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## **Adventure, Positive Psychology, and Narrative: the Wellbeing Impacts of Answering the Call to Adventure**

Kitrina Douglas 0000-0003-1481-9642, David Carless 0000-0003-1617-493X, Paula Reid 0000-0002-3687-9817 and Ruth Hughes 0000-0001-6920-2602

### **Abstract**

This chapter aims to explore the role of positive psychology and narrative theory in informing our understanding of adventures, adventurers, and the adventure story. We will consider factors which motivate and reward the adventurer, including inspiring narratives and wellbeing benefits. Whilst recognising that not all adventures result in positive or positively transformative outcomes, this chapter seeks to use the lens of evidence-based positive psychology to better understand how adventure stories might promote flourishing in both the adventurers recounting them and the audiences receiving them. A summary of some relevant positive psychology frameworks and concepts is provided, followed by a discussion of pertinent narrative theory. Finally, one well-known narrative structure, The Hero's Journey, is explored through a positive psychology lens, supported by evidence from the stories of adventurers.

### **An Adventurer's Point of View: Becoming Someone Else**

As soon as you start, you're there. You're - you're almost mentally someone else. You become the adventurer person. You cast off all your inhibitions and normalness and just, um, restrictions that come with middle-aged person living in middle-England and there's less – it's hard to describe. You're expected to be a certain type of person when you're not adventuring and there's limitations to that

almost, like you're not expected to go up a ladder and paint the front of your house because society assumes you shouldn't or it's dangerous or it's not safe so that feels quite restrictive. So, you become a shadow of ... or you become, I think, less a person because of society's expectations and norms and worries and fears and all that. But then when you're on an adventure, you can just really, really be yourself and you can become stronger again and more natural perhaps, more capable. You can wear what you want, kind of do what you want, but you haven't got that peer pressure of not climbing that tree or caution that comes with the health and safety age of living in modern Britain. So, during [adventure] – lovely; freedom, liberation, be who you want to be, stronger, more decisive, more capable. I can navigate when I'm an adventurer. I can't navigate when I'm not an adventurer. I can do scarier stuff when I'm adventurer. I'm not allowed to do scary stuff when I'm not an adventurer. I can be fit and healthy and muscly and work hard and sweat and cry and bleed when I'm an adventurer, but I'm not supposed to be when I'm not an adventurer. It's so ... it's a hugely ... it feels more authentic, uh, there's another word like authentic, um, compatible or something. Coherent, I think. So, and then your head is in the right zone, so although it's the same worries and the situation that you've pre-thought about, once you're in it, you just deal with it. You just calculate everything and make decisions and when you're in country, if you're in another country, the attitude is so much more, you know, we can and we can solve it and don't worry or no worries. And even when the going gets tough if you're in adventure mode. So, sometimes I liken myself to becoming Lara Croft when I'm adventuring because I just become her. I'm tougher and wiser and more capable without the cotton-wool stuff that I get at home.

'Lara'

## **Adventure, Positive Psychology, and Narrative: the Wellbeing Impacts of Answering the Call to Adventure**

### **Adventures and Positive Psychology**

This chapter aims to explore the role of positive psychology and narrative theory in informing our understanding of adventures, adventurers, and the adventure story. We will consider factors which motivate and reward the adventurer, including inspiring narratives where adventurers leave behind the ordinary world and push beyond

pre-existing boundaries. Whilst recognising that not all adventures result in positive or positively transformative outcomes, this chapter seeks to use the lens of evidence-based positive psychology to better understand how adventure stories might promote flourishing in both the adventurers recounting them, and the audiences receiving them.

*Answering the call to adventure* can result in multiple and diverse experiences which may be “positive” or “negative”. In the heart of an adventure, we can be enduring, surviving, coping, or flourishing; often stretching our understanding of who we are and of what we are capable. As Reid and Kampman propose, “to ‘go on an adventure’ is to choose to have a natural peak experience that is good for our eudaemonic happiness and psychological wellbeing” (2020, p. 8). Positive Psychology (PP) is described as “the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 103). Although there are other frameworks through which to consider the adventure experience, an understanding of evidenced positive psychology offers us insight into how and why adventures, adventure stories and the use of adventurous language, metaphors and words, might result in positive affect both for the adventurer and the listener or reader.

The origin of positive psychology owes much to ancient Greek philosophers, to the Humanistic psychology movement and to therapeutic psychology, amongst others, and still this evolving field continues to develop and redefine itself, embracing all that contributes to optimal human functioning and flourishing, including so-called “negative” emotions (Lomas, 2016) or negative inputs (Wong, 2011). At the 1999 American Psychological Association annual conference, Seligman reminded his audience of their responsibility to nurture “what is best in ourselves” (Seligman, 1999, p. 560) and as Rona Hart puts it, to “draw on what is right with people – their strengths, courage, optimism, resilience and many other capacities” (2020, p.2) all of which undoubtedly contribute to the positive experiences – or mindsets – of many adventurers.

Let’s take a brief look at three of the more well-established PP models and how they may relate to adventuring. The five elements of Martin Seligman’s positive psychology PERMA model (Seligman, 2018) are commonly reported as being experienced on adventures: Positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2013), Engagement (Youssef-Morgan & Bockorny, 2014), Relationships with others (Reis & Gable, 2003), finding Meaning (Peterson & Park, 2014), and a sense of Achievement (Howell, 2009). Adventurers may also experience the positive aspects described in Ryff’s Psychological Wellbeing model (1989) including: Life-Purpose; Autonomy; Personal Growth; Environmental Mastery; Positive Relationships and Self-Acceptance – six categories central to the facilitation of optimal wellbeing. Finally, within the concept of Psychological Capital, can be found “HERO”

with its four tenets of Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism; all linking to life satisfaction and adventure experiences (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

Clearly there are many Positive Psychology concepts that underpin the purpose and benefits of “going on an adventure” or participating in adventurous activities, including the “dark side” of the journey. Experiencing “negative” emotions during times of difficulty and challenge can arguably have positive outcomes, as adventurers experience stressors, challenge and adversity, potentially resulting in resilience and coping skills (Lazarus & Folkman 1984), and harnessing flow, optimism, self-efficacy and grit, to name a few.

Adventure itself could be described – or prescribed – as a Positive Psychology Intervention (PPI) which demands a state of mindfulness or flow from the adventurer, both of which are deemed to be positive states of wellbeing. Additionally, the language and narratives associated with adventuring (such as *rising to the challenge*, *weathering the storm*, *getting to the summit*, or *turning the corner*), may incorporate a similar explanatory style to second wave positive psychology (Ivtzan et al., 2015) and heroic or relational narratives, which will be reviewed further in this chapter.

### **Adventure Storytelling**

Adventure stories call us into the elsewhere, transporting us beyond our ordinary lives and across time. From *once upon a time* to “a galaxy far, far away” (Lucas, 1977) we may “boldly go where no man has gone before” (Delahunty, 2010, p. 52). It is the stuff of Legends. Some of the oldest and most enduring stories are great adventure tales: The Epic of Gilgamesh (Kovacs, 1989); The Odyssey (Homer, 2015); The Mahabharata (Rajagopalachari, 1970) and Beowulf (Klaeber, 1936), for example. These epic stories, and the influence they have on other stories, seep into our understanding of reality, socially constructing what is possible, who we think we are, and, indeed, who we have the potential to become.

We, and our identities – and our potentiality – are influenced by stories. In every culture we use stories to build and shape our understanding of the world, how it works and how we work within it. This influences our mindsets and feeds our wisdom. The recounting of an adventure story involves reflection, sense-making and awareness (whether conscious or unconscious) of narrative form.

Many of us, as readers or as audience, are entertained and inspired by stories of adventure, creating meaning in a world where story form has been inundated by bite-sized social media and messages of consumerist materialism. Stories of perseverance, grit, determination, success, failure and achievement over the odds can play a role in boosting, rather than reducing, positive affect (Mager & Stevens, 2015).

Evidence suggests that both the recounting and receiving of a story could be a positive psychology intervention (Rutledge, 2016). The recounting of the adventure story may prove to be of benefit to the wellbeing of the adventurer reflecting on their reality, narrating (and perhaps reauthoring) selected events, but also to the recipient as a form of Aristotelian catharsis (Kruse, 1979), in the experiencing of which they can safely process unsafe emotions; or to reveal possibilities, inform and inspire. As Parker and Wampler explain (albeit when talking about the use of story in therapy):

It is common to experience emotional changes while engaged in a book, television program, or movie. Feelings of excitement, sadness, and other emotions are experienced while following the storyline. *[If the recipient of the story]* is able to identify with the protagonist of this story and experience the emotional changes, having these feelings can be useful... shifting the emotion from discouragement to success can begin to open up possibilities ...

(2006, p. 155)

Adventure stories recount the capacity of humans to overcome adversity and transform themselves and their life's purpose through suffering, struggle and privation, giving us hope we can ourselves do something never done before. This harnessing of meaning (such as can be found in Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, 2004), can be utilised for overall positive effect; acknowledging and accepting the power of negative emotions we experience when enduring difficulties and providing coping or performance enhancing strategies (Lomas, 2016). Essentially, the adventure creates opportunities for the adventurer to be broken and remade, and thus to grow and transcend (Dabrowski, 1966). Emotionally, the adventure story can do likewise for its recipient. As Crites writes in his seminal paper *The Narrative Quality of Experience*, "we live our lives from day to day, but we understand our life as if it were a story" (1971). The paper lists the benefits of journaling for adults, including: personal growth and development; intuition and self-expression; problem-solving; stress-reduction and health benefits; and reflection/critical thinking. Thus, journaling may be regarded as another form of storytelling (or processing) – an activity that many adventurers undertake to capture their lived experience whilst on adventure. Journaling, or writing down the adventure story, may prove to be a useful tool for reviewing or debriefing, thus potentially decreasing risk whilst on adventure, or reducing mental or physical distress.

The processing and telling of the adventure story itself could be considered as related to the epochs of adventuring: pre-, during and post-experience for both the participant(s) and the listeners. Preparing for and anticipating the adventure, engaging in the adventure, and savouring memories through recounting the experience can boost positive affect as we mentally time travel (Suddendorf & Corballis, 2007). Reid & Kampman (2020) also discerned the significance of the adventure epochs in their research on the purpose and benefits of expeditionary adventuring. The experience – and the story – starts at the very first thought of adventure and has the potential to continue to journey’s end.

## **Adventure Narratives**

### **Introduction**

Across the centuries a variety of scholars from different traditions and disciplines have contributed to our current understanding of Narrative Theory (see for example Mikhail Bakhtin, David Epstom and Michael White). For us, the insights of John McCloud, Dan McAdams, Arthur Frank and Hilde Lindeman Neilson have richly infused our research. Below, we outline some of the theoretical tenets of narrative theory which will be followed by some practical implications.

### **Narrative Theory**

Before looking at what the theory means in practice there is an element to clarify. Some scholars use the terms “story” and “narrative” interchangeably, others believe there are subtle differences worth maintaining. When we use the term *story* it usually relates to a tale about a character or event and what happens, there is a plot, and an arc to what is being described as well as consequences. In contrast *narrative*, takes on a more symbolic, overarching framework. Arthur Frank suggests a narrative type is the most general storyline that can be recognised underlying the plot and tensions of particular stories. When we listen to people’s stories, *narrative* becomes a listening device to unpick and understand cultural expectations, the types of actions that will be validated and the types of actions that will cause trouble for the teller including silencing, exclusion, stigmatisation, or loss of mental health.

While there are many insights that might be gleaned from studying narrative the following are some of the most important to keep in mind:

- Humans are storytelling animals who make sense of their experience, of time, relationships, events, and so on, through creating and sharing stories.
- An individual begins to shape a particular identity through talking about their motivations, experiences, and what they mean; and by sharing stories. In other words, they begin to understand themselves as a ‘person’ who will do A but not B. From observing the actions and behaviour of the individual, others – such as family, friends, the media – also begin to shape the individual’s identity, by telling their own stories about them. Thus, our identities are both personally and culturally shaped and validated.
- A storyteller uses the building blocks available within their environment to create and share their stories. That is the words, metaphors, similes, adjectives, the way the story is put together, along with how the story is narrated, is learned from what is accessible. Thus, from an individual story we also learn about the storyteller’s community, and the conventions of that culture or sub-culture.
- Over time, stories tend to cluster in ways that give rise to recognisable types of plot. The one we often use is the hero narrative, which is where the protagonist takes on a series of daring acts to achieve a super-human feat.
- The process whereby some story plots gain greater recognition leads to master or dominant narratives. These are stories that either carry a moral force such that certain actions and behaviours are justified over others, or leads to some behaviours becoming devalued, silenced and / or tabooed.
- A problematic aspect of dominant narratives is they can misrepresent, oppress, finalise and silence people whose lives and stories fail to align or conform with the dominant story plot. They might also silence those who have evidence that challenges the truth of the dominant story. For example, most of us will recognise the American Dream, but also know it is not working for many ethnic and minority groups in the USA. Reports about adventurers such as Captain Preet Chandi and Nirmal ‘Nims’ Purja also help reduce the dominant narrative of white, western male conquerors.
- Counter narratives, in contrast, are plots that identify, resist and undermine the authority of dominant narratives by bringing to light morally relevant details that are missing or misrepresented (Douglas & Carless, 2015).



- The stories we tell (and those that we are fearful of telling), and the identity that is shaped in the process, are linked in very powerful ways to our mental health; to being accepted and validated within the cultures we live and work. The opposite is also the case.

### **Identifying Narrative Types**

In considering narrative types, we might want to reflect on how different kinds of narratives act as listening devices around stories and thus how they impact upon us.

For example, Arthur Frank identified three different types of stories that cancer patients shared regarding their cancer journey. The first, he called the *restitution narrative*, a story plot which focussed on getting back to health. In its most succinct form, the story plot was “yesterday I was healthy, today I am sick, and tomorrow I will be healthy again”. Such story plots act like a map for the ill person’s journey influencing the types of treatments doctors offered, the expectancy of the patient and how they (and family) describe their experiences. A parallel for this in adventure might be of an adventurer overcoming significant hurdles to achieve their adventure objectives and return safely home.

The second type of illness story – a *chaos narrative* – reported by Frank was largely incommunicable; the individual lived in trauma or fear, was unable to express what they were experiencing and had no map for how to escape, in short, life was in chaos. On an adventure, the protagonist may be physically or psychologically lost, meandering on their journey of ups and downs with no real sense of direction or conclusion.

The third type of narrative was the *quest narrative*. Here the ill person is on a journey where a return to health was not the only or most important destination. These storytellers talked about being transformed by their experiences such that they had learned something important or become something they wouldn’t have expected but now value. Whether surviving cancer, or in death, the transformation of this *journey* was key, as opposed to getting back to health. Additionally, often these storytellers storied their cancer as a positive step on this transformational journey. Transformative quests for adventurers are referred to later in the hero’s journey section (or see Chapter 12).

Frank suggested one issue with the restitution narrative with a ‘return to health’ story being the only outcome, led to there being few conversations about death, and no room for cancer to be storied positively. Without considering death and the type of death that might be best, there was little option for refusing treatment and it sometimes led to sick patients trying new medicines and treatments with no hope of success, often encouraged to do so by loving caring relatives desperate for them to live. If getting better was the only goal with everything

invested in this outcome, it's unsurprising that the types of stories that were developed were about "fighting" and "beating cancer" as the patient became the battle ground. In this context "fighting to the end" was storied as a positive result.

Similarly, if adventure narratives focus solely on achieving the end objective of the adventurer, such as reaching the summit, there may be less room for transformation, connection, achievement, purpose and growth in the upwards climb.

### **Narrative Types in Sport**

In analysing the life stories of multiple tournament winners in sport we discovered three core narrative types (see Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2006; Douglas & Carless, 2009). These may also be applied to the adventurer story (especially those that involve elements of competition, or specific goal attainment). The first we called the *performance narrative*; a story plot where the individual is expected to dedicate their life to winning, and tends to story a need to sacrifice all other activities, interests or relationships to win. For these individuals winning increases self-worth and esteem, while losing has the opposite effect, reducing self-confidence and worth. The results for tellers of performance narratives is that life often becomes an emotional yoyo, dependent on the next win or what was happening on the course.

The *discovery narrative*, in contrast, is the antithesis to what we have just described. The discovery storyteller recounts achieving success without prioritising winning ahead of relationships, education, self-development, and other interests. As such these individuals develop a multidimensional identity and sense of self and these provide additional sources of self-worth not related to sport success.

The third type of narrative we called a *relational narrative*. These storytellers talked about the journey as being important rather than the destination, and other travellers on this journey as being important, as opposed to the trophy, cup or medal. Though it should also be said, these individuals were no less successful to those in the performance narrative group.

By presenting three different narratives in sport, these counter narratives provide an important resource and new options for narrating life experiences. In 2015, after reading the three different types of story at the Recreation Alliance Conference "Sporting Minds" at Wembley Stadium, a mountain climber introduced himself to us and we chatted about what he took from the stories. He mentioned that the narrative types were similar to what he was experiencing in climbing where some people wanted to "conquer" the mountain and would let nothing get in their way to the summit. Others, like him he said, aligned more with the discovery narrative and viewed the

experiences as an opportunity to learn and discover something about themselves, their climbing partners or their technique. What was validating to this individual was that his way of experiencing climbing had in some way been validated, he didn't have to focus on beating the mountain or sacrifice his love of discovery.

**The Hero's Journey Explored through a Positive Psychology Lens**

Although there are many forms of plot, the universal story of "The Hero's Journey" (Campbell, 1949) is a useful lens to connect real and fictional adventure stories with positive psychology theory, thus further exploring potential psychological benefits within the adventures we experience and narrate. The basic premise of "The Hero's Journey" (a global monomyth) is that a story's protagonist goes on a journey comprising trials, allies and enemies, and returns a hero. It provides a rite of passage narrative, depicting a departure from the known world, a journey of tests, initiation and transformation, and a returning back to home. This classic structure is found in many iconic films, books and games, such as Star Wars, The Hobbit, Alice in Wonderland, The Matrix, Frozen, The Lion King, Harry Potter, Lost, The Legend of Zelda, and so on. Campbell describes it thus:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: The hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

(2014, p. 23)

Campbell divided the whole journey into specific stages of story, which we can further explore in terms of wellbeing and specific positive psychology concepts relating to these stages. Each stage is listed below with potential psychological associations. This is a suggested relationship with examples below:

Hero's Journey Stages	Positive Psychology Concepts
1. the ordinary known world	
2. the call to adventure	Optimism & hope Self-determination

	<p>Motivation towards / away from</p> <p>Psychology of Possibility</p> <p>Growth mindset</p>
3. crossing the threshold	<p>Goal pursuit</p> <p>Shattering of the assumptive world</p> <p>Commitment</p> <p>Fear, Courage</p> <p>Liberation</p>
4. the journey	<p>Goal Agency and Pathways</p> <p>Hedonism &amp; eudaemonia</p> <p>Flow, mindfulness, presence</p> <p>Psychophysiological movement</p> <p>Motivation, Drive</p> <p>Savouring</p> <p>Awe</p>
5. trials, challenges and tests	<p>Resilience, grit, hardiness</p> <p>Mental toughness (not mental fragility)</p> <p>Sisu</p> <p>Self-efficacy</p> <p>Coping</p> <p>Character strengths &amp; virtues</p> <p>Positive power of negative emotions</p>
6. mentors and allies	<p>Positive relationships, social support</p> <p>Gratitude</p> <p>Compassion</p> <p>Empathy</p>

7. enemies, temptations and distractors	Self-regulation Forgiveness
8. the ultimate ordeal	See (5) above Mortality awareness Peak & Plateau experiences
9. reward (achievement, positive emotions)	Eudaemonic wellbeing Meaning Accomplishment Self-awareness Identity Atonement
10. transformation and resurrection	Post-Traumatic Growth Post Adventure Growth Cross-cultural growth Identity integration Transformation Transcendence
11. return & adjustment, returning with the boon	Gratitude Wisdom Growth Positive ageing

### **The Hero's Journey and the Call to Adventure**

In this section we will follow the different stages of the hero's journey and link them to adventure experiences.

Some of these concepts particularly resonate with "extended-period expeditionary adventuring" (Reid &

Kampman, 2020) – enduring, “heroic” journeys involving pre-, during and post-adventure epochs. In the original qualitative research, Reid interviewed seven expeditionary adventurers with multiple, extended adventures under their belts. Between them they cycled, walked, sailed, run, skied and climbed around the world several times, including both Poles and the tallest peaks. In their phenomenological storytelling (and as seen in the selected quotes below), we can begin to understand the external and internal journeys these adventurers experienced. Starting from a place of dissatisfaction in their known, ordinary world; through to their return as “heroic” figures; resurrected, transformed, self-actualised – or at the very least, psychologically stronger and wiser.

Here Ted – one of the seven expeditionary adventurers interviewed – begins his “hero’s journey” at Stage One in his known and ordinary world as a discontented tennis teacher:

... I could feel inside I didn't feel like I was fulfilling my potential. And so I had my big massive dream to be like, you know, the next big Tim Henman and there I was teaching tennis to children just thinking, “I'm a waste, I'm useless.” ... and then I started to reflect a little bit on my life and I took time out of my life, which I've never done before, you know, to actually think.

Other adventurers did not always feel happy or fulfilled in their ordinary worlds, like Jack, a round-the-world sailor: “It's not about just ticking along and then you die. What a waste”. He felt there was more to life, as did multi-expeditioner Lara: “... not sitting at home and doing tapestry or something. I would have gone mad if I'd have grown up in the Victorian era”. Sitting at home, adventurers may want more, as they strain against perceived mundanity. For these individuals, their known world may not provide them with sufficient growth, challenge and newness to extend their potential and drive for self-development. In Seligman’s PERMA model engagement is key to wellbeing, and for adventurers, engagement with the unknown may be more appealing than residing in the ordinary world.

The second – and critical – stage of the hero’s journey: the *call to adventure*, may be subtle: “It sat there like a seed ... I didn’t even know it was there ...” (Ted); a call that shines: “... it was like a light that came on” (Dora) or an actual call such as the one Joanna received:

... the chance happening, if you like, was a phone call in the office. I was working as a journalist in London and I had a friend ... asking if I would like to report on an expedition on Everest and, um, I said yes.

Campbell provocatively suggested: “We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us. The old skin has to be shed before the new one can come” (Osbon, 1991, p.8). Referencing the snake reminds us of a Harry Potter symbol: Voldemort’s archetype and the symbol of the Slytherin in Hogwarts, whose headmaster suggests: “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (Rowling, 1998). One choice we make is how we respond to the call to adventure.

The choice to answer the call is an intriguing and life-hanging moment of decision-making. The “Yes Tribe” founded by adventurer Dave Cornthwaite embodies just that point – to say yes more ([www.sayyesmore.com](http://www.sayyesmore.com)) and thus prevent life passing by. Assuming the call to adventure is answered with an affirmative, the adventurer then *crosses the threshold* and departs their known (safe, secure, comfort zone) world taking a leap of faith into the unknown. The adventurer Lara describes it thus:

I think the day before you start is possibly the hardest day because it's all built up into a big tidal wave of anticipation and all your energy is in check because you haven't started and you haven't set foot out there and, um, it's kind of worry about the unknown, I suppose.

At this point of departure, Jack describes the new world as a “bubble world” when “your focus is on your adventure” and you perhaps change your narrative or identity becoming “Lara Croft”. This is an early stage of transformation, where both the landscape, and the inner world of the hero, changes from *terra firma* to *terra incognita*. We go from the known world into the unknown; from our comfort zone to our stretch. *Crossing the threshold* into the realm of adventure, necessitates the adventurer engaging with a goal. The reality of the new endeavour can cause the pre-existing assumptive world to shatter (Janoff-Bulman, 1989) opening new perspectives and possibilities.

It is now time for the journey itself “getting further and further away from home” (Emma). Ted, our frustrated children’s tennis coach, is now off on an epic adventure, cycling 40,000 miles:

And I felt the transition from the beginning more kind of like just scrambling and just trying to fight through every day because it was all a bit too much, but then as I started to progress in the journey, I was like, ‘Okay. Now I know what this is all about ... I’ve just got to get to the end of every day.’

... it’s like the journey just became bigger than me, just totally and utterly like this wasn't to do with me anymore.

The adventurous, heroic journey is not an easy one, and we posit that it is sometimes purposefully chosen by adventurers to strengthen or test themselves. Sean, a *Grand Slam Adventurer* describes it as: “testing myself, you know, pushing the boundaries”. Sean goes on to describe a very challenging time when he was stuck up Denali (mountain) in a storm:

... that was physically horrible. It was painful. I was hallucinating after a couple of days on the mountain, just lying there on the ice. It was not enjoyable and I do remember saying, "I'm never going to do this again.

Perhaps for Sean, this was also a point of utmost despair and the nadir of that particular expedition.

Adventurers face *trials, challenges and tests* inherent in the journey, and if we include the Hero’s Journey structural elements of *enemies, temptation and distractors*, and the concept of *the ultimate ordeal*, the positive psychology concepts of coping, resilience and post-traumatic growth may be of particular relevance in supporting adventurers. Second wave positive psychology (Ivtzan et al., 2015) suggests that through adversity the characteristics of resilience and recovery result in transformational growth. Duckworth and Gross (2014) advocate the employment of self-control and grit as determinants of success, especially when performing in extremes and beyond self-perceived limits (Lahti, 2019). Evidence from stories told by adventurers suggest these factors surely contribute to mental toughness and endurance under pressure (Crust & Clough, 2005). En-route, challenges include *enemies, distractions and detractors* such as the dementors in Harry Potter described thus: “Dementors ... drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them ... Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you” (Rowling, 1999). Ordinary people also can drain the hero, (or anyone anytime in life), as our adventurers describe: “they’d just try and scare me and, ... one guy it's like said, ‘Oh, you'll never make that’ ” (Ted); or “... of course people are going to



tell you that you're stupid and you're foolish and, you know, you're silly for even thinking that, you know, that you can accomplish that thing” (Emma). The detractor or enemy can even be yourself: “It's proving to me that I can do it. Proving to me that I'm not as bad as I think I am” (Sean).

There are also positive forces who aid the adventurer on their journey; *allies, mentors and supporters* who facilitate progress, who encourage, motivate and strengthen with their kindness. Ted, at a time of loneliness as he ran 5,000 miles solo across Canada, came to a point where: “I finally cracked and I thought, I just need people, just need human contact ... eventually I got invited into her house for tea and biscuits”; and Emma: “going into a bread shop bursting into tears and being so thankful that he'd just given me a bag of stale bread”. Sometimes the friendly ally is more significantly helpful such as a guide or Sherpa as Joanna recounts from her Everest climb: “I mean, but for Tran, I probably wouldn't have done it ... he kind of just allowed my confidence to fall to the right side of the line”.

It is unsurprising that good relationships support positive psychology concepts of subjective wellbeing, (Lucas & Dyrenforth, 2006). For the adventurer, especially for those in extreme situations, support from fellow travellers and those they encounter, can be the difference between life and death. Although definitions of support are debatable (Veiel & Baumann, 2014), research suggests that those in receipt of support do better in adverse conditions than those who do not have access to it.

At the darkest hour, there is an *ultimate ordeal* or nadir of the journey; the fundamental test (and thus strengthening of the spirit or *psyche*). Described as the “belly of the whale” this place is dark and deep, often portrayed in film as a tunnel, cave or dungeon – or even garbage disposal pits such as in *Star Wars: A New Hope* and *Toy Story 3* – and may represent our subconscious: “On an expedition when, you know, you don't think you could get any lower and all you want to do is find a dark hole and live in it”, Emma appreciates however that it may be the contrast with the darkness – the struggle or suffering – that provides the enlightenment; the post-traumatic growth:

I try and embrace that feeling because I know that when I come out of that bad place, the  
- the happiness after is going to be so amazing and intense and I'm going to be so much  
stronger from the pain that I felt that's it's - that I think it's something to be embraced  
and appreciated, I think.

The *reward* is the boon. The elixir of life; the *transformation and resurrection* of the spirit, soul or heart: “I know that adventure saved my life”, says Dora; “my heart is fixed” claims Emma; “I ultimately felt, um,

accepted and it was almost like I was an onion and I just peeled back loads of layers of myself and – and it was okay. People actually liked me and it was okay” says Ted.

On returning home – and “there’s no place like home” according to Dorothy (Vidor et al., 1939) – the hero needs to adapt back to the ordinary world and the adventurer needs to adjust too, while perhaps grappling with “post-adventure blues” (Smith & Barrett, 2016). After such peak experiences, adventurers and heroes return home transformed and resurrected (Hopkins & Putnam, 2013), bearing gifts potentially including wisdom, gratitude and altruism as, through story, they support would-be adventurers and inspire the next generation.

In conclusion the journey itself may promote physical and psychological wellbeing. Quite aside from the effects of being outdoors in green or blue spaces (Gascon et al., 2015, Gascon et al., 2017), there are well-evidenced mental wellbeing impacts from the physical engagement of moving and using one’s body. As a wellbeing intervention, physical activity operates on many levels, improving positive emotions (Ekkekakis et al., 2005), encouraging autotelic engagement and flow (Nakamura & Csikzentmihalyi, 2014) and facilitating a number of human needs inherent in goal pursuits (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Adventurers report joy and awe in savouring the environment around them (Buckley, 2020; Reid & Kampman, 2020) – the process and the journey mattering as much as the destination. This savouring in the present time, recalled through the adventure story, can also create wellbeing and, arguably, further aspects of optimism and hope towards future adventures to come (Biskas et al., 2019).

Let’s leave the last words of our narrative with Ted the disillusioned tennis coach, who finally concluded that adventure: “... fills your soul, there and then, you move on with life”.

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