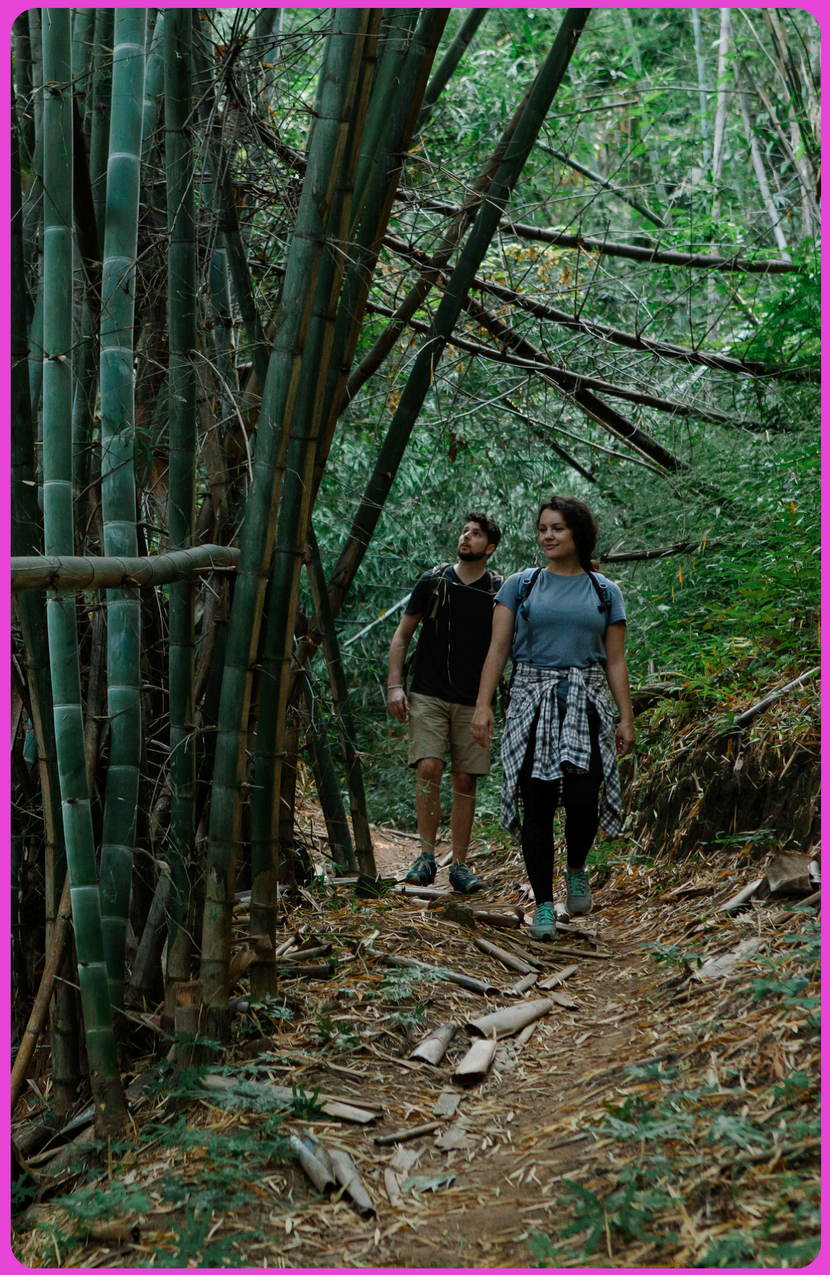
Exploring the Psychodynamic Approach



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Understanding Psychodynamics

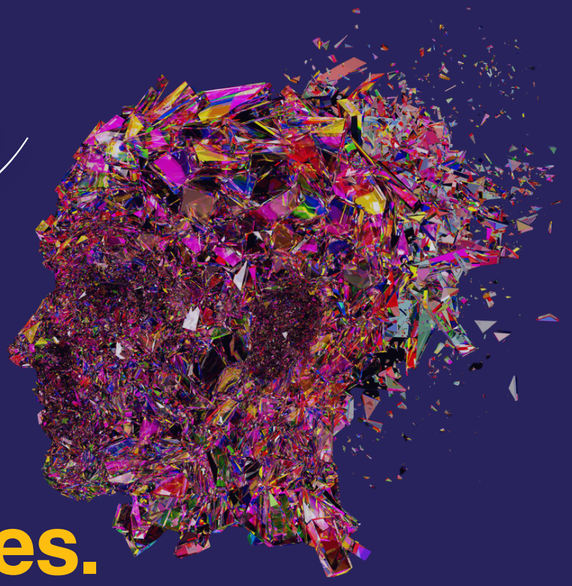
The Unconscious Influencing Behavior

The psychodynamic approach focuses on the **unconscious processes** and emotional dynamics that shape human behavior, emphasizing early experiences and their relevance to current relationships. This also has connections to our experience in the outdoors, with nature, and in adventure settings.



THEN & THERE

Main *Assumptions*



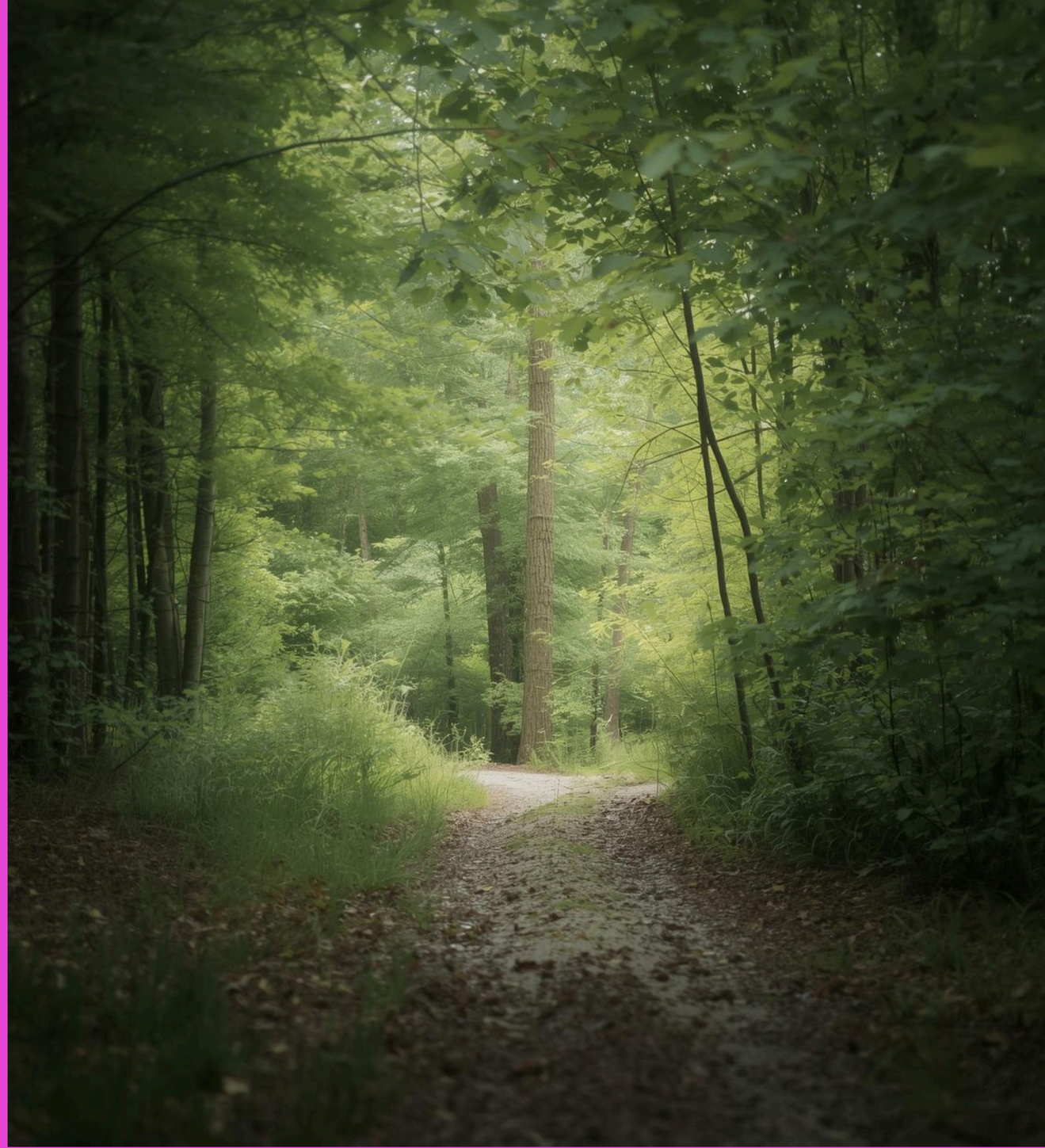
Our unconscious mind contains elements we are unaware of, such as feelings, thoughts & memories.

Current behaviours, relationships & personality are heavily influenced by childhood experiences

While initial theorists like Freud considered childhood as determinant, psychodynamic theorists now acknowledge the combined influence of history, genes and environment.

Foundational Figures in Psychodynamics

Key theorists like **Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein**, **John Bowlby, Erik Eriksson and Wilfred Bion** have shaped our understanding of the unconscious, emotional dynamics, and relationships, influencing practices in outdoor and adventure settings.




B
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Bion's Group Dynamics

Workgroup

Goal-oriented, collaborative, and essential for achieving defined objectives

Unconscious

Basic assumption group

Mostly driven by unconscious emotions such as fear, anxiety, or unmet needs

primary unconscious dynamics



Look up to a leader for guidance, security, and solutions

Respond with confrontation (resistance/ blame) or avoidance (withdrawal)

Respond by placing hope in two members or ideas, believing they will solve all problems

(Bion, 1961; Chiuzi, 2024)

Relational Theory in Adventure Settings

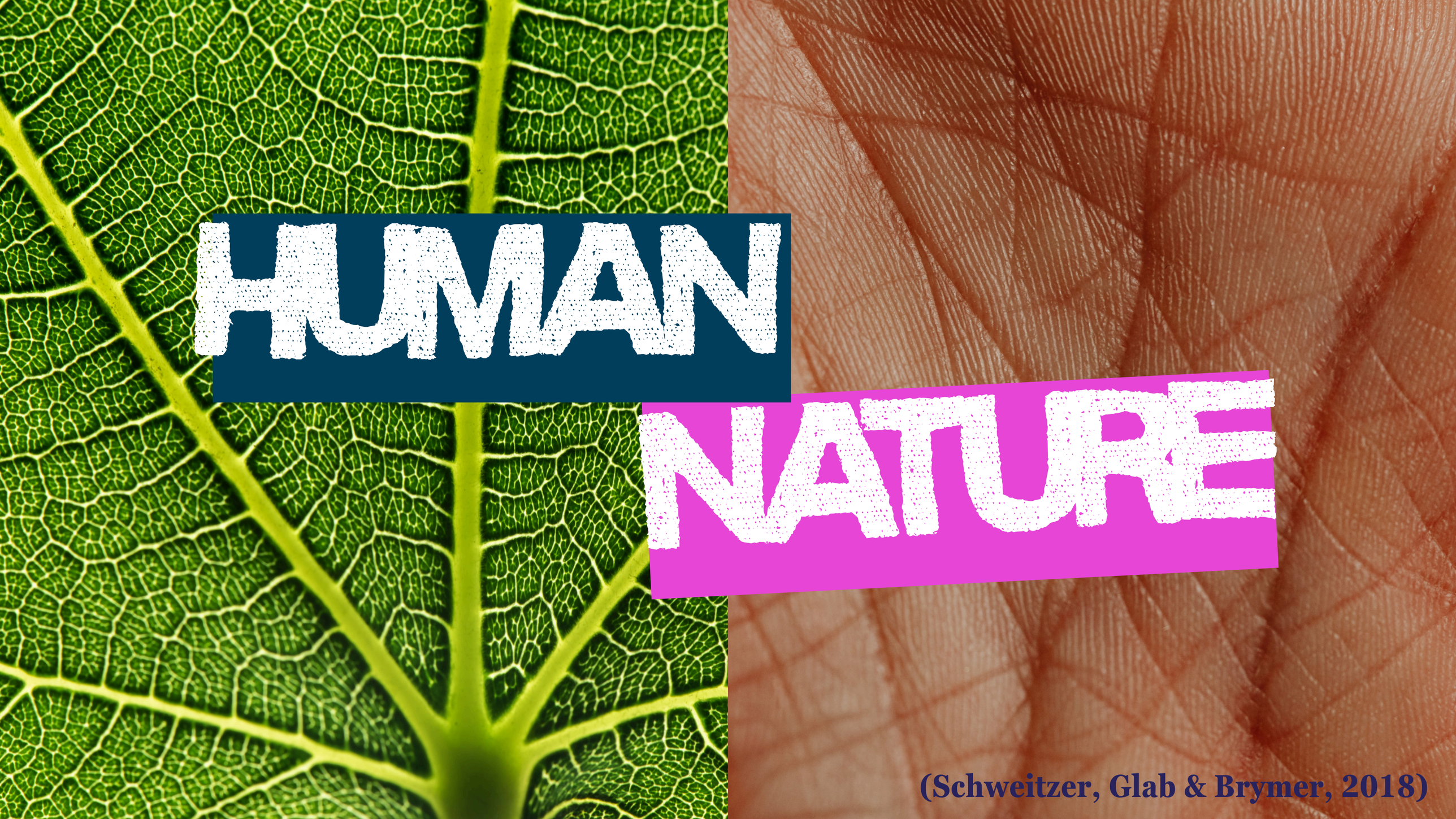
Relational theory emphasizes **interpersonal relationships** that shape our experiences. The concept of a "holding environment" is crucial for leaders, fostering safety (physical and psychological), and fostering connection for participants in outdoor adventures.



Building Trust in Adventure Groups

Attachment styles significantly impact participation in trust exercises, where a leader’s role is crucial in **containing anxiety** and nurturing a safe environment for group members to engage and connect.





(Schweitzer, Glab & Brymer, 2018)

Additional connections

Human-Nature Experience



a) nature being experienced as a **primary attachment**, → experience of nature as part of childhood; nature as nourishing; essential for individual wellbeing; longing for nature, and sense of loss at destruction of nature.

b) nature experienced as a **secure base**, → freedom, play, belonging to nature, nature as home

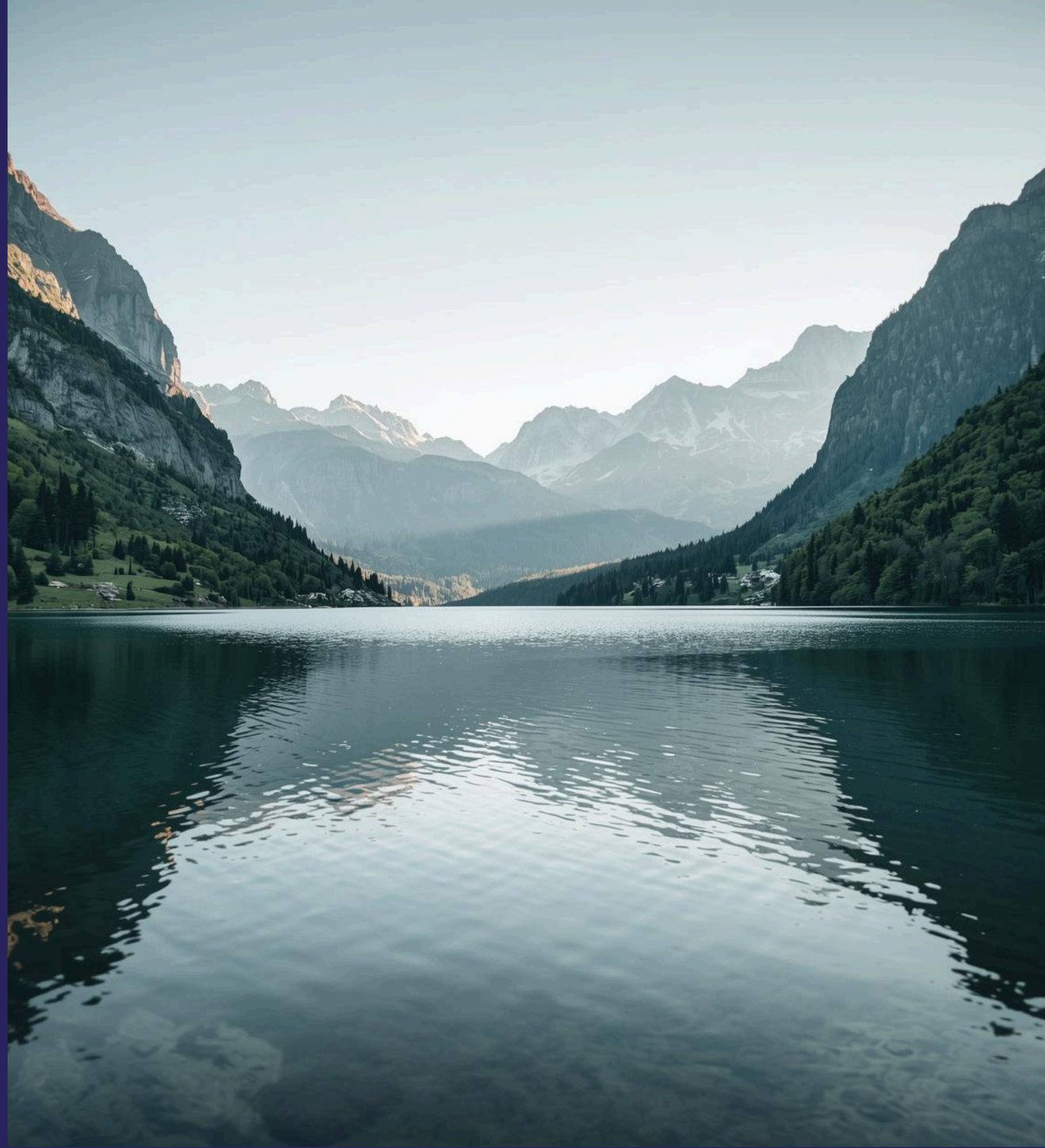
c) nature experienced as **twinship**, → kinship with nature; love in relationship with nature; oneness-with or self-as-part-of nature; nature as inspiring.

d) nature experienced as **containing**, and → providing a sense of safety, experiencing emotional containment from nature

e) nature experienced as **embodied** → experience of cellular connection; urban claustrophobia; sensory experience in nature, and nature as felt

Nature as a Container for Growth

Nature often serves as a **reflective space**, allowing individuals to project their inner emotional states, while adventure challenges symbolize personal growth and reveal defense mechanisms, enhancing self-awareness and emotional development.



Next Week

Choose:

- **Brave**
- **Moana**
- **Whale Rider (2002)**
- **Wild (2014)**
- **The Matrix (1999)**
- **Into the Wild (2007)**

Watch or read the recap & bring your notes on:

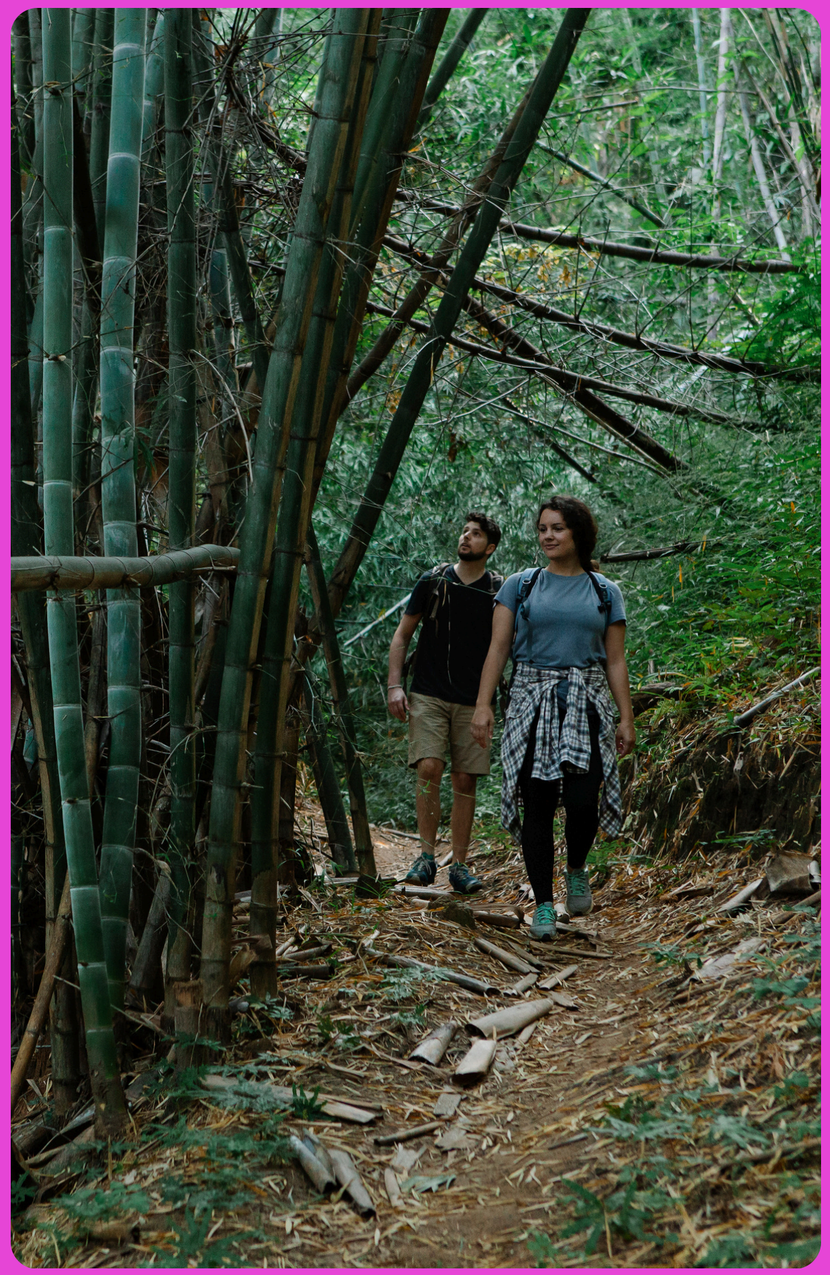
1. What is the “call to adventure” or rupture of the known world?
2. Who are the mentors/helpers?
3. Which are the tests/sacrifices/losses?
4. What is the transformation / return?
5. What do you think is the core message of this story? (in one sentence)



Exploring the Psychodynamic Approach

SESSION 2

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Share your reflection

Choose:

- **Brave**
- **Moana**
- **Whale Rider (2002)**
- **Wild (2014)**
- **The Matrix (1999)**
- **Into the Wild (2007)**

Watch or read the recap & bring your notes on:

1. What is the “call to adventure” or rupture of the known world?
2. Who are the mentors/helpers?
3. Which are the tests/sacrifices/losses?
4. What is the transformation / return?
5. What do you think is the core message of this story? (in one sentence)



The Heroic Journey

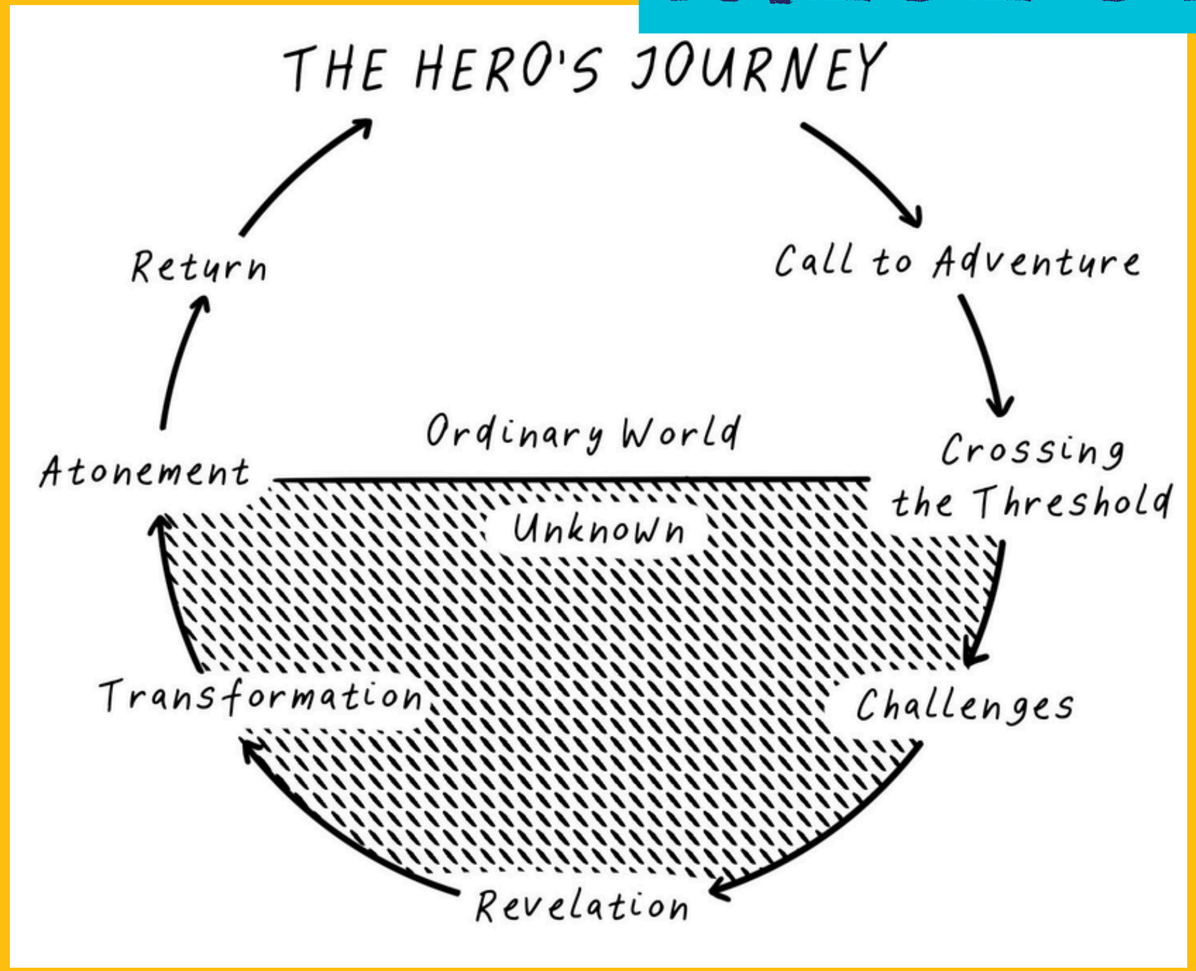
The Hero / Heroine journey have a foundation on a post-freudian author, Carl Jung.

Jung spoke of “archetypes” - a *universal* pattern, symbols or characters that we have in our collective unconscious.

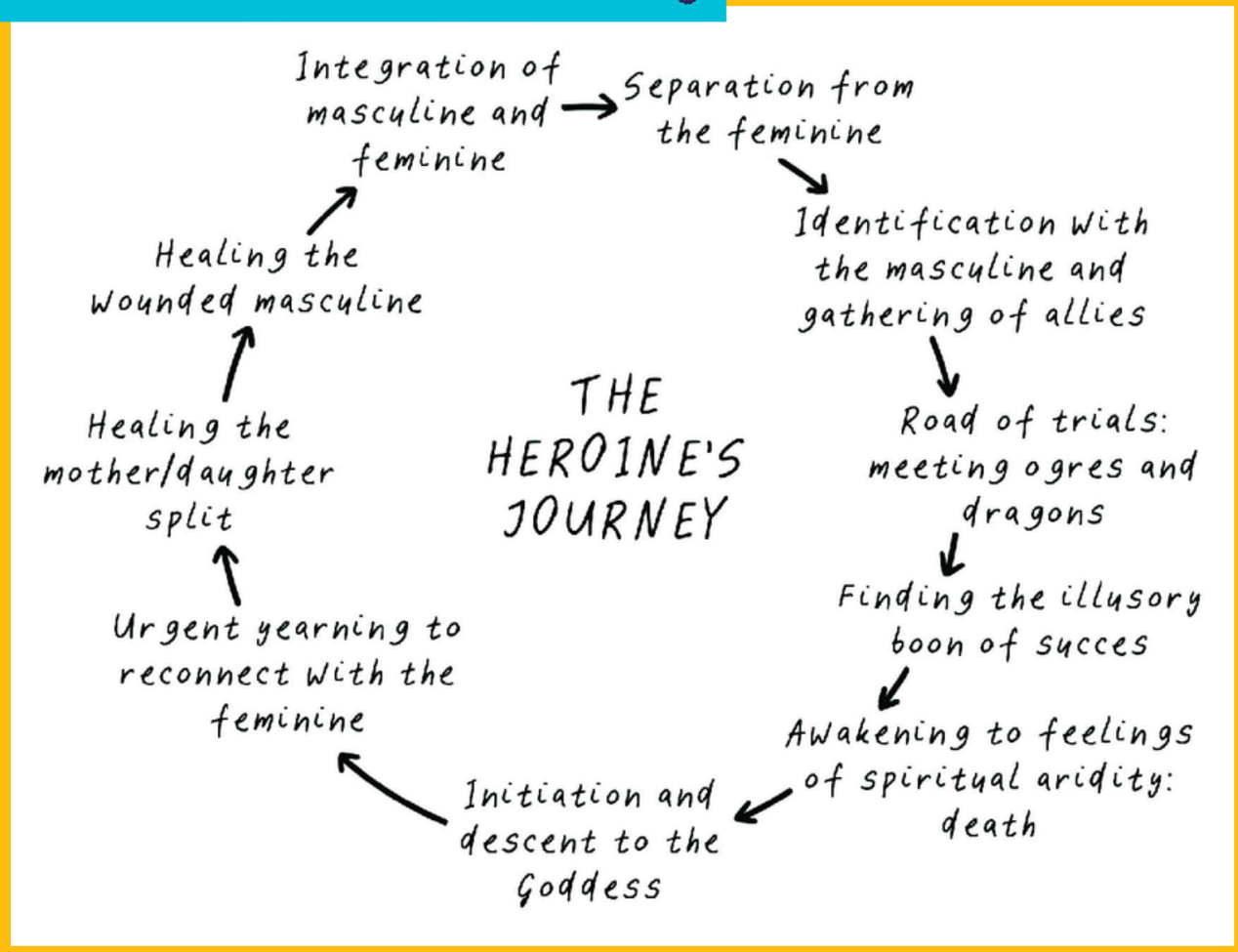
John Campbell (1999, 2025) and later on Maureen Murdock (2013, 2020) have written about the Hero’s and Heroine’s Journeys, a model & story arc that is widely used in story-telling, media and more.



WHERE CAN WE IDENTIFY THESE STORY ARCS?



Adapted from: Campbell, J. (2008). p. 210



Adapted from: Murdock, M. (2020). p. 5

(Milkowska-Shibata, 2025)


HERO AS IDEAL OF ‘SELF’


GUIDE AS ‘MENTOR’


PERSONAL MEANINGS WE GIVE TO CHALLENGES & QUESTS


TRANSFORMATION AS ‘TREASURE’

‘Heroic Journey’ in OA programming

We frame journeys and use story-telling as part of our set up and learning strategies - many of these are based in these models.

These narratives allow for our programming to open the opportunity for a personal exploration of autonomy, resilience, power, creativity - agency.

(Loynes, 2003)



‘Heroic Journey’ in OA programming



Outdoor adventures usually present a **heroic arc**: ‘separation’ - ‘trials & hardships’ - ‘rite of passage’- ‘return with treasure’

“…the conscious use of ritual, the sharing of stories and understanding the archetypal role of the guide are focus points that instructors can develop to enhance the student's experience.”

(Lee, 1997, p.126)

RITUALS & CEREMONIES

CLIMATIC ACHIEVEMENT

SOLO



Analysis of Contributions to OAE practices

Psychodynamic contributions to OAE practices

- Awareness of the power of **relationships** during the experience (including **with** nature)
- Understanding past experiences can **influence** the present behaviour
- Promoting psychological **safety** and modelling healthy relationships
- Support **reflective** processing, allowing for personal choice of non-therapeutic insight
- Heroic journey models in **framing & stories**, being cautious and reflexive of the cultural narratives that are being presented

All from a non-clinical role



Psychodynamic theory in Adventure Therapy

The context and initiatives can support the identification of unhealthy patterns and present new opportunities for healing.

An accepting and nonjudgmental therapeutic environment promotes openness and insight.

Therapists apply diverse psychodynamic & interpersonal techniques during the programmes.





(Gass, Gillis & Russell, 2020)



Critiques of the psychodynamic approach

Excessive interpretation

Group & individual behaviour might not be "pathological" or "symptomatic", but situational

Idealisation of "quest" and "treasure"

Over-analysis of spontaneous experience

Cultural bias

Repeating patronising, Western-based power patterns

Individualistic perspective of conflict

Many structural factors (ethnicity, class, colonialism, power, gender binary, politics, inequality) are not considered

Instrumentalised use of nature

Using nature only as projective tool

Dismissing the political history of land



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