



Each week, Benjamin Law asks public figures to discuss the subjects we're told to keep private by getting them to roll a die. The numbers they land on are the topics they're given.



1
DEATH

2
MONEY

3
SEX

4
RELIGION

5
POLITICS

6
BODIES

Dicey Topics

Daniel Bull

The 37-year-old Australian explorer and adventurer holds the world record as the youngest person to climb the highest mountain and highest volcano on every continent.

DEATH

Some people might look at what you do and think, "Daniel Bull has a death wish." Is that fair?

No it's not. I'm aware of the fatality stats for mountaineering in particular, pushing the limits as I do. But one of my greater assets is my in-depth preparation. That allows me to just focus on – and enjoy being in – the moment.

You've completed a successful unguided ascent of Everest, and in the Swiss Alps you've done one of the world's most dangerous climbs: the Eiger (known as Mordwand – literally, "murder wall" – in German). Have you come close to death?

I've racked up a few close calls over the years, including on the peaks you've mentioned. An early near-death experience was on my first expedition to the Himalayas when I was 23, climbing Ama Dablam – a peak Edmund Hillary labelled as "unclimbable". Completely exhausted after managing to reach the summit, we then crashed in a tent just beneath it. The next morning, we had to abseil down this vertical wall, but we'd left out the rope from the ascent. What I didn't realise was that by leaving the rope exposed, it had become covered in a thin crust of ice ... so instead of abseiling I was basically free-falling down this ice wall. It was the first time I thought, "This is it."

Wow. What happened next?

I began to furiously smash at the ice wall with my ice axe, trying to get some purchase. That didn't work, so I started kicking with my crampons, which are latched onto the boots. I could see I was very quickly approaching the end of the rope, but I just kept kicking, and the spikes managed to get purchase into the ice. It was probably in the last 50 metres of the fall and I just hung there for a while.

There are millions of people worldwide fleeing life-and-death situations. You lean into them. Why?

I really value the gift of life and want to grab it with two hands and make the most of it. What I've realised is that I feel most alive – and appreciate life more – when in extreme environments in nature. The more extreme, the greater perspective I get. It makes me aware of how small and inconsequential my life is. That's liberating, in a way.

POLITICS

Regarding the ethics of climbing a mountain such as Everest, how do you ensure your environmental and cultural impact is appropriate?

It's very much dictated by the government and policies. With Everest, unfortunately, it's open slather. You do need to pay, though. I've climbed on the south-east ridge route, which comes from Nepal, so you're paying about \$US15,000 to the Nepalese government for a permit. The hope is that part of



that goes towards maintaining the environment. But in terms of going to the toilet, well ... it's a less spectacular part of climbing.

Tell me how the practicalities work.

Well, it's very much inevitable ... [Laughs] At Everest Base Camp, you'll have some kind of facilities set out; each expedition will have a toilet tent and you manage that properly. Higher up, it's not so feasible. A common approach is to put one foot on either side of a small crevasse and do your business. Out of sight, out of mind. When public speaking, what values are you trying to instil in others?

The main message I'm trying to convey is to dream big and take steps out of your comfort zone to turn those dreams into reality. Anything is possible, especially with an open mind, perseverance and teamwork. I might be the one standing on the summit, but I'm representing my family and country. All my feats have been the result of a team effort.

What issues sway you when you vote?

The Es: education, energy, the environment and the economy. I'll add an "I" as well: infrastructure.

With those things in mind, has any party secured your vote in the next election?

Not even close.

SEX

Elite athletes are often told not to have sex before a big event. Is it the same for mountaineers before a climb?

For elite athletes, the sport or event they're about to participate in doesn't last weeks or months. But for mountaineers, when you're away from home, family and partners for a long period, and there's that inevitable risk you may not return, it's the opposite: you're going to want to capitalise on every last moment. [Laughs]

You've made it into the Guinness World Records book for your mountain/volcano climbing, and just last month for "highest altitude kayaking" at 5707 metres. Does this turn you into a sex symbol?

[Laughs] Let's say I'm still waiting, but thank you.

You've seen some incredible landscapes. Are any beautiful in a romantic way? Or are they so cold that you'd never want to get your clothes off?

They're extremely frigid conditions. At the same time, it's all very much about body warmth.

Survival is still a priority, which means you're very close to each other.

Trying to squeeze two people into one sleeping bag? Let's just say you're very close.

You've got a lot of attributes many people might find sexy: courage, stamina and physical strength.

What makes another person sexy for you?

Without a doubt: a good sense of humour, a sense of adventure, displays of kindness. And a nice bum. My girlfriend has all of the above. ■

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