Perceived Growth Following Endeavors to Isolated, Confined, and Extreme Environments:
Salutogenesis in the Aftermath of Antarctic Expeditions

by

Patrick Nicoll
B.A., Gonzaga University, 2014

A Thesis Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in the Department of Psychology

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I acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.
Abstract

The environmental and psychosocial adversity inherent in remote polar locales has historically been framed in pathological terms. However, a burgeoning body of evidence suggests that stressful conditions across isolated, confined, and extreme (ICE) environments may elicit positive growth outcomes as well. The purpose of this cross-sectional, retrospective study was to assess the incidence and correlates of Post Expedition Growth (PEG) in returned Antarctic expeditioners. The prevalence of five specific personal growth indicators – ‘new opportunities,’ ‘relating to others,’ ‘personal strength,’ ‘spiritual change,’ and ‘appreciation of life’ – along with individual and group variables that have been associated with growth in trauma-exposed populations (i.e., coping, mindfulness, personality traits, personal value priorities, adverse childhood experiences, and expedition/experience specific variables) were examined using a mixed methods approach. Quantitative results indicate a moderate, positive association between proactive coping and appreciation of life, as well as between universalism (i.e., a sense of harmony or oneness with humanity and the natural world), new possibilities, and appreciation of life. Qualitative findings provide a more nuanced understanding of the five dimensions of PEG and underscore the emergence of a sixth dimension, an enhanced relationship with nature. Further research is needed to illuminate knowledge gaps in ICE environment research, and to help identify potential countermeasures for individuals and groups faced with comparable adversity factors in their immediate environments (i.e., within the current context of COVID-19). A deeper understanding of PEG in ICE environments – as well as promotive factors that strengthen positive outcomes – will serve to inform the development of countermeasures to mitigate health and wellbeing risks following exposure to isolation and confinement in extreme environments.