



TITLE: In the Ascent of Neoliberalism: Climbing, Individualisation and the Perception of Risk.

Author/s: Matthew Bunn

Affiliation/s: University of Newcastle

This paper develops a critical exploration of the relationship between neoliberal doxa and climbing practice. In particular, the individualisation of risk has produced circumstances in daily life whereby we must be able to anticipate and manage risk without the support of larger structural frameworks. Increasingly, as individuals we need to perceive the world in terms of risk. This informs practice in a preconscious way and extends beyond typical institutional relationships and into the leisure practice of the agent. In effect, a neoliberal doxa becomes the habitual foundation for practice, even informing the attempts agents make to temporarily escape this through leisure pursuits. When this logic is applied to vertical space, it is possible to observe the rationale for the shift from looking at mountains as ominous, overwhelming places to recognising these in the form of digestible stages of risk. Indeed, the climber has become so effective at the process of self-governance that they can disembark from heavily regulated fields and effectively manage their own health and wellbeing through an internalised system of self-governance. In this regard, climbing functions as an ideal metaphor (or prototype) of the neoliberal agent.