an easy decision.

The Belief-Disconfirmation Framework

In a study on the effect of belief disconfirmation on proselytizing, Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter (1956) acted as participant observers in a group that had become committed to an important belief that was specific enough to be capable of unequivocal disconfirmation. The group believed a prophecy that a flood would engulf the continent. The prophecy was supposedly transmitted by beings from outer space to a woman in the group. The group members also believed that they had been chosen to be saved from the flood and would be evacuated in a flying saucer. Festinger et al. (1956) described what happened when the flood did not occur. Members of the group who were alone at that time did not maintain their beliefs. Members who were waiting with other group members maintained their faith. The woman reported receiving a message that indicated that God had prevented the flood because of the group's existence as a

force for good. Before the disconfirmation of the belief about the flood, the group engaged in a little proselytizing. After the disconfirmation, they engaged in substantial proselytizing. The group members sought to persuade others of their beliefs, which would add cognitions consonant with those beliefs.

The Effort-Justification Framework

Aronson and Mills (1959) had women undergo a severe or mild “initiation” to become a member of a group. In the severe initiation condition, the women engaged in an embarrassing activity to join the group, whereas in the mild initiation condition, the women engaged in an activity that was not embarrassing to join the group. The group turned out to be rather dull and boring. The women in the severe initiation condition evaluated the group more favorably than the women in the mild initiation condition.

The Induced-Compliance Framework

Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) had men perform boring tasks for 1 hr. Then each was told by the experimenter that there were two groups in the experiment: the one the participant was in, which received no introduction and a second group, which was told the tasks were enjoyable by a person who had supposedly just completed them. The experimenter asked the participant to substitute for the person who usually said the tasks were enjoyable, and the participant was given \$1 or \$20 to tell the next person that the tasks were enjoyable and remain on call in the future. The participants were then asked to evaluate the tasks by an interviewer from the psychology department, who had nothing to do with the experiment. Those paid \$1 rated the tasks more enjoyable than did those paid \$20 or those who merely performed the tasks and were not asked to describe them.

Appendix D: About Alpine Ascents International and Mountain Madness

Out of the six participants that were involved in this study, five of them were members of the Alpine Ascents International (AAI) expedition. It is well known among the international mountaineering community that AAI is a key leader in the climbing industry and is America's premier Everest guide service. Since their conception in 1986, AAI has been increasingly organizing international expeditions including six-day training courses in the Arctic and Antarctic regions to three month expeditions in the Himalayas. These expeditions, led by this well rounded mountain guiding company, have become benchmarks in the climbing world.

Every spring, AAI assembles a team of climbers from around the world to climb Mount Everest via the South Col route. Generally speaking, the company looks for experienced climbers for whom Everest is the next logical step in their climbing career. Nonetheless, due to their well respected reputation and superior infrastructure the company seems to attract climbers of all levels from around the world. The company's objectives are threefold. First and foremost, they help their clients prepare both technically and physically for whatever mountain they are planning to climb. Secondly, expeditions are structured around safety. Implementing prevention programs and making decisions that ensure the clients are as safe as possible are some examples of how they meet this objective. Finally, they set out to enhance their clients' appreciation for and sensitivity to the natural environment. AAI embraces a balanced philosophy of wilderness ethics through discussions centering on preservation.

AAI is one of the most expensive commercial outfitters in the industry. Depending on the chosen outfitter a typical climb on Mount Everest will range anywhere from \$30,000 to \$65,000USD per person. AAI falls on the high end of this spectrum charging \$65,000USD per client. In return for this investment dollar, AAI clients receive a full guiding service that includes

a one-to-one client to Sherpa support ratio, as well as a one-to-three American guide to client ratio, highly experienced Everest veteran guides, access to daily weather reports, guides who are certified wilderness first responders, highest quality and quantity oxygen systems, and access to multimedia cybercast technology. Climbers who are financially well off and prefer high levels of guided assistance on the mountain tend to join AAI. It is interesting to note that of the approximately 2,500 people to stand atop Everest, 102 of them were members on an Alpine Ascents expedition (alpineascents.com). This number is the most of any guide service.

This 2005 season, the AAI expedition included four professional guides, 13 clients including five women and eight men, 12 climbing Sherpas, and a base camp manager. The team was diverse in age and cultural background. Their ages ranged from 18 to 64 years of age and their countries of origin included Britain, Jordan, Mexico, South Africa, and the United States. Out of the 13 clients who set out to climb the mountain this season, 4 of them reached the summit and 9 of them returned home before the summit bid.

About Mountain Madness

One of the participants in this study was a member of the Mountain Madness expedition. Mountain Madness was built in 1984 on the climbing philosophy of a world renowned climber named Scott Fischer. Scott believed in bringing the beauty and excitement of adventure to those who pursue it. Due to an unfortunate disaster in May of 1996, while he was leading his group to the summit of Everest, he perished in the midst of a savage storm that developed during the team's descent. His goals and ideas, however, remain the building blocks of the company's vision. Specifically, Mountain Madness maintains the vision of "achieving serious, high quality guiding and instruction while having the most fun possible" (www.mountainmadness.com).

Mountain Madness offers a wide range of opportunities to climbers of varied skill levels and objectives. Specifically, they offer climbing courses, family trips, ski programs, custom trips, treks, and expeditions to the highest peaks on each continent. The company highlights its ability to develop individual climbing plans specific to each climber's needs. Whether a person is a novice climber on their first glacier climb or a seasonal veteran hoping to tackle the seven summits, Mountain Madness accommodates their clientele. They focus on teaching their clients how to master technical climbing skills, employ safe climbing techniques, and develop leadership skills.

Mountain Madness has been running successful Everest expeditions since 1994 with 29 team members making it to the top of the highest point on earth. A climber who wishes to join a Mountain Madness expedition to Everest is charged \$55,000USD. In return for this fee, clients receive a complete guide service that is heavily supported by experienced staff and a high staff to client ratio. Specifically, the company advertises a one-to-one client to Sherpa support ratio, as well as a one-to-three American guide to client ratio. Moreover, safety is the number one priority at Mountain Madness.

This season Mountain Madness had a team of 2 professional guides, 5 climbers, and 3 climbing Sherpas. Out of the 5 climbers attempting to climb to the summit, 3 of them abandoned the climb before the summit bid. The remaining 2 team members succeeded in reaching the summit.

Appendix E: Researcher Preparation

The researcher's previous experience as a researcher, interviewer, and climber will help her carry out this study. In the fall of 2003 and the spring of 2004, the researcher conducted a study, under the supervision of Dr. Natalie Durand-Bush, on Mount Everest using the Resonance Performance Model with climbers. She had the opportunity to not only climb on the mountain with the participants and observe their behavior but also conduct interviews at base camp and camp 2. This experience provided her with valuable information regarding the research context, including limitations and possibilities. Further, her climbing background, including two attempts on Mount Everest has provided her with the necessary skills to climb on the mountain with the participants. In addition, she interviewed 10 elite Mount Everest climbers for her Master's thesis (Burke & Orlick, 2003). In light of her previous research on mountaineering and experience as a climber, the researcher feels confident about her abilities to successfully carry out this study on Mount Everest.

Appendix F: Consent form

Study: Mount Everest Climbers: Exploring Their Experiences with Dissonance Arousal and Reduction

Shaunna Burke (Ph.D. Candidate)
 Faculty of Education
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Recruitment of climbers aged 18 and above attempting to summit Mount Everest for a study aimed at exploring their experiences with dissonance arousal and reduction.

This research project is being directed by Dr. Raymond Leblanc and Dr. Natalie Durand-Bush of the University of Ottawa, and investigated by Shaunna Burke. The intent of the project is to explore the cognitive dissonance experienced by Mount Everest climbers. Cognitive dissonance occurs when two simultaneously held attitudes or cognitions are inconsistent or when there is conflict between belief and overt behavior. The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, motivates the person to reduce the dissonance. The objective of this study is to explore climber's experience with dissonance arousal and reduction. If you are interested, you will be asked to participate in a 12-week research study. As such, your involvement will consist of:

1. Attend five interviews captured on audio and videotape during the 12-week expedition, which will be held every ten days or so.
 - a. Initial interview (approximately 1 hour) at base camp upon arrival
 - b. Second interview (approximately 30-60 minutes) at camp 2 during their acclimatization
 - c. Third interview (approximately 30-60 minutes) at base camp before the summit attempt
 - d. Fourth interview (approximately 30-60 minutes) at camp 2 on the return from the summit
 - e. Fifth interview (approximately 30-60 minutes) at base camp on the return from the summit
2. Attend a final interview (approximately 1 hour), one-month after you leave base camp.

The interviews will be scheduled at a time convenient to both you and the researcher. The information you will share throughout the study will remain strictly confidential. Anonymity will be assured by assigning a number to your file so that your name will not appear on or identify any transcript. Furthermore, the audiotapes, videotapes, transcripts of interviews, and field notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet of Dr. Raymond Leblanc for a period of five years following the publication of the results after which they will be destroyed. Only the research team, which consists of my two thesis supervisors and myself will have access to the codes and data. Interviews will be sent to you for authentication whereby you may remove anything you would rather not have said and have the opportunity to add, elaborate, change, or comment on any part of the interview or interview process. You are free to withdraw from the project at any time, before or during an interview, and may refuse to answer questions without prejudice. You will be able to receive, by providing a mailing address below, a summary of the findings of this research, which will be available in May 2007.

Potential risks involved: There is very minimal risk involved in this study. In the case that you regret having disclosed personal information during the interviews, that information will be excluded from the study and not be reported in any form of communication. If at any time you feel fatigued before or during the interviews you are free to reschedule the interview at a more convenient time. The researcher will be sure to be open and accepting of any emotional pain that may arise if you are asked questions that cause you to relive difficult or painful experiences. The researcher will not probe or push you to share experiences that you may be uncomfortable sharing.

CONSENT

By agreeing to participate in this study, I _____ understand that my involvement will consist of sharing personal information about my experiences climbing on Mount Everest. The purpose of this study is to gain information about my experiences as a climber. I also understand that the results of this study may be presented at conferences and/or published in academic journals but that my name will not be mentioned at any time.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, including before or during the interviews. I can also decide to withdraw shared information from the interviews and refuse to answer verbal questions without prejudice.

Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5, tel.: 613-562-5841, email: ethics@uottawa.ca There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I can keep.

Researcher's signature _____ Date: _____

Participant's signature _____ Date: _____

Please feel free to contact us at any time with any questions or concerns:

Shaunna Burke
Faculty of Education
145 Jean-Jacques-Lussier
Ottawa, ON
K1N 6N5
Tel: (613) 270-1069

Dr. Raymond Leblanc
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145 Jean-Jacques-Lussier
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Tel: (613) 562-5800
Ext: 4153

Please mail a summary of
the results to:

Appendix G: Interview Guide

Interview 1

1) Demographic information

Name: _____ Age: _____
 Gender: Male/Female
 Name of Expedition:
 Expedition Leader: Yes/No
 Country of Origin:
 Profession:
 Years of experience climbing on Mount Everest:
 Years of high altitude climbing experience:
 Highest peak achieved:
 Address and telephone number:

2) Getting to know the climber (the self): and potential experiences with cognitive dissonance

1. Tell me about yourself and your climbing background?
2. Tell me about your philosophy of (a) climbing and (b) life?
3. How would you describe yourself (a) as a person and (b) as a climber?
4. What do you value (a) as a person and (b) as a climber? What aspects of yourself do you value when climbing?
5. What does it mean to you to climb?
6. How do your values affect your climbing performance?
7. What thoughts will accompany you on this climb?
8. How do you want to feel on this climb? Is climbing unpleasant or pleasant for you?
9. Does how you feel affect how you perform?
10. If you don't feel the way you want to, what will you do?
11. What are your expectations regarding this climb?
12. How important is it for you to reach the summit?
 - (a) What sacrifices are you willing to make?
 - (b) What price are you willing to pay?
 - (c) At what cost do you want to summit?
13. What will it mean for you to reach the summit?
14. Will this experience change your life? If yes, how?
15. What does the climbing etiquette mean to you? Is it important to you? Why or why not? Have you ever disrespected this etiquette? Explain.
16. Have you ever behaved in a manner you regretted while you were climbing? If so, what happened during and after?
17. Have you ever experienced an inner conflict? Explain. What did you do to resolve it?
18. What happens when you feel threatened in this environment? (e.g., by climate, other climbers, personal health)

- (a) How did you feel?
 - (b) Did you do anything based on how you felt?
19. How do you make decisions on the mountain? Have you ever made a bad decision? If yes, what did you think? How did you feel? What did you do about it?
 20. Tell me how you cope with obstacles (e.g., psychological discomfort or tension) when you are climbing?
 21. What strategies do you use to remain focused when faced with challenges?
 22. Why do you climb?

Interview 2-5

1. How are you feeling at this moment?
2. Describe important challenges you faced?
 - (a) How did you feel?
 - (b) What did you think?
 - (c) What did you do to overcome them?
 - (d) Did you experience any inner conflict as a result? Explain.
 - (e) How do you make sense of your actions?
3. Describe difficult decisions that you made?
 - (a) What led you to make these decisions?
 - (b) How did you feel once you made the decision?
 - (c) What happened after you made the decision?
 - (d) How do you feel now?
4. Describe how you wanted to feel while climbing? Did these feelings impact your decisions?
5. Have you experienced any feelings of discomfort? If yes, when? What caused it? How long did it last? What did you do about it?
6. Have any of your values or beliefs been tested so far? If so, in what way? How did this affect you? Your performance? What did you do as a result?
7. Has your philosophy of life or climbing enlightened you in any way so far? Explain.
8. What are your expectations at this stage of the journey?
9. How important is it for you to reach the summit? At what cost?
10. Did you behave in any way that you regretted based on your personal standards, values, or philosophy? Explain. What was the result of this? What have you done since then?
11. How do you see yourself now (a) as a person and (b) as a climber?
12. What have you learned so far?

Interview 6 (final interview)

1. How are you feeling at this moment?
2. Describe important challenges you faced?
 - (a) How did you feel?
 - (b) What did you think?
 - (c) What did you do to overcome them?
 - (d) Did you experience any inner conflict as a result? Explain.
 - (e) How do you make sense of your actions?

3. Describe difficult decisions that you made?
 - (a) What led you to make these decisions?
 - (b) How did you feel once you made the decision?
 - (c) What happened after you made the decision?
 - (d) How do you feel now?
4. Describe how you want to feel in your daily life? Have you been feeling this way since you returned home? How have your feelings impacted your decisions?
5. Have you experienced any feelings of discomfort? If yes, when? What caused it? How long did it last? What did you do about it?
6. Have any of your values or beliefs been tested so far? If so, in what way? How did this affect you? Your performance? What did you do as a result?
7. Has your philosophy of life or climbing enlightened you in any way so far? Explain.
8. What are your expectations at this stage of the journey?
10. Did you behave in a way that you regretted based on your personal standards, values, or philosophy? Explain. What was the result of this? What have you done since then?
11. How do you see yourself now (a) as a person and (b) as a climber?
12. What have you learned from this journey? Has it changed you? Your life? Your values and beliefs?
13. What do you think and feel about yourself? Explain and provide examples.

Appendix H: Steps in Developing a Participant Profile

Step 1

Read and reread the transcript thoroughly, marking passages of interest.

Step 2

Compiled all marked passages into a single transcript.

Step 3

Read the compiled transcript with the goal of presenting the description in its most concise form. This was accomplished by applying the following questions while reading the text: What is absolutely essential in this text – i.e., if it were missing, what was left would not represent the experience of the participant? Only the most essential passages were retained.

Step 4

While maintaining the voice of the participant as closely as possible, the next step included writing the profile in the third person narrative. Any word changes, grammatical modifications, and omissions of text will be indicated symbolically in the profile. The profile reflected the order in which the interviews occurred to maintain the context within which the information was given (Seidman, 1998).