



Heroic Efforts: The Emotional Culture of Search and Rescue Volunteers

Jennifer Lois

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Winner of the 2006 Outstanding Recent Contribution Award from the American Sociological Association, Sociology of Emotions Section

Many search and rescue workers voluntarily interrupt their lives when they are called upon to help strangers. They awake in the middle of the night to cover miles of terrain in search of lost hikers or leave work to search potential avalanche zones for missing skiers, snowboarders, and snowmobilers in blizzard conditions. They often put their own lives in danger to rescue stranded, hypothermic kayakers and rafters from rivers.

Drawing on six years of participant observation and in-depth interviews, Jennifer Lois examines the emotional subculture of “Peak,” a volunteer mountain-environment search and rescue team. Rescuers were not only confronted by physical dangers, but also by emotional challenges, including both keeping their own emotions in check during crisis situations, and managing the emotions of others, such as those they were rescuing. Lois examines how rescuers constructed meaning in their lives and defined themselves through their heroic work.

Heroic Efforts serves as an easy to understand sociological introduction to the ways emotions develop and connect us to our surroundings, as well as to the links between the concept of heroism and other sociological theories such as those on gender stereotypes and edgework.



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