

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

JENNIFER LOIS, *Heroic Efforts: The Emotional Culture of Search and Rescue Volunteers*. New York and London: New York University Press. 2003. xi + 233 p. Index.

Heroic Efforts is an ethnography of a volunteer mountain search and rescue group, which the author joined and actively participated in for six years. The introduction and the first chapter do a nice job of describing the process of gaining entrée into a such a milieu, and the variety of challenges which may be faced by the ethnographer. Subsequent chapters examine the type of individuals in the group; how new volunteers were socialized; rescuers' management of their own emotions in crisis situations and how they managed the emotions of victims and family members; the ways in which survivors and families responded to rescuers; and the emotional rewards for rescuers arising from altruistic service to the community.

Lois uses the term "edgework" (Lyng, AJS, 1990) to describe how volunteer rescuers were engaged in physically risky activity while having to maintain emotional control in the face of potential crisis; in doing so they negotiate the "edge" between safety and danger and between calm and panic. Edgework required volunteers to master their own emotions as well as to manage the emotions of victims and family members. Lois outlines strategies used by volunteers to keep injured or frightened hikers from going into emotional shock or dissolving in hysteria—responses which would impede victims from cooperating in their own rescue. She also describes how volunteers helped family members to walk the fine line between maintaining hope and simultaneously facing the possibility of an unhappy outcome during searches.

Lois addresses the issue of how participation in this group is gendered. One might expect that women would be marginalized in their participation based on assumptions about their lesser strength. However, Lois argues that this is largely offset by the demanding training received by volunteers and the leaders' focus on skills learned. Instead, the author shows how expectations about women's emotional response in crisis situations are more important than notions about physical capabilities in differentiating male and female volunteers. Group leaders assume that women have less ability than men to maintain emotional control in the light of particularly horrific circumstances which rescuers may encounter such as having to retrieve the badly injured bodies of hikers who had fallen to their death. Not surprisingly, women are seen as better at comforting those who are injured or family members and more frequently assigned to these roles. Also of interest is how women themselves reproduce this gendered reading of their abilities.

Chapter 3 is particularly interesting for its description of the process of socialization into this group and how this was used to control access to symbolic rewards—particularly, being able to share in the heroic status that is conferred on the group by the community. Lois demonstrates how volunteer labour, while unpaid, is nevertheless subject to complex strategies of control and sanction which serve to re-define individual motivations. Lois shows how new volunteers were often motivated by self-interest, joining the group to seek personal adventures, learn specialized skills, or make friends. However, these individuals had to patiently earn their membership, investing substantial amounts of time and energy in attending meetings and training sessions before ever being allowed to participate in an actual rescue. More importantly, they had to demonstrate that they were willing to set aside egotistical goals—for example, by accepting assignments to mundane tasks which were part of rescue efforts or demonstrating that they would not take risks which could jeopardize the safety of other group members even though such behaviour might demonstrate their own bravery. Gaining heroic status was part of the pay-off for these rescue volunteers but it could only be gained by overcoming one's own self-interested reasons for joining such a group.

Heroic Efforts will interest those studying the motivation of volunteers, altruistic behaviour, and the organization of volunteer groups, and those interested in the topic of emotional labour. It could also be used in a qualitative methods course, if one was in search of an easily readable text to use as an example of well-organized ethnography.

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