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Abstract:

Long-distance walking can help people cope with change and make enduring positive changes in their lives. Interviews with twenty five long-distance walkers reporting personally significant experiences on multi-day hikes suggest increased self-confidence, and other enduring changes which enhance well-being. By fostering engagement with people, settings and challenging tasks, long-distance walking is found to facilitate relationships, meaning and a sense of achievement. While the ensuing positive emotion may be short-lived, enduring self-efficacy and growth can also result. Findings will be of interest to tour operators and guides, and provide insights into the transformative potential of long-distance walking experiences.

Personal transformation through long-distance walking

Robert Saunders, Jennifer Laing and Betty Weiler

Introduction

Walking is a popular leisure activity throughout much of the world, and is widely endorsed for its benefits to health. Contemporary bushwalking in Australia and New Zealand, while sharing the Romantic origins of British, European and American leisure walking cultures (Edensor, 2000; Solnit, 2000), has evolved within the distinctive settings, history and symbolism of the region (Harper, 2007). In recent decades the development of hut-based and designated trails, the availability of light-weight camping equipment, and the growth of support services have encouraged participation in multi-day walking by novices and active older adults. Given the frequent association of long-distance walking with contemplation, self-development and achievement (Edensor, 2000; Pearce, 2011), a closer examination of the walking experience and its outcomes has the potential to offer insights into the under-researched transformative potential of travel, and associated benefits to well-being through positive personal change.

This chapter presents and discusses findings of a study exploring ways in which adults come to make positive changes in their lives following long-distance walks. Guided and self-guided walking experiences are included in the study, in settings recognised for their natural or cultural significance. The research presented here is part of a broader qualitative exploration of transformative experiences associated with long-distance walks within Australia and nearby regions. Participants, recruited through walking

clubs, websites of popular tracks and snowball sampling, were self-selected after having ‘personally significant’ experiences on a walk of at least three days duration.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews (Wengraf, 2001) were carried out with twenty-five adults, including follow-up interviews with participants who reported significant change. Additional insights were obtained from personal journals and other written material provided by participants. A phenomenological approach is taken in the analysis, with themes and interpretations emerging from participants’ articulation of their walking experiences, reflections and subsequent actions. The nature of any self-reported change is explored, along with insights participants provided about their change processes.

The chapter begins with an overview of key literature relevant to transformative travel and long-distance walking. It then presents five major outcomes or ‘themes’ emerging from interviews with walkers, regarding personal changes they associate with their long-distance walking experiences. Outcomes and transformative processes are then discussed in the context of positive psychology, and a model is proposed linking transformative processes with the five PERMA elements of well-being postulated by Seligman (2011). The relevance of character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) not included in the PERMA formulation is also noted, although a detailed analysis of this aspect is beyond the scope of the present chapter.

A synopsis of key literature on personal transformation and long-distance walking

The contemporary world generates many situations that can catalyse personal transformation. Changes in relationships, careers, health, finances, family situations and technological developments have an impact on the life course of many people. While not all role changes and turning points in life's journey are negative, the associated feelings of disorientation often are. Effectively negotiating change involves what Bridges (2004: 186) describes as *transition*: 'the psychological process of disengagement from the old, going through the nowhere between old and new, and then embracing and identifying with the new.'

The pace, complexity and uncertainty of present-day life can generate anxiety, depression and personal crisis. Kottler (1997) advises that appropriate styles of travel can be effective mediations in many situations routinely seen in counselling, by facilitating new perspectives and building resilience and other coping skills. Seligman (1993) also suggests that anxiety and mild depression may be more amenable to treatment by methods that address attitudes, ways of thinking and behaviours than by treatment with drugs, which often merely reduces the symptoms of these conditions.

A complementary, proactive perspective on personal transformation is that of growth through self-directed change. Widespread belief in the possibility of managing personal change over the life course is a relatively recent phenomenon, and 'represents one of the most fundamental and important revolutions in modern thought' (Seligman, 1993: 17). Self-development has become a major industry, targeting or exploiting almost every aspect of contemporary life, including tourism. Pine and Gilmore (1999), in advocating

the integration of experiential elements into service industries as a way of adding economic value, suggest that transformation is the ultimate form of experience. Travel is an ideal vehicle for experiential services, and the last two decades have seen substantial growth in both product and participation, as well as some research, in the emerging field of transformative tourism (Lean, 2009).

Of course, not all travel is expected to be transformative. Many people are content with themselves as they are, or ‘aren’t up to the task of confronting any major challenges such as those that might be a part of making significant life changes’ (Kottler, 1997: 14). But personal change can also be subtle and unintentional. It can arise from a variety of processes including learning new skills; having novel experiences that trigger emotional drivers; temporarily altering one’s social identity or entering a new social world; experiencing mindfulness and deep processing through immersion in a setting; or realising the reflective value of learning about others, in one’s own life (Pearce, 2011).

Nash (1996: 50) points to three characteristics which are likely to constrain the life-changing potential of travel, contending that ‘too many tours are too short, too superficial and have qualities too much like home to result in enduring personal transformations.’ In this study, long-distance walking has been selected as a vehicle for exploring transformative travel because it is an extended, often absorbing activity offering a range of levels of comfort through supported and self-reliant styles. Long-distance walking is also widely accessible, attracting many adult participants, and is currently undergoing growth in popularity and product creation (Curtis & Zanon, 2010).

There is a growing body of research on the impact of travel experiences on participants' knowledge, attitudes and values within specific tourist segments. Contemporary forms of tourism associated with growth, personal development, and rites of passage, especially during the transition from youth to adulthood, include overseas study programs (Nash, 1996); backpacking (Noy, 2004); and the 'gap year' (Hall, 2007). Long-term travel as a ritual of life-stage, a path to personal growth, and the discovery of new meaning in life has also been observed in the context of early mid-life (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000) and older travellers (Rosh White & White, 2004), with such journeys offering not only an opportunity to escape from everyday life but also a liminal space for reflection (Muller & O'Cass, 2001).

While many kinds of journey may be associated with a search for meaning, long-distance walking particularly calls to mind the traditions of pilgrimage. Digance (2006) argues that modern, secular pilgrimages embody historical archetypes including 'the quest', hardship, and the journey to a special, 'sacred' place. Although the notion of what is sacred has blurred in modern society (Digance, 2006: 37), aspects of long-distance walking can be seen as contemporary expressions of persistent cultural tropes, many of which imply the potential for personal transformation.

Lean's (2009) study of transformative travel finds that 'those who experienced the most significant transformation visited settings far removed from their home', and 'the factor most commonly identified by participants as affecting transformation was social contact' (pp. 199-200). While Lean (2009) finds no particular correlation between transformation and motivation or trip length, his findings support the idea that

‘reflection is a key to transformation’ (p. 201). Lean (2009) concludes that an immense range of travel-generated transformations are possible and that ‘future research... needs to be conducted on a smaller scale with a fixed scope, so as to reduce complexity’ (p. 203).

A range of studies investigate long-distance walking and related adventure activities undertaken for the purposes of outdoor education. Many Australians are introduced to long-distance walking through school camps, scouting or commercial adventure activities. Program objectives range from learning bushwalking skills; through experiential environmental education and adventure activity designed to promote personal responsibility and team work; to ‘bush adventure therapy’ for those considered socially or psychologically at risk (Pryor, Carpenter & Townsend, 2005). The majority of Australian outdoor education programs focus predominantly on youth and young adults. This parallels the wilderness experience program industry in the United States (Friese, Hendee & Kinziger, 1998), which ‘despite serving a full spectrum of people, is primarily focused on youth, youth at risk or college/university students’ (p. 42).

The authors regard developmental changes which occur during the teenage years and early twenties as formative rather than transformative, and for this reason have selected research subjects who are aged 30 years and over. Longitudinal studies in social psychology suggest personality in most people is fully established by the age of 30, although it does not stop developing at that point but ‘appears to grow increasingly consistent with age and reach a plateau later in life than previously thought (e.g., age 50)’ (Caspi & Roberts, 2001: 51).

In one of the few published studies which consider the impacts of long-distance walking on adult participants, Mueser (1998) surveyed people completing the more than 3,500 kilometre-long Appalachian Trail in the United States. He found, amongst other things, that 'before the hike, only one hiker out of 136 had been working in a job involving the environment; but after months of following the Appalachian Trail, some 18 individuals said they had changed or were going to change jobs to work in ecology and the environment' (Mueser, 1998: 15). Major changes in core life domains such as career suggest profound impacts on values and attitudes are possible.

The experiences of long-distance walkers seem rarely to have been investigated, with Mills and Butler's (2005) analysis of flow experiences among Appalachian Trail hikers, and den Breejen's (2007) study of walkers on the West Highland Way in Scotland important exceptions. Mills and Butler (2005: 366) report that more than 60 per cent of hikers sampled experienced flow, 'and for the majority of them it was a daily occurrence.' Den Breejen's (2007) use of an innovative in situ diary captured the lived experience of 15 long-distance walkers, who enjoyed meeting other hikers, appreciated the scenery and a sense of being close to nature, felt varying degrees of solitude and freedom, and found time to think and reflect during their 152 km trek. The end of their walk was experienced as a climax of enjoyment, suggesting scope for further research into the role of achievement and its contribution to positive affect (den Breejen, 2007).

A recent exploratory study of long-distance walking in the United Kingdom (Crust, Keegan, Piggott & Swann, 2011) utilised in-depth interviews with six long-distance

walkers. While their study did not specifically explore transformative experiences, the age range, walk length and track characteristics chosen by Crust et al (2011) are consistent with criteria used in the current research. Crust et al (2011: 258) report that ‘the three main outcomes were bittersweet feelings [at the end of the walk], sense of well-being, and personal growth.’ Conclusions from the Crust et al (2011) study relate directly to the framework of positive psychology, and suggest that ‘long-distance walking can elicit positive emotions, undo the effects of stress, promote an increased sense of well-being, and personal growth’ (p. 261).

The current study seeks to extend the exploration of outcomes and benefits of long-distance walking by identifying positive changes people make in their lives following a long-distance walk, and elucidating associated processes of change. Findings are discussed within the context of positive psychology. In particular, this chapter explores the relevance of Seligman’s (2011) five elements of well-being to the outcomes of long-distance walking: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement (PERMA). The qualitative nature of the current study means that these elements were elicited from the content analysis of interviews and written journals.

Study context and major transformative themes emerging from interviews

A range of settings and styles of long-distance walking are included in this study.

Walking tracks mentioned by more than one participant include Tasmania’s Overland Track, the Larapinta Trail of Central Australia, Western Australia’s Bibbulmun Track, the Kokoda Trail of Papua New Guinea and New Zealand’s Milford Track. While most

are nature-based treks, the Kokoda Trail is also an iconic World War II battlefield site. Walks undertaken by interviewees range from three days to three months, and include guided and self-guided styles. Interview participants include males and females, novice long-distance walkers and those with hiking experience dating back to their youth.

The selective and qualitative nature of this study means it is difficult to assess the frequency of personally significant experiences and transformative outcomes amongst long-distance walkers. While several guides (who were also interviewed as part of the larger study on which this chapter is based) suggest that the majority of people walking the Kokoda Trail are significantly affected by their experiences, one Overland Track guide suggested that only about 30 of the 600 participants he has led have had transformative experiences:

For some of them you know it's just ticking off something on a list of things they want to do. It doesn't mean any more than that. For others there is a deeper meaning and connection they make – you can see it in them.

Most interviewees had completed their long-distance walk within the three months prior to the interview. In cases where significant change was reported, a longitudinal perspective was obtained by follow-up interviews between six months and two years after the initial interview to test the enduring nature of the change. Analysis of interviews from the twenty-five long-distance walkers suggests thematic saturation has been reached (Boeiji, 2002). While the wide range of raw themes and detailed stories is beyond the scope of this chapter, five major themes have emerged from the analysis that

are positive expressions of personal transformation and are directly relevant to enhanced well-being:

1. Therapy and problem solving
2. Challenge and achievement
3. Relationships and belonging
4. Health and fitness
5. Meaning and connection

The remainder of this chapter draws on interview findings to illustrate these themes and consider antecedent and in-situ elements and processes that may contribute to personal transformation and enhanced well-being. All names used in reporting the findings are pseudonyms.

Therapy and problem solving

Transformative changes are perhaps most evident when they relate to the resolution of a chronic problem. Five of the twenty-five interviewees fit this category. Susan and Valerie had suffered clinical depression for some years before their long-distance walks. Keith had left his job and had become depressed, overweight and unmotivated at a stage in life when he had taken on the responsibility of a mortgage and become a father. Ollie had a fear of heights which was impacting on his enjoyment of hiking and other activities. Trish was suffering the effects of a traumatic separation from her partner, which also left her with sole responsibility for their school-age children. In all cases, long-distance walking provided relief and helped facilitate a resolution to these problems.

Susan explained the background to her eight week walk with her husband:

I had been on anti-depressives for about seven years. I have had various jobs... taking on difficult programs... and feeling just unappreciated... So yeah, I think I was pretty stressed, pretty run down, pretty depressed.

During the early stages of the walk, there was a process of disengagement from Susan's normal life, which provided respite from the stresses of her work:

It took several days before I even wanted to write in the diary and then three weeks before I really felt like I was relaxed and into the way of life.

Susan gradually became engaged in all aspects of the walk: the physical challenges; social interactions with her husband and other people they met; and observation of the natural environment through which they walked. After a month she had a revelation:

I can remember, yeah, not really thinking too much about the work situation but after four weeks just saying 'Yeah it's clear. I'm not going back'. So I didn't actually need to sort of wrestle with that at all, it just seemed to come to me in not thinking about it for several weeks. It just came to me that that was how it should be.

Susan loved her work, but it was affecting her health. Medication helped her through each day, but wasn't curing her depression. Walking gave her space and time to reflect, to put her problems into a new perspective and to see a solution: she could do similar work somewhere else. Putting her resolution into practice took effort and courage, but the achievement of completing the walk and conquering her fears about river crossings along the way was empowering. Reflection and resolution continued after the walk, when Susan worked as a volunteer before finding a new position. Two years later she is still not taking any medication.

For Trish the unexpected separation from her partner 'was awful' and generated a lasting sense of grief. Long-distance walking brought her closer to family members who supported her emotionally, and allowed her to develop in new ways. Her first long-distance walk at Wilsons Promontory was a pivotal moment:

In a sense that was a turning point, that I did realise was something if we had stayed together I'd never have done... You do grow in ways that you'd never have dreamed. And so while I'd still prefer to be married, to the same person actually, it was just, it was wonderfully liberating to be able to do these things.

Later, long-distance walking became a frequent source of stress-relief for Trish, and provided new perspectives from which to review her life and her work:

It was just strange that I realised what I needed to change... and how I could just generally improve everything for everyone, on a track on the way to Everest.

Why can't I do that at home?

Challenge and achievement

The most common transformative theme emerging from interviews relates to the sense of achievement derived from completing a long-distance walk. This theme was reported by males and females; experienced and novice walkers; on guided and self-guided treks; and from those who walked for only three or four days and others who walked for up to three months. Interviewees also reported gaining confidence in relation to other aspects of their lives and setting new goals.

Follow-up interviews confirmed the behavioural expression of change. New goals set following walks varied from undertaking more frequent or longer walks, to specific targets like completing a marathon on each continent. In some cases interviewees reflected on their priorities in life and this led to other goals such as seeking to change jobs, spending more time with family, or incorporating exercise into daily activities. A clear aspect of this theme is empowerment: interviewees felt that the walk gave them the courage, strength and determination to follow through on their goals.

Keith described how the personal significance of successfully climbing a remote mountain was immediately apparent, and experienced emotionally:

It poured all night and half the next day and we just lay in our tents glowing warm from having got there... I couldn't believe that after at least a dozen years of walking in Tasmania I had achieved what I thought was the ultimate: getting to the top of Federation Peak. So I was ecstatic... even the initial adrenaline that comes from being exposed to danger wasn't the only reason I was ecstatic... I had started to face down the fears that I had, and that if I was able to do that in

terms of a physical intimidation like a hard mountain climb, then that was transferable to the rest of life, to the difficulties I faced in terms of employment and self-esteem.

For Keith the achievement of climbing Federation Peak prompted a progression of self-directed life changes including obtaining employment in his chosen field. This suggests self-efficacy and growth may be facilitated by increased self-confidence.

Self-efficacy and growth were also demonstrated by Roy, together with an element of disengagement from the past. After completing a three month walk 'to put some distance between our lives in the workforce and our future lives; a time to walk, a time to reflect and a time to rejuvenate' Roy observed that 'some of the cynicism built up during 30 years of work has been shed and we certainly have no fears for what life now holds.' Challenge, achievement and goal setting have become central to Roy's new life:

The Great South Coast Walk taught us that, to feel fulfilled, you need to constantly provide yourself with a challenge, of which an adventure such as this is only one form. The dreaming, the planning, the doing, the remembering while the next dream evolves all contribute to an increasing sense of achievement and purpose.

For Barbara the empowerment derived from walking has led to new goals and achievements, and tackling things she previously had not envisaged:

It just enabled me to see that I am capable of doing things. Since 2007 I've run five marathons... And I bought a house too... that is a big thing! Because it was

about, particularly as a single woman buying a property... my mindset was I'd have to have somebody else to help me do it but in reality I did it all by myself.

The sense of achievement among interviewees also generates positive affect: people feel happy and satisfied, proud to have achieved something they value.

Relationships and belonging

The social benefits of walking can be transformative. In meeting other like-minded people, some participants find and enter a new social world, commonly undertaking further walks with the same group. Social benefits of this nature were more often mentioned by novice long-distance walkers. For Elaine, walking the Milford Track in New Zealand and staying in huts overnight was initially challenging:

For me it was really quite life-changing because first of all... in the first hut you sleep with 20 people. So that was very different for me, I'd never done anything like it, the roughing it. I've never roughed it like that.

Elaine found it hard to sleep the first night of her trek, but began to form a relationship with some younger American women who subsequently looked out for her, and helped to make her more comfortable at the next hut:

One of the girls had got there before me and she'd kept a space for us... which was nice because we'd got friends with all these youngsters and... they wanted us with them.

There are clear suggestions of *communitas* (Turner, 1974) in Elaine's narrative, emphasised by the age and social differences between participants. Elaine found the experience enjoyable and rewarding, and has kept in touch with people she met on the walk:

All those youngsters kept on saying we hope we're like you when we're your age... so it was great, we made friends with all these kids. I occasionally get emails from people, and I like it... [On return to Australia] I picked them up and we went and had dinner. And I'm sure that if they ever come here again they'll contact us, or if I will go to San Francisco, I'll contact them.

Another example of this theme is Dianne, who met her new life-partner during a long-distance walk. Within a year she had left her job, moved interstate to live, travelled extensively overseas, and given up another long-term leisure activity which had previously been a central life interest. The development of such a close relationship could be seen as incidental to the walk, however several interviewees noted that sharing the difficulties and the emotional journey of an extended walk is a bonding experience, and some suggested that walking is a good way to see the real person behind the facade some may present to the world.

In Andrew's case, the relationship formed with an indigenous porter on the Kokoda Trail was an important element of his trip, and a reason to continue his involvement with the people living along the Trail:

I met his wife and his kids. When we went through his village he took me to the school and showed me around his village and he had such pride in it... you don't hear about the beautiful side of these people and that's what we saw with the villagers... I think we've formed a relationship and... I'm going to help him in whatever way I can.

Health and fitness

While the effort of pack-carrying, tired muscles and blisters were mentioned by many interviewees, there was a common view that these are small costs compared to the benefits in overall health and fitness that accrue from long-distance walking. Claire noticed an improvement in her strength after she returned from long-distance walking in New Zealand:

I go to the gym on a regular basis, and I got back to the gym and I was doing weights that I would normally do, and they were easy. And I didn't, until then, realise how strong I'd become in New Zealand on that trip. So, yeah, for fitness, it was fantastic.

For Susan, weight loss and fitness gains also contributed to her resilience and self-esteem:

I lost 10 kilograms during the hike... I can wear the clothes that my daughters wear which is lovely... I think it's probably made me feel stronger in character overall because I can do these physical things and I can follow things through... and so you get the recognition of other people, that you're hard-core walkers, you can do these things.

Some interviewees mentioned the benefits of going to sleep many hours earlier than at home, and waking with the dawn. Sleeping soundly and reconnecting with natural cycles are seen by many as part of the slowing down and simplification of life that comes with long-distance walking. Susan spoke of:

Really satisfying physical tiredness... I could sleep for 12 hours, 11 or 12 hours, no worries at all... because it was dark; it was the middle of winter... It was just lovely to feel like I could, I needed that sleep because I was physically tired.

For Ursula, physical and other aspects of health and well-being are intimately connected:

The body becomes more resilient, strong, lean, grows in its capacity to cope with extremes of temperature and terrible rain and that kind of thing... I think that there isn't a clear division between our physical body and our - the other dimensions of our being... For myself I found that the physical resilience opened up or brought about a mental resilience as well... like a focus and a clarity of thought.

Meaning and connection

A transformative theme associated with walking some tracks more than others is finding or creating meaning and connection with something bigger. There also seems to be a sense of growth associated with the discovery of new meaning, or the intensification of existing attitudes, values and beliefs. On nature-based treks, deep engagement with the

setting can generate a sense of spiritual awareness, of connection with the infinite. Keith expresses this as follows:

I feel just the tiniest speck of life in a vast universe and yet somehow the fact that I'm able to have feelings of transcendence and sublime feelings somehow enlarge you, make you feel that you expand into the vastness of that universe too. I believe in paradox – I like holding those kinds of tensions. Yes I'm insignificant and yet somehow I count, I matter, and not just to myself.

Interviewees who walked the Kokoda Trail reported deeply emotional experiences and an embodied sense of connection with the soldiers of World War II. They frequently found personal meaning in these experiences. Jeff's journal entry about Brigade Hill, the site of a major battle, illustrates how he came to empathise with the soldiers and their predicament:

The battle site is certainly very significant and the stories amazing... the Japanese killed many Australians here and it was sacred soil in my book. I thought about what it must have been like during the night here, dug into a foxhole not knowing if the Japanese were ten metres in front of you... not knowing if you would be dead in a while.

Jeff was ill throughout his trek and at the end he collapsed on the side of the track physically and mentally drained. However, in hindsight he was deeply satisfied with how he had performed:

I reflected that I actually showed quite strong leadership skills and... I was a character amongst the group. There were a lot of people who were insular and they didn't want to help with anything whereas even while I was sick I was still trying to be involved... And then I guess one of the other reflections is I thought, maybe I could actually do this, I wouldn't mind being one of the guides.

Jeff's perspective suggests *eudaimonic* well-being, or doing those things that are conducive to growth, as opposed to *hedonic* well-being which consists of seeking pleasure for its own sake (Ryan & Deci, 2001). It seems that the eudaimonic well-being Jeff gained from his Kokoda trek was important to him, and sparked a sense of purpose.

A reflexive insight into the relationship between meaning and emotional reaction was offered by Ursula:

I realised really clearly on this walk... that my experience of hardship versus suffering was entirely dependent on the thoughts that were going through my head. Hardship... like walking with a blister... becomes suffering when there's a layer of interpretation... such as 'you're doing something wrong'... or 'we're not going to get there now'... those kinds of meaning-makings absolutely change my experience of the hardship and make it horrible to be with.

Discussion in relation to transformation and positive psychology

To make sense of these themes by linking them to changes people make in their lives, it is useful to consider interviewees' descriptions covering the phases before, during and

after their walks. Connections with enhanced well-being are then interpreted by considering outcomes in relation to the five elements of well-being postulated by Seligman (2011), as a basis for proposing a process model.

Before the walk: motivation, preparation and antecedent conditions

Stated motivations for undertaking a long-distance walk included both escapism and attraction to a particular trail. Challenge, a desire to get back in touch with nature, and mental relaxation were frequently mentioned, similar to the findings of den Breejen (2007) for the West Highland Way. Training and preparation was sometimes evident, particularly for the more arduous treks. Interestingly, personal change was rarely described in intentional terms. Some interviewees sought relief and respite from personal crisis through long-distance walking, but there was little evidence of any expectation that they would experience profound change.

In some cases, people are conscious of life stage transitions, but as Kottler (1997: ix) emphasises, antecedent conditions may be unconscious aspects of travel motivations. In the words of one of the guides interviewed for this study:

Sometimes people are searching for something, you know they are. Other times people don't even know they are looking for something, but they are open to things when they happen. They've got to be ready for it. You can't transform someone who isn't ready for it.

Interviews suggest there are many reasons why people may be open to personal change. It could be curiosity and open-mindedness, or a vague sense of something missing or out of balance in their life. The absence of a close relationship seems to have been a factor in the case of Dianne, who met her future partner on a long-distance walk. A more general social and nurturing need may have been important for Ivan, who became a scout leader after enjoying long-distance walking in national parks. Needs relating to growth and development are suggested by some of Jeff's comments quoted earlier, regarding leadership.

For others, there may be deeper, hidden or unrecognised needs and drives. Susan's depression did not appear to be a conscious reason for undertaking her walk, nor did she expect that walking would resolve her issues. However, prior to the walk she discussed with her doctor the possibility of reducing her medication during the walk. She also prepared a page for diary notes each day, as if she tacitly understood the value of reflection. Despite these actions, Susan's pre-walk perspective towards her depression can only be described as hopeful, and she was genuinely surprised at her realisation during the walk that changing jobs could restore her mental health.

Specific long-distance walks seem to have been chosen based on previous knowledge and expectations. As Mueser (1998) observed in relation to Appalachian Trail hikers, many had thought about doing an extended walk for some time. Especially in the case of the longer trails, timing was often opportunistic, based around access to a period of extended leave from work or the organisation of a group activity by a friend or colleague.

During the walk: processes of engagement and reflection

People who feel they have had a personally significant experience on a long-distance walk have engaged deeply: with the *task* of walking; with other *people*; or with the *setting* of the walk, and often with all three. Disengagement from the participant's normal life (Bridges, 2004) also seems to be important, and may be facilitated by engagement with something new and different. It seems to be through distancing oneself from normal life that the opportunity to reflect from a different perspective is accessed, allowing issues to be reviewed and major decisions made.

Task engagement is usually experienced by trek participants as the challenge of the walk. Long-distance walking often requires persistence through inclement weather, route finding, demanding track conditions and fatigue. At times, risks such as walking alone in remote and unknown country, obstacles such as river crossings and exposed rock-climbs tested the courage of interviewees. Successfully completing the walk or achieving a key goal of the trip usually generated a strong sense of achievement.

There are glimpses here of an underlying process involving the development or expression of personal traits such as courage and persistence, which are part of the character strengths and virtues framework of positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Specific traits appear to contribute to a number of themes. For example, the development of courage and persistence seems to facilitate therapy and problem solving (theme 1), challenge and achievement (theme 2), and health and fitness (theme 4).

Engagement with other people including guides, and in the case of the Kokoda Trail, with indigenous porters, developed relationships through social interactions, shared experiences and emotions. Sometimes a sense of *communitas* (Turner, 1974) emerged. Relationships that develop on a walk can lead to a participant entering a new social world of shared interests and values, extending those relationships and developing a sense of belonging.

Flow-like states (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Mills & Butler, 2005) seem mostly to be experienced when people are alone in challenging, scenic or meaningful settings within a walk. However, some group situations suggested co-active social flow, and in-depth conversations may have generated interactive social flow (Walker, 2010). In all these states people lose their self-consciousness, and this may contribute to the liminality of the experience.

Engagement with the setting of a walk can lead to the emergence of meaning. In the case of the Kokoda Trail, cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects of meaning became evident as the physical challenge of the walk led to a sense of re-enactment amongst trekkers (Saunders, 2012). Deep engagement with the battlefield setting of the Kokoda Trail sometimes led to numinous experiences: a deeply felt connection ‘to the people and spirit of an earlier time’ (Cameron & Gatewood, 2003: 55).

The richness of the walking experience seems to depend on the level of engagement with the task, people and setting of the walk. Interestingly, many of the strong emotions

felt during the walk were not what one would associate with pleasure: they include fears about safety and the walker's capacity to meet challenges; negative reactions to other trail users such as dirt-bike riders and hunters; and deep sadness associated with stories of horrific battles on the Kokoda Track.

Although interviewees generally enjoyed their walking experiences, strong positive emotion was most often associated with the end of the walk, as observed by den Breejen (2007). Trish found this energising, and a source of renewed enthusiasm for her work: 'I often come back to work bouncing, grateful for the [clients] that are coming in, because that's where a lot of life happens for me.' The strong sense of elation on completing a long-distance walk was sometimes tinged with loss, reminiscent of the 'bittersweet feelings' identified by Crust et al (2011). The strength of the positive emotion also faded over a week or two. Ursula wrote on her return after seven weeks of solo walking:

When the track was fresh in me... I could feel light in my eyes. I don't know how else to describe it. All of the elements of such a journey, the out-doors-ness of it, the walking, the watching and breathing of it... they work a magic... I feel that that radiance is quietly lessening, going underground? Disappearing? Being veiled? I think that's what I find a bit sad, and not super-sad... just wistful, maybe. Because I want to keep that. And I can't.

After the walk: behavioural expression of enduring change

Returning to the five themes of personal transformation presented earlier in this chapter, the most widespread outcome evident among interviewees was the feeling of confidence

that results from achievement (theme 2). This was typically expressed after the walk by setting new goals and working towards achieving them. An example of this is Barbara who, after walking the Kokoda Trail, decided to run a marathon on every continent. She has completed marathons on five continents to date.

Interviewees tended to refer to this outcome in terms of a feeling of confidence, which supports the findings of Crust et al (2011); however its consistent expression through subsequent actions suggest it could also be interpreted in terms of empowerment and self-efficacy. Ryan and Deci (2001: 156) note that self-efficacy ‘is associated with enhanced well-being.’ Outcomes for some people may also include increased optimism as they find the personal resources to deal with life’s ups and downs: ‘optimism, the conviction that you *can* change, is a necessary first step in the process of all change’ (Seligman, 1993: 253).

Enhanced health and fitness (theme 4) is usually related to the walk itself, although some interviewees have subsequently integrated regular walking into their normal lives in order to maintain their improved fitness. Regular doses of long-distance walking were seen by several interviewees as important in helping them cope with life’s stresses, and even the knowledge that one can always go for a walk when times are tough was seen by some as valuable for stress management. The combination of confidence and persistence that comes from long-distance walking also seems to enhance resilience.

In all cases where interviewees described behavioural expressions of change following their walk, strong emotional engagement with some aspect of the walking experience

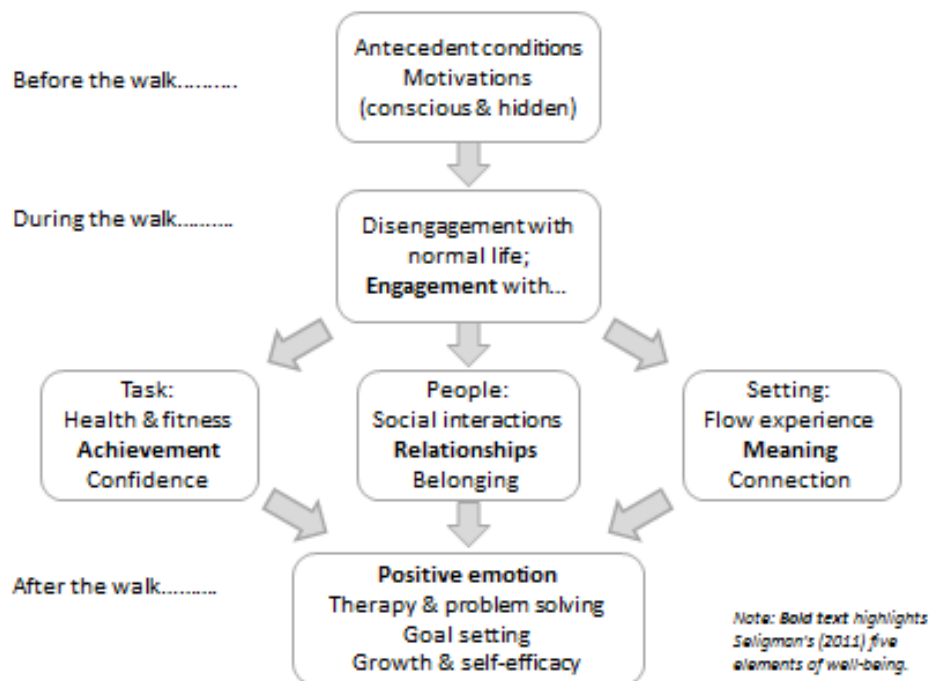
was mentioned, along with reflection during or after the walk. In the case of the Kokoda Trail experience, the strongest emotions were expressed in relation to meaning and connection (theme 5). Most Kokoda trekkers reported reading books about the wartime history of the trail on their return. After his walk Andrew also sought out veterans of the Kokoda campaign living in nursing homes, and now visits them regularly. He also joined one of the Kokoda Battalion Associations and attends their dinners and Anzac Day services.

Emotional impact seems to be important in generating the motivation necessary to integrate change into the lives of interviewees after a walk. Challenge and achievement (theme 2) had the most widespread emotional impact on interviewees. In some cases, relationships and a sense of belonging (theme 3) through meeting people with shared interests also generated strong emotions. Together with the sense of meaning and connection (theme 5), these outcomes often seem to generate a new sense of purpose. Powerful positive emotions are associated with the end of a walk, and appear to be a generalised outcome of the holistic experience rather than being tied to any one aspect.

Figure 1 draws on concepts from positive psychology and the findings from interviews to suggest how a long-distance walking experience may enhance well-being through personal transformation. A combination of antecedent conditions and motivations prior to a long-distance walk facilitates engagement in three key aspects of the experience: the walking task; social interactions with people during the walk; and the walk setting. *Engagement*, one of Seligman's five elements of well-being, thus becomes a central process in transformation. Three other elements of well-being: *achievement*,

relationships and *meaning* are outcomes that arise from the engagement with task, people and settings. Seligman's fifth element of well-being, *positive emotion*, is a product of all these aspects. All five of Seligman's (2011) elements of well-being are potentially enriched by the transformative experience.

Figure 1. Transformative effects of long-distance walking



Implicit in the model are also the three components of Bridges' (2004) change process: disengagement from normal life occurs in the early stages of the walk, followed by an extended period of liminality in which participants are open to new perspectives. Integration of changed perspectives and behaviours into normal life occurs after the walk, with goal setting, growth and self-efficacy being important aspects. For this reason, therapy and problem-solving (theme 1) is shown in the model as a holistic outcome at the end of the walk. Although critical insights may occur during reflective

moments of the walk, in each case from interviews, important additional actions occurred after the walk.

In linking achievement, relationships and meaning directly with the walking task, other people, and the walk setting, the model simplifies complex interactions. Walking in itself can generate longer-term meaning, especially through guiding and sharing experiences with other people. Since completing their walks, Jeff has become a tour guide and has led several treks along the Kokoda Trail, Ivan has become a Scout leader, and Roy has found a new central life interest by developing a website to share information about his long-distance walks.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the outcomes and benefits of long-distance walking; outlined positive changes interviewees made in their lives following such an experience; and elucidated associated processes of change. Interviews suggest that long-distance walking can facilitate processes of relief and disengagement from common stresses and problems in life and can help people find ways to resolve their issues. Moreover, long-distance walking can foster enduring positive self-directed change in participants' lives by building confidence and a sense of purpose. Process elements highlighted in interviews include opportunities for reflection and reappraisal, which may be important in adjusting to life crises and major life transitions.

The framework of positive psychology helps further elucidate the process of transformation and its positive effects on well-being. In particular, all five elements of well-being in Seligman's (2011) PERMA scheme are evident in the transformation process, as presented in Figure 1. Engagement with the task and challenge of long-distance walking generate a sense of achievement, which frequently leads to increased confidence and goal setting. Relationships formed and developed through long-distance walking can be strong and enduring, with shared experiences and associated emotions deepening bonds. Meaning emerges particularly from engagement with setting, changed perspectives and time spent in reflection while walking; but can also be facilitated through interaction with other people such as guides. Positive emotion is a product of all these aspects. Perhaps most powerfully, the achievement of completing a challenging and meaningful walk can boost self-efficacy and generate growth.

This study supports the findings of Crust et al (2011) that long-distance walking in itself can contribute to well-being. Findings also support Kottler's (1997) contention that appropriate travel can act as a substitute or supplement to counselling and other interventions, and suggests that long-distance walking may have potential to help older adults in ways which build on established programs directed at youth and young adults. The potential contribution of long-distance walking to the development of character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) not included in the PERMA formulation is an area in need of further research, as is research examining how certain character traits may contribute to a range of outcomes and benefits to participants.

A limitation of the current study is its exploratory nature. Elements of well-being have been elicited from the content analysis of interviews and written journals rather than being identified through validated, quantitative measures. The extent to which well-being is enhanced, whether this is an enduring effect, and the frequency of personally significant experiences and transformative outcomes have not been measured. Quantitative research may be able to elucidate these aspects and the importance of transformation in ongoing personal well-being. The field of guiding and guide training may benefit from further research into the role of emotion and flow-like states including social flow (Walker 2010), and ways in which these experiences can be facilitated. The transformative benefits of long-distance walking suggest that research may also be worthwhile into the relationship between achievement, confidence and the broader constructs of self-efficacy and learned optimism.

Transformative travel is under-researched, despite recent growth in the types of experiences available around the world and the numbers taking up these activities. This chapter contributes to knowledge about transformative travel by exploring long-distance walking in an Australian context and examining change processes which benefit adult well-being. A model is developed which draws on themes elicited from a qualitative study of long-distance walkers, together with the elements of well-being identified by Seligman (2011). This chapter illustrates how these experiences can become life-changing for participants, by setting new goals and directions which become central to some aspect of their lives. Walking, far from being a passive leisure experience, appears to have had profound effects on the participants in this study. Future research will

explore these experiences in greater detail, including the antecedents and longevity of transformative outcomes.

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