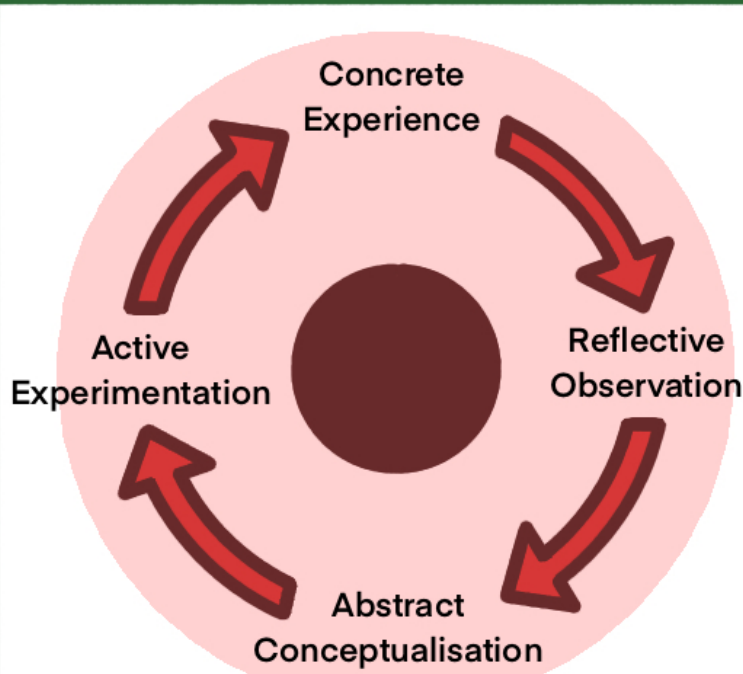


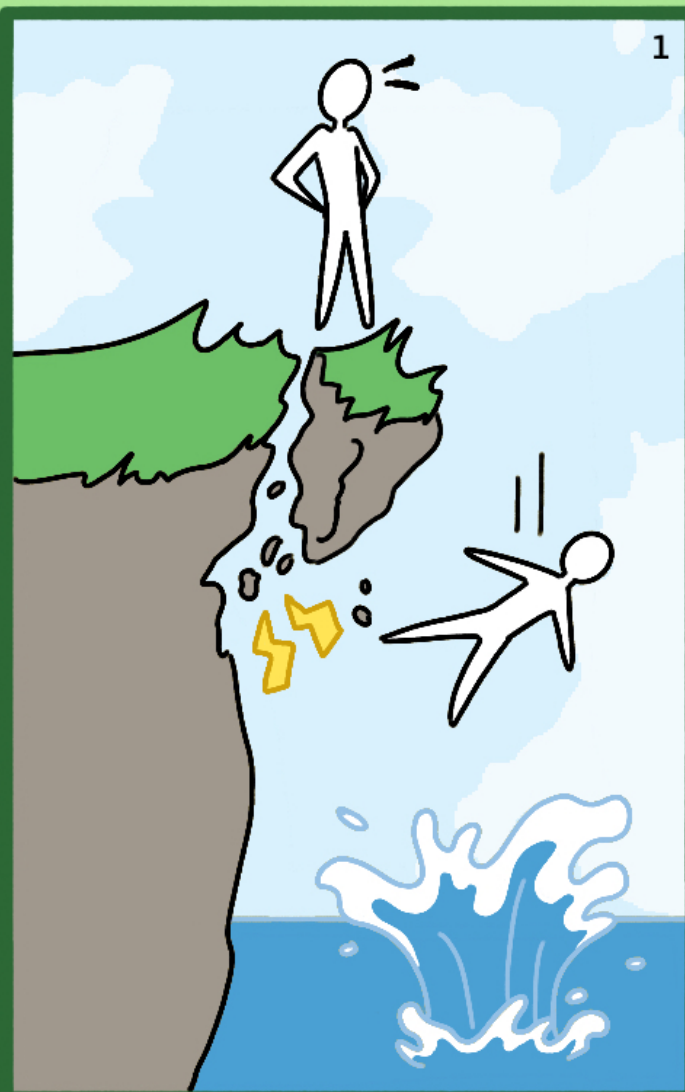
With reference to Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), discuss how your own experience of environmental conditions whilst engaged in an outdoor adventurous activity has developed your understanding of preparing to safely participate in outdoor adventures.

Kolb's Cycle

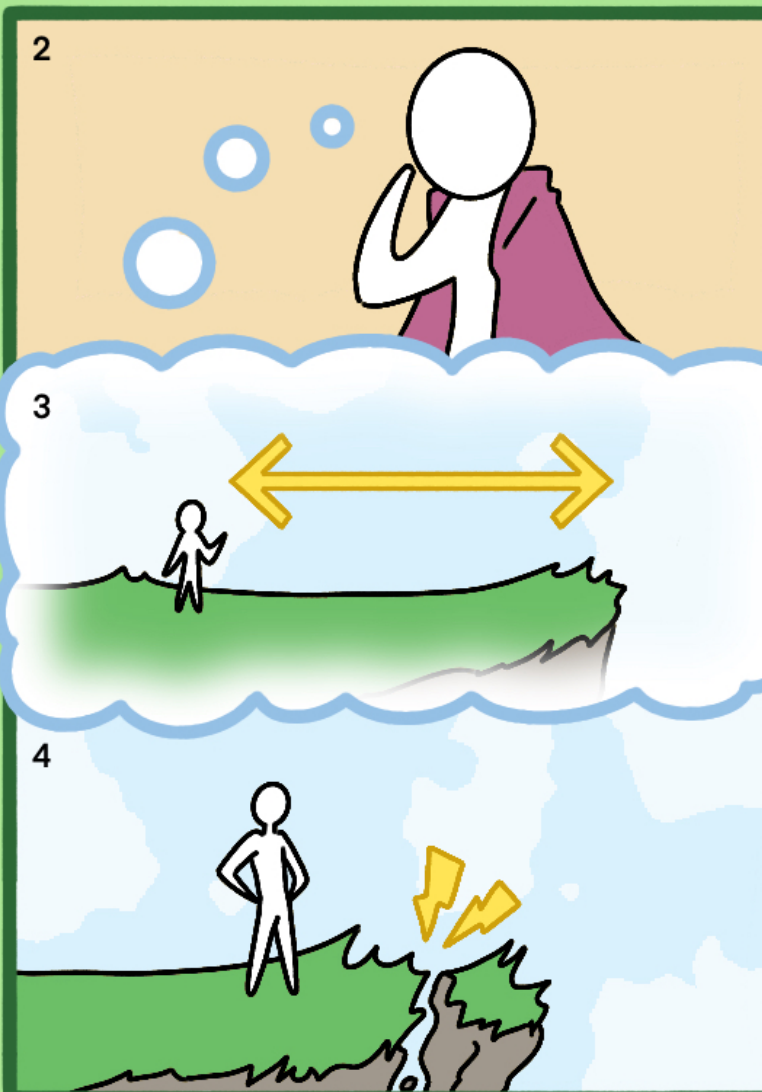


This comic will consider the affects alexithymia can have during adventurous activities, using my own experience coasteering and my understanding of Kolb's (1984) theories on experiential learning.

Influenced by earlier work by philosophers like John Dewey, Kolb's work codifies ideas that education results from natural experience into a four stage cycle which focuses on the process of learning, rather than the outcomes. Kolb's cycle of experiential learning is essential in developing knowledge in the outdoors, as its focus on active learning and experience is perfectly suited to the physical nature of outdoor adventure.



1



2

Concrete Experience
The concrete experience is in some way unique to past experiences, providing an opportunity to develop new understanding. While any experience has the potential to be a concrete one, not all experiences are relevant. This can be considered the 'feeling' stage.

1

Reflective Observation
Reviewing the experience allows a chance to deconstruct it, to consider why and how the experience occurred, and how you might have responded to it. Considering the experience in context of your prior understanding allows room to develop your knowledge.

2

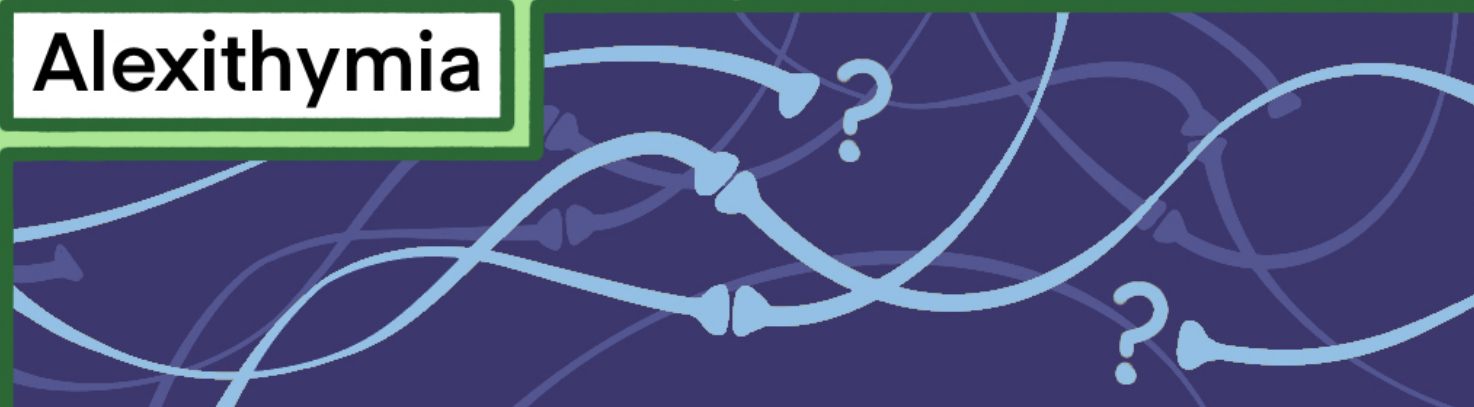
Abstract Conceptualisation
Reaching conclusions about what the concrete experience has taught you leads to developing new ideas about how to apply your new knowledge when next in a relevant situation. Forming strategies and being prepared in the future will improve and develop experiences going forward.

3

Active Experimentation
This stage applies the developed learning in context to find the ideal ways in which to make use of it. This stage can often lead to the formation of new concrete experiences via the experimentation, allowing the cycle to continue constantly developing your understanding.

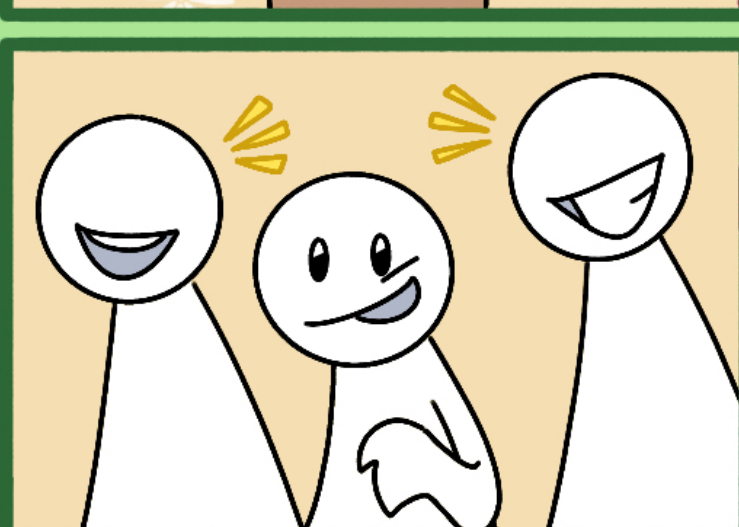
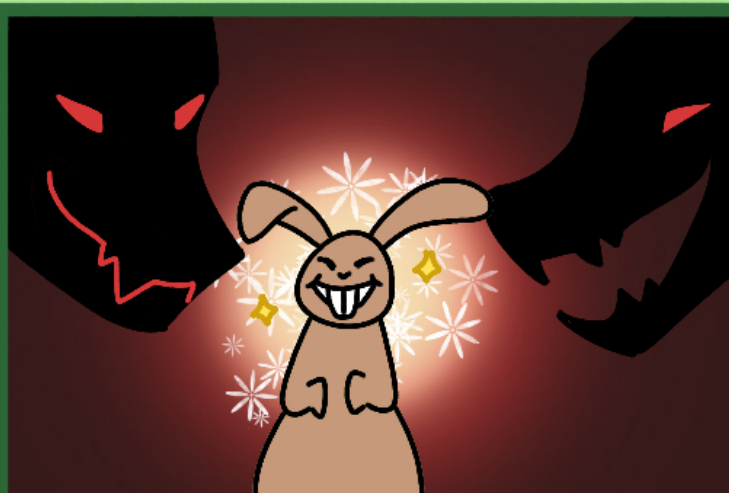
4

Alexithymia

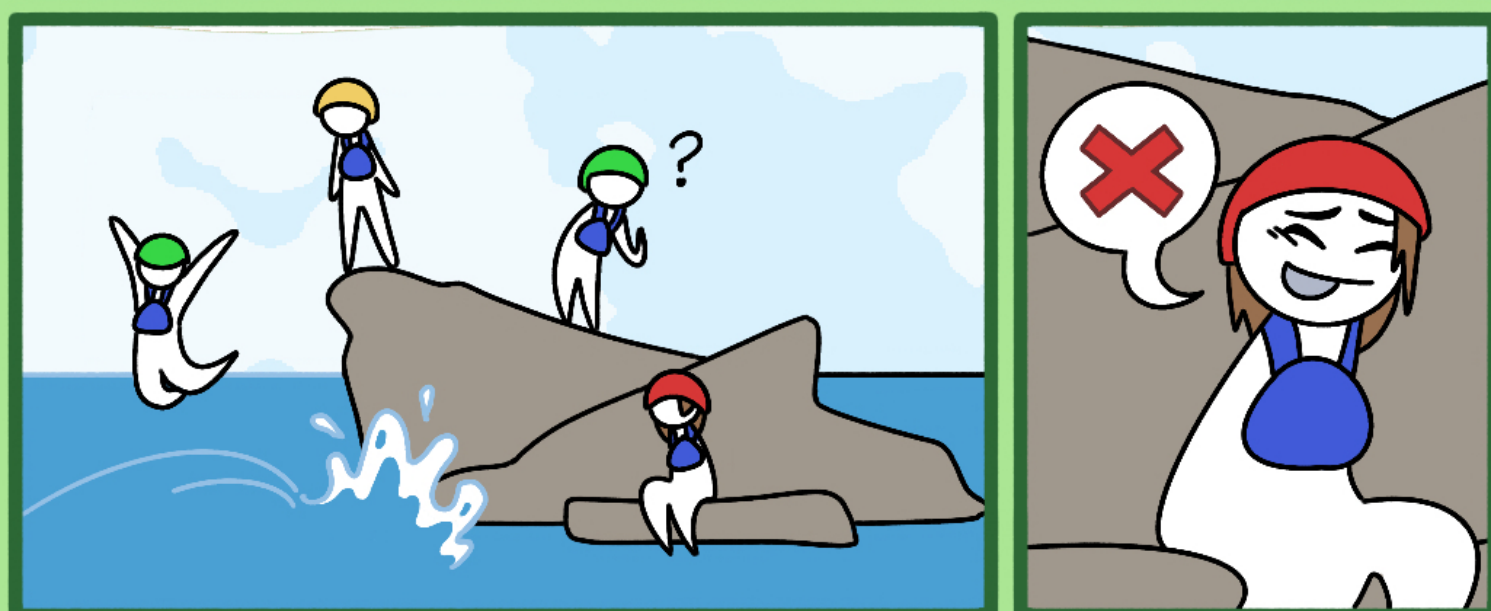


The term alexithymia roughly means 'no words for emotion', and describes a deficit with interpreting and communicating personal feelings. While alexithymia can occur in a variety of people, a systematic review of studies found that it is far more prevalent in those who are autistic (49.93% compared to 4.89% for neurotypicals)(Kinnaid *et al*, 2020). My perspective is from this subgroup experiencing both autism and alexithymia together, so it is important to note the similarities in the way these two conditions affect a person. Both autism and alexithymia interfere with the way information is processed and transferred through the brain, autism often having a larger affect on processing physical experiences and alexithymia affecting internal experiences (although this is a partial simplification and is not absolute).

When experiencing intense emotions, alexithymia can cause issues interpreting the intention of the experience. Anger, fear, happiness, or any emotion can become unidentifiable where an interruption occurs, requiring the brain to make guesses about what emotion it should be responding to. In an evolutionary context, the safest assumption is that any intense experience is a negative one, rather than risking a positive response where the intense feeling was actually in response to a threat. Consequently, this can lead to positive experiences being confused for negative ones.



In one recent experience, alexithymia affected my ability to fully engage when coasteering and get the most out of the experience. I chose not to take part in several jumps due to an internal sense of discomfort which I could not determine the cause of, despite having no problems with the similar activities I did engage in. This led to a notably diminished experience in comparison to what I expected when coasteering.



When considering the experience afterwards, and in context of previous coasteering adventures, I quickly concluded that it was unlikely the jumps themselves were the reason I did not want to engage because it would be inconsistent with my previous enjoyment of large jumps and adrenaline-based activities. The problem could potentially have been triggered by sensory issues; the pressure of PPE, the intense saltiness of sea water or the new social group, but none were consistent with how I would normally react to those issues. Recalling the interactions I had with others was vital in assessing the issue, as I recall each of those being positive. Furthermore, when not given the chance to stew in unidentified feelings and pushing to enjoy the coasteering, I experienced no negative escalation. These factors signify that I likely had a very positive experience whilst coasteering and that feeling was misattributed to a sense of stress or discomfort.



Determining when alexithymia has affected an experience afterwards is a useful and essential process to minimise its affects, and doing so can help to form productive strategies for catching it in the moment. In future, eliminating other potential causes of negative feelings, making comparisons to past experiences, and documenting experiences in writing may be useful tools for combating the effects of alexithymia. In my opinion, having a reliable group present who will understand the confusion I may be dealing with is often the most valuable tool for managing alexithymia.



While there are many ways to explore unidentified intense feelings, these do not necessarily allow the connections to be made in a physiological way, and instead means choosing to trust past experience and fully engage despite the risk of worsening negative feelings. A trusted group that can be relied on in the event of an unexpectedly negative reaction allows me to take the risk of engaging with adventure. Otherwise i may choose to avoid it out of fear of experiencing a shutdown that could be draining, upsetting, and embarrassing when with people who do not understand conditions like alexithymia and autism. I have found Kolb's theories and cycle to be a very useful tool in relation to alexithymia, as it provides an easy sequence to follow to asses when my feelings and experiences are being interfered with by internal issues in processing. It also includes an opportunity to consider how to apply knowledge to manage future experiences, something which often falls to the wayside without a guiding process like Kolb's cycle.

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