

*“A Stage Model of Why Climbers Climb
And How It Frames the Discussions of Recent Climbing Controversies”*

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Abstract

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This paper proposes a stage model of why more serious climbers climb. It categorizes findings from literature on why climbers climb into two explanations: (i) for achievement and / or flow, and (ii) to build character. A content analysis of forty-two published writings of serious climbers is conducted. Support is found for the first two reasons, and a third reason for climbing emerges: spiritual self-realization. A stage model of climbing purposes is developed: (i) climbers first climb for extrinsic achievement and / or flow; (ii) climbers climb to prove their worth to self and others (character). Third, climbers come to realize a greater spiritual Self. The stage model is used to frame six climbing controversies.

Key words: climbing, purposes, controversies.

INTRODUCTION

Stories of serious climbing of almost any kind (alpine, rock, ice) make climbing seem a little ridiculous or crazy (Mitchell, 1983). Serious climbers punish themselves physically, mentally, emotionally, and psychically with cold, heat, pain, hunger, and exhaustion; they risk life and limb; and sometimes they and their teammates pay the ultimate price for thrilling and terrifying experiences in the mountains.

Understanding why men and women undergo these difficulties can serve a couple of purposes. First, more people could come to understand what serious climbing is about and understand why climbers seem to be acting a little crazy or ridiculous. Second, understanding the reasons for climbing could help to frame the issues around recent controversies in the climbing world (e.g., notorious expeditions on Everest, defilements on sacrosanct natural monuments or mountain areas, aesthetics and ethics regarding how people should climb, etc.).

This paper proposes a stage model of why more serious climbers climb. It categorizes various perspectives on why climbers climb into two basic explanations. Serious climbers climb (i) for achievement and / or flow, and (ii) to build personal character (proof of self worth). A content analysis is undertaken of how climbers themselves write about their reasons and experiences in climbing, and support is found for the first two reasons, and a third reason for climbing emerges: spiritual self-realization. A stage model of climbing purposes is proposed in this paper, and the model is used to develop a framework for the discussions of recent climbing controversies.

CLIMBING PURPOSE #1: ACHIEVEMENT OR FLOW

Climbers' Personalities. There is a long list of anthropometric and psychological studies regarding risk-taking and personality (Feher, Meyers, & Skelly, 1998). Researchers using personality traits have attempted to explain serious climbing behaviors by focusing on the extent to which climbers seek stress, thrills, or sensation (Zuckerman, 1979) and climbers' willingness to (i) assume risks, (ii) experience fear and anxiety, and (iii) appraise accurately various kinds of risks (Feher et. al., 1998). A wide range of traits and sub-scales have been measured in climbers (e.g., aggressiveness, impulsiveness, imagination, forthrightness, self-sufficiency, tough-mindedness, shrewdness, low ergic tension, intelligence, and reserve—Breivik, 1996), only to conclude that risk is not really a true goal or motivation for climbers. Traits have provided little explanation of underlying causes of climbing behaviors. Instead, risk appears to be a condition that climbers use to achieve their goals (Delle Fave, Bassi, & Massimini, 2003).

Climbers Are Strongly Goal-Directed Other researchers have argued from a more behavioral point of view. Serious climbers have strong, deep-seated needs for arousal, autonomy, self-determination, and individualism (Ewert, 1994, 1989, 1987; Mitchell, 1983, 1988; Lyng, 1990; Fredrick & Ryan, 1995). Although the strengths of people's needs are varied individually (McClelland & Burham, 1995; McClelland, Atkinson, & Lowell, 1953), powerful aspirations can lead people to achieve consequential and serious extrinsic goals (e.g., difficult summits and routes).

Climbers Want To Be "In the Zone"—Intrinsic Motivations Humanistic psychologists have argued that goals do not have to be extrinsic (such as power or achievement) in order to be important and motivating (Maslow, 1987). Goals can be both intrinsically motivating as well as

extrinsically motivating. People can enjoy their behaviors for themselves, irrespective of extrinsic rewards (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985). “Flow,” an optimal subjective experience, occurs when action and consciousness merge, where the degree of challenge and the skills that a person takes to a challenge are perfectly matched. Flow is found in a narrowing of attention on clearly defined goals, in an intense concentration (being “lost” in an activity), in a loss of a personal and individualized self, in a transcendent state of mind, with a loss of a sense of time, and with a strong sense of well-being. On either side of a flow experience (mismatches between skills and challenge) are boredom or anxiety (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; 1990; Mitchell, 1988). In a flow state, personal growth and more complex behaviors increase (Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000).

Mediation of Goals by Skill and Experience The reasons why serious climbers climb could be mediated by time, skill, and experience (Lyng, 1990). Ewert’s (1994) findings indicate that: (i) novice climbers are oriented to physical aspects of climbing and the image of climbing; (ii) intermediate climbers to decision making and exhilaration in climbing; and (iii) experienced climbers to exhilaration, self-expression, and self-testing in climbing. The findings are consistent with intrinsic-motivation theories, and they hint at a progression of climbing purposes among serious climbers.

CLIMBING PURPOSE #2: DEFINING CHARACTER

Traditional economics and decision theory are powerful and pervasive explanative frameworks in today’s modern world. They make the assumption that people create “good” when they serve themselves, primarily by maximizing their own pleasures and utilities. Pleasure-seeking

behaviors make people happy. Unfortunately, these theories cannot explain much about climbing behaviors. Pain, suffering, hunger, exhaustion, and even dismemberment and death—outcomes found all too often in mountaineering—are dubious non-consumptive “goods.”

Modern behavioral economists now argue that activities like mountaineering are rationally utilitarian in that they answer important needs that people have to signal value (i) of self to self and (ii) self to others. Value or utility is created for “buyers of climbing” by providing them with (iii) the means by which to create significant goals and complete them, (iv) opportunities for the development of mastery, virtuosity, and excellence, and (v) opportunities to discover meaning in life (Lowenstein, 1999). These ideas of self-worth, mastery, and meaning point to character as one’s inner nature, moral fiber, or self-control that demands respect (Hewitt, 1989).

Defining or Finding Character Some sociologists argue that people work hard to provide others with impressions that are consonant with their “face” (Goffman, 1959; see *Appendice I*.) People conduct themselves with an eye towards making some kind of claim about who they are and what is going on so that they appear normal and sane to others, even in the most mundane situations (Chriss, 1993, 1995). Extraordinary circumstances are means of developing character. To fully define the self and establish worth, a person must perform *voluntary* actions that are not available in everyday life. The difference between holding down a job and pulling a job off is that while the former can be considered “killed moments,” the latter is more consequential and problematic. When an act holds real risks and the completion of it cannot be normally assured, then the act can be said to be “fateful” (Goffman, 1967b). Indeed, brushing with the possibility of the most serious of consequences can strengthen the self and probe the meaning of existence

(Simmel, 1959). Virtue is made from necessity, and self-respecting men or women cannot be afraid to put themselves on the line. Some encounters in life need to be confrontations. Maybe there is little left in everyday life for fatefulness, and maybe people look to become alive by fateful actions (Goffman, 1967b).

There are two kinds of skills and capabilities associated with fateful activities. The (i) primary skills are the technical skills of an activity (stored in memories and experiences), often created by training in inconsequential circumstances (topropeing, gym climbing, sport climbing?) and other forms of practice. However, the (ii) secondary set of capabilities is more important, because the secondary set enables the primary, technical set to be exercised unencumbered. When consciousness of the risks of fateful action invades the mind of the individual, his or her decency can weaken, and naked self-interest can flood the consciousness and block the ability to perform the primary, technical activities. When an individual maintains full control of himself when the chips are down, it indicates moral strength and integrity (Goffman, 1967b).

The secondary set of capabilities is comprised of four elements. (1) Raw courage is needed, because courage precedes the danger. (2) Will and determination (“gameness”) are also needed. An actor must put total effort into a fateful action no matter what the demands are (e.g., fatigue, pain, set-backs). (3) Integrity is also needed, for actors under stress must resist the temptation to depart from moral standards even when an activity cannot be fully witnessed. Proper form must be maintained even when the forms are full of substance and not trivial. (4) Composure is also needed. Composure includes: (a) the ability to execute physical tasks that rely especially upon the control of small muscles to produce smooth, concerted, and managed movements; (b)

emotional self-control to mobilize memory and knowledge of the primary, technical skills under pressure; (c) the ability to contemplate an abrupt change in fate without falling apart; and (d) dignity of bodily decorum in the face of all costs, difficulties, and imperative urges (Goffman, 1967b). Discomposure can disqualify a person for duties and threaten his or her status in a jointly created world (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Hochschild, 1983), especially among beginners (Donnelly & Young; 1988).

When the chips are down and individuals risk and take an opportunity to display an admirable style of conduct, the self is subject to re-creation in recreation. The appeal of fateful actions for people, then, is that it provides the opportunity to show grace under pressure. Serious action is a means of obtaining some of the moral benefits of heroic conduct in modern times. Chance-laden activities with the most serious consequences can lead to honorable and heroic lives, where people can realize their moral fantasies and where their moral sensibilities can be best tested and proved (Goffman, 1967b).

DATA AND METHODS

A content analysis was undertaken of the 2005 issue of the *American Alpine Journal*, from two of John Long's compilations of other climbers' writings (*The High Lonesome* and *Tales from the Steep*), two recent books by climbers (Simpson's *The Beckoning Silence*, and Twilight's *Kiss or Kill*), and Peter Kaan's recollection of his first, bold ascent of The Left Side of the Hour Glass in Yosemite Valley in 1972. Quotations were extracted that support one or more of the explanations indicated above—and an additional explanation emerged from the climbers' reports about their experiences (spiritual self-realization).

Any community's participant's report about his or her behaviors, intentions, and meaning can (i) talk about many things at once, (ii) present contradictions or inconsistencies sometimes even within the same breadth, and (iii) struggle to make articulations of things they may barely perceive or clearly understand themselves. Furthermore, people will construct inventive and plausible explanations for their actions retrospectively that may not reflect what actually occurred (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Hence, it is helpful for researchers to familiarize themselves with the everyday labels that participants use before attempting to make sense of what they say (Geertz, 1973, 1983; Spradley, 1979). Doing so should enable researchers to capture how participants actually view issues without too much insinuation of a researcher's own bias into participants' reports (Bougon, 1983; Ericsson & Simon, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher of this present investigation has been an intermediate, traditional climber for 7 years. As a further check on the validity of this research, drafts of this article were distributed to climbers on national climbing forum (www.supertopo.com/).

FINDINGS

Almost all of the writings in these publications focus on the technical and most immediate aspects of climbing experiences and routes. Explicit insights about why the climbers climbed appear as punctuations amid technical descriptions, when they appear at all. Not all climbers in these few reports explicitly note why they climbed or the meaning of it.

Support is found for the purposes of achievement and flow, and for character-building. The climbers' insights, descriptions, and musings suggest a third reason why they climb seriously:

spiritual self-realization. Together, these three broad reasons form the basis for a stage-model this paper will propose later.

Climbing for Flow and Achievement A few climbers explicitly note their desire for, or experience of, flow.

I wanted to hold the moment as long as possible . . . le petit mort, the little death. The post-coital depression, the fleeting saddening loss when it is over (Simpson, pp. 116-117).

. . . perhaps it all boils down to sensation (Simpson, p. 128).

[Geoffrey Young describing Mallory] *'There are natures whose best expression is movement. Mallory could make no movement that was not in itself beautiful . . . climbing is the supreme opportunity for perfect motion'* (Simpson, p. 135).

I was stripped of all my powers but still my training saw me through . . . I was never more impeccable in my life. . . . (Haan, p. 8)

The rock and climber weaving together, as John Gill, Castaneda, and Merleau-Ponty have all written. This bond, chiasm and truth was physically experienced, rather than theorized . . . perhaps yield[ing] no other answers but itself. . . . such joy! (Kaan, p. 9).

Achievement, too, is an obvious reason why many serious climbers climb. Indeed, one cannot find a climbing periodical today that does not emphasize speed, grade, and difficulty in climbing experiences.

[I was] *training and storing survival responses 'to stay alive'* (Beyer, p. 21).

I was immensely proud, yes. I had pulled it off, a great personal victory, a dream come true (Hesse, p. 127).

However, achievement is not overwhelmingly written about in these climbers' writings nearly as much as would have been expected. Nonetheless, the difficulties of routes or hard climbing experiences are always noted in these writings as a matter of course, and the recognitions should be taken as indicative of an orientation to extrinsic achievements.

Climbing as Character Definition A large number of quotes extracted from the writings focus on character-building and the secondary capabilities that Goffman (1976b) describes.

[Relating a quote by Vern Teyas] *'I love being in the mountains,' he said. 'From them I get feelings of self-sufficiency, confidence, and self-worth* (Davidson, p. 91).

. . . I began to question . . . then my mind seized, locked up with the thought of losing it and falling off into the void (Hesse, p. 127).

Ice climbing is so much a head game (Simpson, p. 20).

This was where you defined yourself, balanced tenuously between life and death.

(Simpson, p. 17).

It's not about being a 'hard' climber, not a challenge to prove how good we were, but a pure and simple test of ourselves (Simpson, 115).

You are what you do . . . (Twight, p. 39).

. . . self-validation through dangerous practices. . . . I had to prove myself over and over again . . . in my quest for power (Twight, p. 157).

They make the summit, not the style, the yardstick of success (Twight, p. 192) [in a criticism about the pollution of mountaineering that comes from posers who replace skill and courage with cash and equipment].

I tried to remain optimistic and not to picture myself rocketing off the lieback while I would try to enter the slippery offwidth cleanly and statically (Haan, p.6).

. . . to retreat now was also a major undertaking—it meant my complete demoralization and the trivialization of all eight years of my hard climbing and my search and yearning for true integrity (Haan, p. 7).

It is your will [rather than technical skills] that is most tested when climbing in Scotland
(Richardson, p. 123).

Climbing for Self-Realization The great majority of climbers' insights, reflections, and recollections in the writings—when they occurred—look to be about self-realization, about spiritual growth and expansion of the self, and about the meaning of life itself.

[Q: Did close calls—running out of food, being in avalanches, ever lead you to reconsider alpine climbing?] *'No, it just makes me appreciate the small things in life again--things that we usually take for granted* (Loomis [interviewing Kitty Calhoun], p. 109).

There on the mountain I had lived for a few days the life of the visionary, the mystic, prey to a spiritual exaltation undreamed of before. . . . The intensity of experience I had lived was above and beyond anything I had known (Ghirardini, p. 5).

Most extreme climbers are looking for an ascent to show them one more thing about life or themselves (Long, p. 46).

The Sentinel put it to me . . . 'What do you want?' . . . I had no answer to that question. . . . What was my purpose? (Wilford, p. 63).

Now that I have come back from death, I have embarked on a long and arduous process of regeneration that will require the dedication of my entire life . . . of what use are extreme faces? It is within that we find the most insurmountable barriers. We shall not find the seventh grade beyond the sixth, but in ourselves (Ghirardini, pp. 8-9).

I'm thrilled to be here because all I can do is my best and if that's not enough I'll still have gone through so many layers of myself that I'll remember it forever (Croft, p. 112).

. . . it was so much more. I hadn't conquered the mountain, far from it. I had engaged it, mentally and physically, in a profound way. I was leaving this place with a gift far greater than the vain glorious pride and I knew that it would be a long time before I would truly descend from the heights to which the mountain had taken me (Hesse, p. 127).

I used to be afraid that I would die young but after living for a while I got scared that I wouldn't (Twight, p. 156).

[After a long list of physical complaints and psychological misgivings about the route, 'Son of Heart'] *El Cap is a quest, a quest for yourself, a quest for happiness (Karl, p. 117).*

'Son of Heart' was for me a trip into an unexplored country, the land of my own psyche. I had never thought I could muster so much faith in myself after so much anxiety and

despondency . . . surely this enterprise shed some light on the darkness in myself, solving part of the riddle of who I am (Karl, pp. 129-130).

The whole notion of ‘deep play’—the gambling theory of extreme risk taking when the gambler stands to lose far more than he could ever possibly win—may well be an apt description of some levels of climbing, but playing the game in reality now seemed a conceited and ridiculous enterprise (Simpson, p. 27).

[C. Anker’s tribute to A. Lowe’s death in *Climbing Magazine*] *‘What drives us to climb? The exploration of the unknown has led humanity to where we are today . . . to progress spiritually and intellectually. . . For Alex, this is what climbing was about, the exploration of the soul, the trust and learning gained from attempting something difficult and improbable’ (Simpson, pp. 68-69).*

[A. Lowe] *‘I appreciate why I come to the mountains; not to conquer them but to immerse myself in their incomprehensible immensity—so much bigger than we are; to better comprehend humility and patience balanced in harmony, with the desire to push hard . . . and to share it in the long run with my friends . . . and with my own sons’ (Simpson, p. 69).*

[Brian Eno about Mark Twight] *When we undeniably see that we create our own misery, we stop. The force generated by this insight changes anyone. Even Mark. His internal*

struggles for personal freedom, outwardly manifested through his climbing, eventually transformed Dr. Doom into Dr. Om (Twight, p. 9).

I don't care about what I climb, only how it affects me (Twight, p. 30).

I know it sounds melodramatic and trashy, but from climbing I've learned about how to love—to love completely with one hundred percent of myself, to give everything to another person. To be willing to unselfishly die for or—harder still—live for another (Twight, p. 52).

Deprivation [a route on Mt. Hunter, Alaska] taught me about the existence of this mystic path in the mountains How can I be tired while climbing on the mountain when I have become the mountain? I have searched within myself through both passive and active meditation, for the tools to open this 'door' whenever I will it. I still search (Twight, p. 147).

For me, the point is not to climb the peak but to climb new ground both internally and externally (Twight, p. 162).

Climbing is the means I have chosen to define and understand myself (Twight, p. 201).

But within [me]—just below the surface—still worked away a strange young agony, terrible longing and sense of belongingness that had been subtly mounting for years and

not stop. And I could recognize this obsessive dilemma in many of my other climbing colleagues (Haan, p. 1).

For decades, progress in the climbing art was not towards safety . . . but into ever more transcendent flights of self-risk and existential knowledge with less and less equipment, more and more awareness and in explicable power (Haan, p. 2).

After my ascent, and typical of other climbers before me, the accomplishment and rite of passage were partly why I could bow out of the central camp scene and its infinite loop of harder and harder climbing Perhaps thus enlightened, I turned to new thoughts and still deeper ways of looking at my life, as I grew older (Haan, p. 3).

I saw that I would not be able to solve the riddle of my youth: who was I really and what was this world? And so now I would be lost (Haan, p. 6).

I began to feel that I might reach even further into myself just then and climb deeper than the danger itself, far deeper than I had ever done before, and out of some kind of ultimate love. . . . And I continued to hear the callat last centered and willing to leave the ordinary world in search of the answers and extreme beauty of this place(Haan, p. 7).

I still felt immaculately void, a plain vessel washed by a force, huge and beyond me, and my heart lay open but strong. The world seemed a miraculous and mysterious place and

I found myself now peaceful, a deep and small part of it. . . . I was set free so long ago [at this first ascent] to go ahead, have a bigger life, to start to take in a broader messier world, to try to be effective in that wildly hopeless place that seemed all so complex, troubled and wrong and to which I had no sense of belonging . . . I had been there, to what I thought was maybe, the other side or at least had found one big answer within. . . . my fulfillment was to have seen that yes in this world, there was something more inside it all, past mundanity, which if somehow reached, took on in or took one back (Haan, p. 9).

Climbers' responses from the climbers' forum about this research indicate that [summary of Supertopo responses here].

DISCUSSION

A Stage Model Of Climbing Purposes A stage model can be constructed that links these three different explanations together for why climbers climb. First, serious climbers climb for reasons of achievement (numbers, summits, grades) and for the attainment of flow. Next, climbers climb to build or define character. They do so to prove their worth to self and others in more and more difficult, high-stress situations. The deeper the pressure, the more their character is revealed. The last stage is a stage of deep spiritual self-realization.

The three stages of climbing development build on each other. Climbers learn the technical skills of climbing in the first stage and focus on their achievements, or learn to enjoy climbing in "the zone." In the second stage, they hone their discipline and their mettle of "the head game" in

high-stress climbing situations. In the first two stages of development, climbers' egos are enhanced and built-up by honing technical competencies and increased motivations for further achievements and flow.

I was strong. I could have done anything. I seethed with desire. Believing in my self-importance, I stroked and blessed my ego. Ambition was so precious. I worshipped it and stole for it. I rationalized every evil thing I ever did by weighing it against my ambition. I wanted to be a god without the boredom of sainthood (Twight, p. 23).

In the second stage, climbing purposes shift to a kind of artistry (Slanger, 1997), as climbers undertake a search for personal virtuosity and excellence. As they do so, another shift in consciousness begins to unfold as their individual personalities get in the way of their learning and growth. It is likely that repeated, voluntary, high-stress experiences engender far-reaching new perspectives on life. What were intrinsically rewarding experiences (flow) in the first stage turns to agonies, as climbers run headlong into their own egos. Their personal limitations are not their technical capabilities but the personal habitual patterns and conditions that they have built-up over many years. These agonies are the signs of spiritual development. Inevitably the most serious climbers begin to reject their individualized self in the third stage for a broader and more empathetic consciousness, where deeper connections with the world and its objects are revealed (Loori, 1999). The individualized "little self" begins to die, and a Greater Self begins to emerge that disintegrates the distinctions between "I" and "Thee" (McCaskey, 1988; Wilber, 1995).

Ilgner's (2003) descriptions of "the mental game" in climbing seem to recognize these three stages. He claims that better climbing is a question of personal power and flawlessness (the first two stages), morality, personal integrity, and attention to gaining self-knowledge of Self in the world (the last stage). Zen-like in his prescriptions, Ilgner advises climbers to become witnesses of their own being, center their consciousnesses, act with absolute decisiveness, and rest in the ultimate groundlessness of life to achieve sartorial excellence to truly learn and grow. A true "rock warrior" is motivated by love, learning, and consciousness.

The underlying suggestion posed by all resolutions is one of being in control, which, I realize now, is not at all the case . . . Chaos rules it all (Twight, p. 47).

Routes need not be 5.12, Grade VI, or above 26,000 feet to test and prove one's mettle or to encourage one to understand what is important in life. Stress is perceptual. With proof of character, climbers can break through into new realms of consciousness and being as much as any world-renown climber setting new records can. What matters in climbing—as it does in any realm of human activity—are true heart, close personal witnessing, honesty, attentiveness to what the world shows, deep moral integrity, and ever-widening expansions of consciousness (Ilgner, 2003).

The Meaning of Self-Realization in Climbing In the last stage of climbing, a climber transitions from the mundane everyday world into a more sublime and heroic world. Death in any guise is conquered by the birth of something new, by a spiritual transformation, by redemption. Indeed, the most creative acts in the world derive from some kind of dying to the everyday world so that

one comes back reborn, made great, and filled with creative powers. But first, the individualized self—the ego—must die.

Long (1999): *Many sages have said that a creative life requires . . . [an] arena where men and women have risked all* (p. 3).

Ghirardini (1999): *I came to find my own mediocrity and that of the world intolerable. I recognized that I . . . was degenerate. . . . I realized that I was not a man in the full sense of the word, . . . and the realization was so bitter that I often wept. . . . If I undertook “the Shroud” [a difficult route], it was precisely for that reason: to submit myself and my life to God’s purpose and it was, of course, a wholly egotistical act* (p. 6).

The journey of a hero is a path that tens of thousands have followed before. Seekers slay themselves when they thought others were to be slain. They travel to the core of their own existence when they thought they had to travel outward. They come to be with all of existence when they thought they needed to be alone. They find a god where abomination was expected. A universal, eternal, and perfected life celebrates its ultimate victory in the kiss of its own annihilation (*Kiss or Kill*). The love of the fate of death, and living as though one were already dead, are the experiences of tragic art, self-sacrifice, and redemption to something more sublime than one can express (Campbell & Moyers, 1988).

Twight (2001): *Words and numbers are meaningless for the artist* (p. 30). . . [and] *Death plays a huge role in why men climb I face death rather than avoid it I cannot turn off my hunger* (p. 104-105).

In Twight (2001), as said of their climbing experience on Nanga Parbat by Twight's climbing partner, Barry Blanchard: [it was like]*having sex with death* (p. 44).

The hero ventures forth from everyday life into a region of supernatural wonder, where extraordinary forces are encountered and a decisive victory is won. But the hero's journey is invariably a discovery of the Self. In the end, the hero is that which he or she came to find.

The purpose of (any crazy and ridiculous) religion (like climbing) is not to cure the individual but to detach him from the delusions that keeps him from his "at-one-ment." These agonies of breaking through one's personal limitations, battling with one's ego, are the agonies of spiritual growth. All art, literature, myth, philosophy, ascetic disciplines, cults, and callings (even climbing) are instruments to help the individual ("the little self") past his or her limited horizon into spheres of ever-expanding realizations (to a larger Self). In so far as any person is truly alive, the life of the hero will call him or her, for everyday life is the soul's sleep and death its awakening. The hero is the awakener of his own soul and ironically the very means of his individual dissolution (Campbell, 1968).

A heroic life is a life of transformation, of sacrifice, of extraordinary goals and virtues, of danger and violence, of risk, of genius and artistry, of self-denial and self-restraint, of charisma and

grace, of excellence and virtuosity—everything that everyday life is not. Everyday life is mundane, taken-for-granted, “commodified,” highly institutionalized, fragmented, differentiated, passive, sociable, vulnerable, desirous of attachment and earthly love, and oriented to wealth and property. Whereas a hero attempts to artistically create an ordered and grandly meaningful world by using his or her will to tame the world in pursuit of a higher purpose (God’s will, one’s own glory, survival of a community, etc.) by deliberately and decisively risking life itself, an anti-hero of everyday life rejects the *avant-garde*, genius, originality, extreme excellence, courage, high narratives and morals in favor of immediate and non-reflective experiences, playful frivolity, and the fragmentation of tongues and beliefs (Featherstone, 1992).

Stidious observers of climbing argue that the exaltation and transcendence that serious climbers write about are simply romantic, machismo, or artistic expressions about the grandeur and thrill of the mountains (Lester, 2004; Macfarlane, 2003). They seem to say that the climbers’ expressions cannot be real, any more than God can be real. Serious climbers’ expressions of that sort are only a reflection of broader cultural and social movements. They are a response to fragmented lives and modern living. Such realist positions are truly understandable, for the mythology of heroes—as a science or history—has to be absurd (Campbell, 1968). However, a mythology of heroes can explain and guide people’s development into more spiritually significant lives. Man is, and always has been, the crucial mystery in life (Wilber, 1995), and it is doubtful that the mystery is being plumbed by people who focus on their immediate self-interests in modern everyday life.

Viewing the Controversies in Climbing Through the Stage Model A stage model can explain how climbers talk about climbing controversies, and it can even explain how the controversies arise in the first place. Here are descriptions of six different controversies in the climbing community.

1. Defilements and Trespassing: Certain climbing areas and routes are out-of-bounds to climbing for social or cultural reasons. This includes defilements of images on the rock or defilements of the rock itself.
2. Aesthetics: With regards to what equipment might be appropriate to use on a route, bottom-up route construction, etc., there are disagreements about to what extent a *style* of climbing is important and appropriate on climbing routes.
3. Ethics: Following the method of a first ascent, bolting decisions, etc. are all indications of what climbing practices the community of climbers think are ethically right or wrong. (In time, aesthetics tend to become ethics.)
4. Behaviors in “The Death Zone”: Ultra-high altitude climbing situations present extraordinary situations for climbers’ personal decisions and compassion. How should climbers behave with others who are in-need in those environments when the climbers’ very lives depend on whether they decide—and how—to help others?
5. Guiding and Expeditions in Treasured Locations: The plans and organizations of guides and expeditions to lead climbers—who would otherwise be out-of-their league to attempt such a climb on their own—means that guides and guiding organizations may have different and conflicting responsibilities to their clients, to others they might encounter,

and to the locations they take their clients. This controversy includes the trashing (leaving debris in) of sacrosanct climbing areas.

6. Gentrification / Commoditization of Climbing: To what extent should efforts and resources be devoted to enable “climbing for everyone” in wilderness settings? On an organized basis (that is institutionally), what is the overall purpose of climbing?

Figure I

Analyzing Climbing Controversies with the Stage Model

Stages of Climbing Purposes			
Controversies	Attainment of Flow & Achievement	Character-Building & -Maintenance	Self-Realization
Defilements & Trespassing	Relegate Cultural Issues	Difficulty, Challenge Supersedes Cultural Considerations	Cultural Mores Are Valid. Respect the Ever-Widening Web of Life
Aesthetics	Important As “Style,” But Secondary to Achievements	“Style” Is Everything and Primary	Probably Important: Honor Community Membership & Respect Its Practices
Ethics	Probably Important: Establishes Standards for Grades & Summits	Very Important & Primary: How Character Is Graded, Determined, & Compared	Probably Important:; Honor Community Membership & Respect Its Practices
Behaviors in “The Death Zone”	Attainment & Achievement Primary; Technical Capabilities Stipulate What Is Possible	Shows Greater Character	Self-Sacrifice; Do Not Go into Death Zones Unless Willing to Self-Sacrifice for Others
Guiding & Expeditions	Summitting Is the Objective & Purpose; Get Clients on Top Safely & Ensure Organizational Success	<i>[Might Be Applicable—(See Outward Bound Programs)¹; Regular Adult Clients Usually Achievement-Oriented]</i>	<i>[Might Be Applicable—(See Outward Bound Programs)¹; Regular Adult Clients Usually Achievement-Oriented]</i>
Gentrification / Commoditization of Climbing	←	Follow the Model (It's about Helping Others Evolve Their Consciousness)	→

Figure I indicates how climbers would frame the various controversies in the climbing community depending upon what climbing purposes they follow. It is doubtful that any

climber's perspective falls into a single set of climbing purposes down through every controversy than, say, any individual's consciousness were equally developed along every dimension of knowledge or humanity (Wilber, 1995).

The purpose of the model and analysis is to suggest that climbers' purposes could likely shift over time through a progressive sequence. The panoply of arguments about any one controversial issue in the climbing world can be made simpler if discussants' objectives were unearthed and made evident.

Appendix I

*Elements of Face*¹

Poise: the capacity to suppress and conceal any tendency to become shamefaced with others.

Pride: the manifestations of compunctions to ensure an expressive order that is consistent with face. This is a duty to self.

Honor: when the same compunctions serve wider social units and receive support from the units for doing so (a group reinforcement).

Dignity: when a person handles with composure his body, his emotions, and the things he has physical contact with.

Considerateness: the expectation of going to certain lengths to save the feelings and face of others present, willingly and spontaneously. Those who witness another's humiliation and retain cool countenance are "heartless."

Shameless: Those who can contribute unfeelingly to their own defacement.

Tact, savoir-faire, diplomacy, social skills: these all reference the capacity to have some knowledge of "face work" and some experience in its use. To do so, one must become aware of the interpretations of others on his (and their own) acts, and the interpretations he was supposed to place on others' acts (which demands a perceptive actor).

Threats to face can be:

- Unintended or unwitting (*faux pas*, gaffs, boners)
- Meaning to offer insults to others

¹ Summarized from Goffman (1967a).

- Only incidental offenses, not out of spite

Threat-saving practices:

- Avoidance
- Various corrective processes

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