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Evaluating Joseph Campbell's Underexplored Ideas In the Light of Modern Psychology

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Evaluating Joseph Campbell's Underexplored Ideas in the Light of Modern Psychology

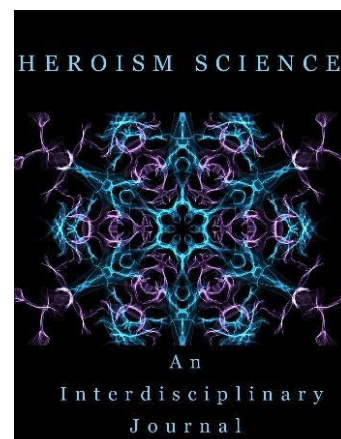
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ABSTRACT: Joseph Campbell was a scholar of comparative mythology and religion who attained great popularity by promoting the importance of mythology in people's everyday lives. His ideas have not been subjected to rigorous testing, however. So, it is unclear if they are useful for people trying to attain optimal psychological functioning or if they could contribute to current research and theorizing in psychology. In this paper, we summarized Campbell's psychology-related ideas. Then, we assessed those ideas in relation to modern psychology research. We found that many of Campbell's ideas are consistent with existing evidence and theory. This means his ideas could stimulate and organize future research and they could help people attain optimal functioning.

KEYWORDS: *Joseph Campbell, mythology, optimal functioning, hero's journey*

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1 EVALUATING JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S UNDEREXPLORED IDEAS IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

Joseph Campbell was a scholar of mythology and comparative religion whose ideas have been widely embraced by the public. His books, including *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) and *The Masks of God* (1968), still reside near the top of bestseller lists decades after their publication (e.g., Amazon.com), and the 1988 broadcast of his interviews with Bill Moyers attracted over 30 million viewers, making it one of the most popular series in the history of American public television (Moyers & Company, 2018). His aphorism "Follow your bliss" has cemented itself into the public consciousness to such an extent that it can now be found on mugs, t-shirts, and bumper stickers. A single Google search of the phrase returned 863,000 hits. Even *YouTube* is replete with talks by Campbell, as well as personal tributes to the man and his ideas, and these videos have garnered hundreds of thousands of views.

Interestingly, this wide public acceptance of Campbell's ideas has not been matched by an interest in those ideas by the scientific community. Few of Campbell's ideas have been subjected to rigorous empirical scrutiny. The research that has been published has been conducted relatively recently and has focused primarily on the hero's journey. There are now books (Allison & Goethals, 2011), empirical articles (e.g., Efthimiou & Franco, 2017; Robertson & Lawrence, 2015; Tomazos, 2016), and whole journals (*Heroism Science*) presenting serious scientific research into this issue. This is certainly good, but there are still a number of Campbell's psychology-related ideas that remain unexplored.

Our goal in this paper was to evaluate these underexplored ideas. Because we could find no research directly these ideas, we evaluated them using what seemed to us to be relevant studies conducted for independent reasons. For example, to evaluate Campbell's claim that people are not looking for meaning in life but an experience of being alive, we reviewed research on the relation between meaning and life satisfaction (Kulkarni, Anderson, Sanders, Newbold & Martin, 2015). To evaluate his claim that where you stumble there lays your treasure, we reviewed research on post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). We began by discussing Campbell's conceptualization of myth.

What Are Myths?

Over the course of his career, Campbell offered-up a variety of definitions of myth. He suggested, for example, that myths are: "other people's religion" (Campbell, 2013a, p. 8), clues to the spiritual potentialities of life" (Campbell & Moyers, 1988, p. 5), and "a metaphor transparent to transcendence" (Campbell, 1990, p. 40). Alongside of these differences, however, he routinely suggested that myths are narratives bound in time and culture that should not be taken literally. In his words, "Every myth is psychologically symbolic. Its narratives and images are to be read, therefore, not literally, but as metaphors" (Campbell, 2002, p. 28).

When understood as metaphors, myths help people cope with basic problems of life, such as reconciling our consciousness with the way things really are. According to Campbell (2013c), "Consciousness has other notions of how things ought to be, what virtue is and so on. One of the problems that Man has to face is reconciling himself to the foundations of his own existence, and this is the first function of mythology." In other words, people have their own desires for how things should be and these desires may put them at odds with the way things are.

To exemplify the lack of congruence between the way things are and people's desires Campbell told the story of a Buddhist monk he knew who had bought buckets of baitfish with the goal of setting the fish free (Campbell, 1991). The monk carried the fish to the seashore, blessed them, and released them into the water. As he did, though, pelicans swooped in and began to eat the fish. This was not the outcome the monk had in mind. So, he began running up and down the shore, waving his robe at the pelicans, trying to chase them away. The moral of the story, according to Campbell, is that the monk's compassion for the baitfish led him to ignore the needs of the pelicans or the way of nature more generally. "What is good for pelicans is bad for fish, and this monk had taken sides. He was not in the middle place" (Campbell, 1991, p. 210).

Myths help us attain this middle place by giving us "a certain distance from our role," and enabling us "to appreciate the role of somebody on the other side of the court... There are always opposite values on the opposite side of the fence, and if you are playing it, it's going to be a much more human, congenial, and successful life you will be leading" (Campbell, 2013b). Campbell gave the example of two people in a tennis match (Toms, 1990). Each has to strive to win. Otherwise, there would be no match. But each also has to accept the perspective of the umpire who calls the ball in or out regardless of which player benefits.

By helping us weaken our attachment to our egocentric perspective, myth "opens the world to ... the mystery that underlies all forms." (Campbell, 1988, p. 31). When we open up in this way, "the universe becomes, as it were, a holy picture. You are always addressing the transcendent mystery through the conditions of your actual world." (Campbell, 1988, p. 31). As a result, people may experience a "sense of wonder and awe before the absolute mystery of being itself with affirmation and with gratitude" (Campbell, 2013a). Thus, one of the main functions of myth is to help people move beyond their egocentric perspective to a self-transcendent one, and experience life as it is with awe and gratitude. In this context, egocentrism refers to an individual's attachment to his or her own perspectives, viewpoints, truths, and construal of self, whereas self-transcendence involves moving beyond self-centered consciousness, seeing things with a clear awareness of human nature and human problems, and attaining some freedom from biological and social conditioning (Levenson, Jennings, Aldwin, & Shiraishi, 2005).

The Hero's Journey

How do people move past an egocentric perspective to a self-transcendent one? Campbell outlined the process in his well-known hero's journey. The basic motif of the journey is "leaving one condition, then finding the source of life to bring you forth in a richer or more mature or other condition" (Campbell, 1988, p. 152). "You as you know yourself are not the final term of your being. And you must die to that, one way or another, in giving of yourself to something, or in being annihilated actually physically" (Campbell, 1988, p. 188).

Campbell also described the process for annihilating the egocentric self. "I always tell my students 'Follow your bliss' ... where the deep sense of being in form and going where your body and soul want to go, when you have that feeling, then stay with it and don't let anyone throw you off" (Campbell, 1988, p. 147). To find your bliss you must "keep your mind on those moments when you feel most happy, when you really are happy — not excited, not just thrilled, but deeply happy. This requires a little bit of self-analysis. What is it that makes you happy? Stay with it, no matter what people tell you" (Campbell, 1988, p. 193). Thus, the way for people to move past their egocentric perspective is to find the values that really drive them and that are not merely put upon them by society.

The call to do what makes you happy regardless of what other people tell you could easily be interpreted as a call to self-centered hedonism. This is not what Campbell had in mind, though. In fact, he argued explicitly against this view when he said, "Following your bliss is not self-indulgent, but vital; your whole physical system knows that this is the way to

be alive in this world and the way to give to the world the very best that you have to offer" (Campbell, 1991, p. 9). Following your bliss reflects "the deep sense of being in it, and doing what the push is out of your own existence. It may not be fun, but it's your bliss and there's bliss behind pain too" (Campbell, 1988, p. 217).

Campbell elaborated on this idea in his discussion of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs (e.g., physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, self-actualization).

When I first read that I remember thinking 'These are exactly the values that go completely to pieces when one is seized with a mythological zeal.' If there is something you are really living for, you will forget security. You will forget survival. You will forget your prestige. You will even forget your friends. And as for self-development, that's gone. (Campbell, 2013b).

Further evidence that following one's bliss is not self-centered lay in the observation that "All of the great myths require that the individual who has achieved the goal should come back with it to his social order and give it" (Campbell, 2013a). "[F]irst you must find your trajectory then comes the social coordination" (Toms, 1990, p. 34). In short, following one's bliss is not self-serving. It involves waking up from an egocentric self to a transcendent one and then using one's new insights to help others.

The Search for the Grail

Although the hero is expected ultimately to benefit society, the journey itself is not inherently social. It centers on "that which never was before on land or sea: the fulfillment of our unique potentialities, which are different from anybody else's." This means other people can help you on your way, but "the last trick has to be done by you" (Campbell, 1988, p. 184). Thus, the sense of most myths "is the finding of the dynamic source in your life so that the trajectory of the life you live is something out of your own center and not something put on you by the society" (Toms, 1990, p. 34).

Once a person has found his or her bliss and has started to follow it, things only get better. In the words of Campbell (1988), "If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. When you can see that, you begin to meet people who are in the field of your bliss, and they open the doors to you. I say, follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be." (p. 150). When people follow their bliss, they encounter opportunities for goal attainment they would not have encountered otherwise.

Where You Stumble, There Lay Your Treasure

When all is said and done, the message of myth is overwhelmingly positive: People die to their egocentric self, wake up to their transcendent self, experience awe and gratitude, and return revitalized to help society. We should not conclude from this, however, that the journey itself is pleasant. It is not. Trials and tribulations are indispensable ingredients. "The black moment is the moment when the real message of transformation is going to come through" (Campbell, 1988, p. 46). The hero dies to the egocentric perspective and wakes up to the transcendent one by working through a series of adventures that challenge the self to its limit.

"When looking back at your life, you will see that the moments which seemed to be great failures followed by wreckage were the incidents that shaped the life you have now... Even though it looks and feels at the moment like a negative crisis, it is not." It is during such times that "the spontaneity of your own nature will have a chance to flow." (Campbell, 1991). In short, people may obtain important insights and psychological benefits when they are forced to cope with challenges in life.

Meaning versus Experience

As we have seen, myths play a central role in many aspects of our life, at least according to Campbell. They help us experience life as it is with awe and gratitude, they help us overcome our egocentric perspective and see things from a broader perspective, and they help us find benefit in life challenges. At the bottom line, though, these different effects may converge on one experience. Myths help us to experience that rapture of being alive. As Campbell noted in one of his more famous statements: "People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking... I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive." (Campbell, & Moyers, 1988, p. 5).

How do myth help us value the rapture of being alive over meaning in life? Ironically, by providing us with meaning, but a specific type of meaning.

"A myth, a mythological order, is a system of images which renders to consciousness a sense of meaning in existence. ... the mind goes asking for meanings. It can't play unless it knows or makes up some system of rules, and mythologies present games to play. ... So, that ultimately you experience through the game that positive thing which is the experience of being in being" (Campbell, 2013d).

From this perspective, finding meaning in life is not an endstate, but a means to an end. Myths give people clues regarding how to play the game of life. This, in turn, allows them to experience the rapture of being alive. Once they have this experience, they do not need the meaning.

THE IDEAS

Although our summary does not capture all of Campbell's psychology-related ideas, we believe it captures the major ones that have not been evaluated yet. So, those are the ideas we evaluated. Specifically, we examined Campbell's claims that:

1. People have their own ideas of how things should be and these ideas may put them at odds with the way things are.
2. Adopting a self-transcendent perspective rather than an egocentric one helps people experience life as it is with awe and gratitude.
3. The way for people to move past their egocentric perspective is to find the values that really drive them and that are not merely put upon them by society.
4. When people wake up from the egocentric self to the transcendent self, they use their new insights to help others.
5. When you drop your pre-conceptions, the spontaneity of your own nature will have a chance to flow.
6. When people follow their bliss, they encounter opportunities for goal attainment they would not have encountered otherwise.
7. People may obtain important insights and psychological benefits when they are forced to cope with challenges in life.
8. Finding meaning in life is not an end state, but a means to an end. Meaning gives people a way to play the game and thus experience the rapture of being alive. Once they have the rapture, they do not need the meaning.

THE EVIDENCE

The Consciousness-Reality Disconnect

Our first assessment focused on Campbell's claim that people have their own ideas of how things should be and these ideas may put them at odds with the way things are. Is there any evidence for this claim? Yes, and from a wide variety of studies by a wide variety of researchers.

One of the clearest demonstrations came from a study by Gilovitch, Medvec, and Madey (1995). They interviewed Olympic athletes after they had won a medal. Given that the medal system is unambiguous, the reactions of the athletes should be easy to predict. Winning a gold medal is better than winning a silver one which is better than winning a bronze one. So, it would be reasonable to expect the gold medalists to be the happiest, followed by the silver medalists, followed by the bronze medalists. This is not what Gilovitch et al. found, however.

They found that the gold medal winners were the happiest, followed by the bronze medal winners who, in turn, were happier than the silver medal winners. They explained their results by noting that the medalists based their emotional reactions on counterfactual thinking. The silver medal winners had thoughts like “I could have won the gold if only I had been a tenth of a second faster,” whereas the bronze medal winners had thoughts like, “At least I won a medal. A tenth of a second slower and I might not have gotten a medal at all.” Thus, the medalists’ reactions were determined not by their real order of finish but by their thoughts of what might have been or what should have been. This result fits perfectly with Campbell's claim. The athletes' desires led them to experience emotional reactions that were out-of-sync with the way things actually were.

Conceptually-related results have been found in numerous other studies. Taylor and Brown (1994) summarized evidence showing that people routinely display three positive illusions. They generally rate themselves as better than the average person, they are routinely over-optimistic in assessing the likelihood they will attain their goals, and they tend to overestimate the amount of control they have in most situations. Other studies have found that people who are highly motivated to believe the world is just will blame innocent victims in their attempts to maintain their view of the world (Hafer, 2000), and people tend to overestimate the height and strength of the candidate from their political party compared to the candidate from the opposition party (Knapen, Blaker, & Pollet, 2017).

Such findings make it clear that people often try to interpret reality in ways that make it fit better with their idea of how things are or should be. Thus, the findings are congruent with Campbell's suggestion that people have their own ideas of how things should be and these ideas may put them at odds with the way things are.

Awe, Gratitude, and Self-Transcendence

Campbell’s second suggestion was that adopting a self-transcendent perspective rather than an egocentric one helps people reconcile with reality and experience life with awe

and gratitude. We evaluated this suggestion using research on the connections among egocentrism, self-transcendence, awe, and gratitude.

Recall that egocentrism refers to an individual's attachment to his or her own perspectives, viewpoints, truths, and construal of self, whereas self-transcendence involves moving beyond self-centered consciousness, seeing things with a clear awareness of human nature and human problems, and attaining some freedom from biological and social conditioning (Levenson, Jennings, Aldwin, & Shiraishi, 2005). If Campbell were correct, then if people shift from an egocentric perspective to a self-transcendent one, they are more likely to experience awe. There is evidence this is the case.

Preston and Shin (2017) had some participants recall a time they had a strong spiritual experience or, if they were non-religious, a time they felt a deep connection to the universe. Other participants were asked to recall a time they felt strong feelings of humor or amusement. Then, they had the participants complete the small self scale and a measure of awe. The former reflects the extent to which participants experience a diminished sense of self vis-a-vis something deemed vaster than the individual (e.g., "In the grand scheme of things, my own issues and concerns do not matter as much." Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato, & Keltner, 2015).

Preston and Shin found recall of the spiritual experience (whether religious or non-religious) decreased the perceived size of the self and increased feelings of awe. More importantly, a bootstrapping analysis revealed that the sense of a small self mediated the relation between religious recall and awe. That is, recalling a strong religious experience provided people with the sense of a small self, which in turn increased their chances of experiencing awe. This was precisely the relation predicted by Campbell.

Campbell also predicted that dropping an egocentric perspective would increase the likelihood that a person would experience gratitude. McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) obtained evidence consistent with this prediction. They had participants complete measures of spiritual transcendence (e.g., "I have been able to step outside of my ambitions and failure, pain and joy, to experience a larger sense of fulfillment"), self-transcendence (e.g., "I have had moments of great joy in which I suddenly had a clear, deep feeling of oneness with all that exists"), and gratitude ("I feel thankful for what I have received in life"), and found the three were positively correlated.

The reason for this, according to McCullough et al., is that gratitude is inherently a socially directed feeling. People feel gratitude when they attribute their positive outcome to the intentional actions of another person (or spiritual entity). They are not so much grateful

for getting a cup of coffee, for example, as for having a friend who is willing to buy them a cup of coffee. In sum, there is evidence consistent with Campbell's second suggestion that adopting a self-transcendent perspective rather than an egocentric one helps people reconcile with reality and experience life with awe and gratitude.

Lose the Social Constraints to Find Yourself

In his third suggestion, Campbell said the way for people to move past their egocentric perspective is to find the values that really drive them and that are not merely put upon them by society. This was Campbell's well-known aphorism to follow one's bliss. We examined this suggestion in the context of research derived from self-determination theory (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000).

According to that theory, people's motivation can be ordered along a continuum from autonomous to controlled. At the autonomous end, people perceive their behavior as being motivated out of their interests, values, and enjoyment, and they do not feel pressured in their choices. At the controlled end, people have limited awareness of their interests, values, and feelings and base their behavior instead on situational controls and contingencies. Thus, the autonomy orientation has considerable overlap with Campbell's idea of following one's bliss. In both cases, people get in touch with their interests, feelings, and values, and base their behavior on those rather than on extrinsic societal contingencies. So, if Campbell were correct, then we would see people high in autonomy being higher in self-knowledge and prosocial tendencies, but lower in Narcissism. This turns out to be the case.

For example, Koestner, Bernierim and Zuckerman (1992) had participants complete a scale that measured their level of autonomy vs. controlled motivation. Then, they had participants play with some puzzles and rate each in terms of how interesting, fun, and enjoyable each was. Unbeknown to the participants, the researchers also measured the amount of time participants played with each puzzle. They found a stronger correlation between the ratings and the playtime for autonomy-oriented participants compared to control-oriented participants. This means the autonomy-oriented participants guided their play by their interest and enjoyment, whereas the control-oriented participants did not. As Campbell suggested, social pressure can keep people from following their bliss.

Koestner et al. (1992) extended these findings in a second study. They measured participants' level of autonomy vs. control orientation as well as their level of conscientiousness. Then, they asked the participants if they would complete a questionnaire at home and return it by mail one week later. Given that people high in conscientiousness are

more likely than those low on this trait to take their obligations seriously, we might expect the former to be more likely than the latter to return the questionnaire. Koestner et al. found this to be the case -- but only among participants who had an autonomy orientation. Again, we see support for Campbell's suggestion that the way for people to move past their egocentric perspective is to find the values that really drive them and that are not merely put upon them by society.

Bliss Leads to Self-Transcendence

Although following one's bliss involves focusing on the self rather than on social pressures, it is not Narcissistic, at least according to Campbell. There are reasons to think he was correct. Kasser and Ryan (1996) had participants complete the Narcissistic personality inventory (e.g., "I like to be the center of attention") and rate the importance of seven aspirations as well as the likelihood they would attain these aspirations in their future. Three of the aspirations were extrinsic (money, fame, image), whereas four were intrinsic (growth, relatedness, helpfulness, health). The former are dependent on the contingent reaction of others and are usually engaged in as a means to some other end. The latter are congruent with actualizing and growth tendencies natural in humans, and are inherently satisfying to the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, adopting intrinsic aspirations is closer to what Campbell referred to as following your bliss (i.e., the deep sense of being in it, and doing what the push is out of your own existence).

Kasser and Ryan found that Narcissism was positively correlated with the endorsement of extrinsic aspirations but negatively correlated with the endorsement of intrinsic aspirations. Other studies have shown that intrinsically oriented people are more likely than extrinsically oriented ones to provide help to others (Gagné, 2003). In short, the data suggest that Campbell was correct. Following one's bliss is not selfish and Narcissistic but in fact makes people more prosocial.

Your Own Path

It is when you are not following the pre-existing scripts that "the spontaneity of your own nature will have a chance to flow" (Campbell, 2001). Research on the moderators of the relation between personality and behavior may give us some evidence relevant to this claim. According to Caspi and Moffitt (1993), people may fail to direct their behavior in accordance with their personality when they are in situations that contain strong norms and cues (Snyder

& Ickes, 1985). In such situations, people tend to behave more or less the same way because they are basing their behavior on the same situational cues.

During life transitions, however, the cues from the old situation may no longer be relevant and the cues for the new situation may not yet be available. So, people will search for something else to guide their behavior. According to Caspi and Moffitt, this is when people are likely to turn to their stable dispositional differences. So, for example, introverts will behave like introverts and extraverts will behave like extraverts (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). This observation is generally consistent with Campbell's suggestions. People may lose contact with their personal values when they are subjected to social pressure but may turn back to their self when the pressure is weakened during a life transition.

Doors Will Open

According to Campbell, when people follow their bliss, they encounter opportunities for goal attainment they would not have encountered otherwise. When people follow their bliss, doors will open that would not have opened before, and, as a result, people will be more likely to encounter opportunities for goal attainment. We assessed this suggestion by examining research on the upward spiral of well-being. Sheldon and Houser-Marko (2001) had participants at the start of a semester list 8 goals they hoped to attain and then report why they were striving for those goals. They could report reasons ranging from intrinsic (i.e., interest or enjoyment) to extrinsic (i.e., guilt or shame). Then, at various points in the semester, the researchers asked participants how they were progressing toward their goals and assessed their well-being. They found that students with intrinsic motivations were more likely than those with extrinsic motivations to have attained their goals and to have experienced an increase in well-being. The intrinsically motivated students were also more likely to set subsequent goals that were concordant with their intrinsic values, which, in turn, made them more likely to attain those goals, more likely to experience an increase in well-being, and so on.

In short, students who pursued goals congruent with their values were more likely than those who pursued extrinsically motivated goals to put themselves on an upward spiral of well-being. This pattern is consistent with Campbell's suggestions that when people follow their bliss, they encounter opportunities for goal attainment they would not have encountered otherwise.

Growth from Challenge

Our next evaluation is of Campbell's suggestion that people may obtain important insights and psychological benefits when they are forced to cope with challenges in life. We assessed this claim by exploring research on posttraumatic growth (e.g., Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Park, 2010; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The starting assumption underlying this research is that as people go through life they build up cognitive models of the world and their place in it. In this context, traumas are events that challenge our view of the world.

Having one's worldview challenged is distressing, and it motivates people to rebuild their worldview. In the best of cases, this rebuilding results in a worldview that maps more closely onto the world as it is and that allows people to continue to engage with life in the future. As Janoff-Bulman (1992) put it, "It is not simply that some trauma survivors cope well and perceive benefits in spite of their losses, but rather that the creation of value and meaning occurs because of their losses, particularly the loss of deeply held illusions" (p. 35).

Possession of a new, more realistic worldview may inoculate people from future challenges and may contribute to psychological growth. This sets the stage for people to experience improvement above their pre-trauma levels, at least along some dimensions. For example, people may experience greater social support, find answers to existential questions, and discover strengths they never knew they had.

It is important to note, however, that the growth does not occur as a direct result of the trauma. It comes from the coping, from the tearing down and the building back up of one's worldview (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Park, 2010; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Thus, the research on posttraumatic growth is congruent with Campbell's suggestion that people may obtain important insights and psychological benefits when they are forced to cope with challenges in life.

Experience Rather than Meaning

Our last evaluation is of Campbell's claim that people are not seeking a meaning for life but an experience of being alive. According to Campbell, meaning gives people a way to play the game and thus experience the rapture of being alive. Once they have the rapture, they do not need the meaning.

At first glance, this claim may seem difficult to reconcile with the large body of the research on meaning in life. That research shows, for example, that people who report having meaning in their life also report higher life satisfaction than people who report not having meaning (Steger & Kashdan, 2007). They also report reduced suicidal ideation (e.g., Heisel &

Flett, 2004), lower alcohol and drug use (e.g., Lecci, MacLean, & Croteau, 2002), and better coping with physical illness (Jim & Anderson, 2007). Kray and colleagues, 2010 concluded that "the ability to find meaning in life is virtually a prerequisite for achieving the 'good life' (p. 106).

Recall, however, that Campbell did not say that meaning was unimportant. He said people are not searching for it, but searching instead for the experience of being alive. The latter, however, they could attain by finding clues regarding how to play the game of life. So, it is in this sense that meaning is important. It helps people experience the rapture of being alive and once they have done so, they no longer need the meaning.

Evidence generally consistent with this position was obtained by Kulkarni, Anderson, Sanders, Newbold, and Martin (2015). They had participants play one of three versions of a computer game. In one version, the pace of the game was extremely slow, in another it was extremely fast, and in the third it was between these two extremes. Then, they had participants report the extent to which they were experiencing meaning in life and report their satisfaction with life.

Based on Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) flow theory, Kulkarni et al. predicted that participants would experience more flow or optimal experience (e.g., concentration, positive affect, sense of clarity and competence) in the moderate pace condition, but would experience more unpleasant emotions and more off-task thoughts in the slow pace and fast pace conditions. This is in fact what they obtained.

More importantly, though, was the effect of these experience on participants' reports of meaning in life and life satisfaction. In the moderate condition, participants felt structured, competent, and confident. In Campbell's terms, they could play the game. So, meaning in life should be less important to them. They already had the positive experience finding meaning in life was supposed to confer. When participants played the game that was very slow or very fast, they were not in flow, and they reported more off-task thoughts. "Why is the experimenter making me play this senseless game?" As a result, they were motivated to search for meaning.

The results supported this hypothesis. Among participants who were in flow as a result of playing the moderately paced game, there was little correlation between participants' meaning in life and their life satisfaction. Among the non-flow participants (fast or slow game), however, there was a significant correlation between life satisfaction and meaning in life. In short, meaning in life was important to life satisfaction only among people who were not able to play the game. This pattern is a concrete representation of Campbell's broader

point. People do not have an inherent need for meaning in their life. Meaning may help them play the game of life and in that way help them experience the rapture of being alive. Once they experience the rapture (i.e., flow), meaning becomes less important to them.

Using a very different procedure, Scannell, Allen, and Burton (2002) also obtained results that were generally supportive of Campbell's view of meaning in life. They assessed the relations among well-being (e.g., happiness in life, self-esteem, physical symptoms) and two dimensions of meaning in life. One dimension was cognitive and reflected the extent to which participants reported having a clear direction in life, a purpose in life, deep beliefs, and a structured philosophy in life. The other was affective and reflected the extent to which participants reported living fully and deeply, having a passion in life, and feeling excited, energetic, and focused. Scannell et al. found that having an affective sense of meaning was more strongly associated with well-being than was having a coherent, structured cognitive framework. As they put it, "Perhaps a sense of meaning in life is more important than a fully developed structure for that meaning." (p. 104). This finding seems generally consistent with Campbell's suggestion that people value the experience of being alive over the finding of a meaning in life.

In short, there is some suggestive evidence that people are not always motivated to finding meaning in life -- at least not in the sense of developing a structured cognitive framework. It seems instead that people are searching for the kind of meaning that allows them to play the game of life and in that way experience the rapture of being alive. Once they experience this rapture, they find the meaning less central.

CONCLUSION

Based on his study of mythology, Joseph Campbell made a wide range of suggestions for how people could attain optimal psychological functioning, and these suggestions have been widely embraced by the public. The suggestions, however, have not received much serious scientific scrutiny. There is a growing body of research exploring implications of Campbell's hero's journey, but less research addressing his other psychology-related ideas. So, we decided to evaluate those ideas in the light of existing psychological research conducted for independent reasons.

Based on this evaluation, we concluded that many of Campbell's suggestions are useful. There is research to support each of his following suggestions:

1. People have their own ideas of how things should be and these ideas may put them at odds with the way things are.
2. Adopting a self-transcendent perspective rather than an egocentric one helps people experience life as it is with awe and gratitude.
3. The way for people to move past their egocentric perspective is to find the values that really drive them and that are not merely put upon them by society.
4. When people wake up from the egocentric self to the transcendent self, they use their new insights to help others.
5. When you drop your pre-conceptions, the spontaneity of your own nature will have a chance to flow.
6. When people follow their bliss, they encounter opportunities for goal attainment they would not have encountered otherwise.
7. Finding meaning in life is not an end state, but a means to an end. Meaning gives us a way to play the game and thus experience the rapture of being alive.
8. People may obtain important insights and psychological benefits when they are forced to cope with challenges in life.

This is an impressive accomplishment, especially when one considers that Campbell based his ideas in large part on theories and research that are over 100 years old. (Toms, 1990). Campbell pointed specifically to Freud and Jung as his psychology influences and to Adolf Bastian and Heinrich Zimmer for his view on mythology. He also gave credit to novelists James Joyce and Thomas Mann for their depictions of the role of myth in daily life.

It is also interesting to note that at the time Campbell was formulating his ideas, mainstream psychology was dominated by the behavioral perspective and by the psychodynamic perspective. That makes Campbell's emphasis on optimal psychological functioning even more impressive. In some ways, he was a harbinger of the recent positive psychology movement. He focused on awe, gratitude, and self-transcendence at a time when mainstream psychology was focusing on unconscious conflicts or reward and punishment contingencies.

How is it possible that this researcher is congruent with recent research? Campbell might have explained this outcome by saying myths reflect timeless psychological truths. What was true of people when they wrote the epic of Gilgamesh was also true of them 100 years ago and is still true today. According to Campbell, there are themes common to myths from different places and different times (e.g., worldwide flood), and these commonalities are

not the result of cultural diffusion. They are the result of separate development. "And when you have the idea of separate development, this speaks for certain powers in the psyche which are common to all mankind" (Campbell, 1988, p. 217). "The images of myth come from the psyche and are reflected through the world in the way that psychiatrists speak of projection" (Campbell, 2013b). Although we cannot evaluate these claims here, we can say that Campbell, influenced by myths and by early 20th century thinkers, made predictions that turned out to be supported by research conducted decades later.

By the standards of current psychology, one of Campbell's weaknesses was his lack of precision. In writing this paper, we had to use a variety of sources to give us confidence we knew what Campbell meant when he made claims such as follow your bliss. This lack of precision, however, may have contributed to Campbell's theoretical breadth and integration. He saw relations among egocentrism, self-transcendence, awe, gratitude, autonomy versus controlled motivation, prosocial behavior, Narcissism, the upward spiral of well-being, and post-traumatic growth. Although each of these topics is currently the subject of considerable research, each is also for the most part being studied separately, in the light of domain specific theories (e.g., a theory of awe, a theory of gratitude). There is certainly nothing wrong with that, but it is possible the research could benefit from the adoption of a more integrative approach, and taking Campbell's work into consideration could be one step toward that end. Taking his work seriously could lead to the development of new hypotheses and new techniques for people to attain optimal functioning (e.g., Allison & Goethals, 2011).

His research suggests ways to experience life as it is rather than as we would have it to be and it helps us experience awe and gratitude as we do this. Myths also help us guide our life using our personal values rather than those placed on us by society, and it helps us turn away from our limited, egocentric perspective to a helpful, cooperative, transpersonal one. Myths help us find benefits during life challenges and they suggest ways to face life when life seems to have no meaning.

It seems likely that Campbell's wide appeal in the public results from people believing his ideas could help them attain optimal functioning. Our review suggests that people may not be off the mark in believing this. If they interpret Campbell's ideas correctly and follow them closely, then they would be engaging in behavior that has been shown by modern research to facilitate optimal functioning (e.g., awe, bliss, gratitude, transpersonal self, ways to play the game of life).

We did not assess all of Campbell's ideas. We focused on his psychology-related ideas that have not yet been fully explored. Future research could evaluate these ideas more

directly and could tighten and evaluate what are currently diffuse suggestions (e.g., the privilege of a lifetime is being who you are).

In sum, Joseph Campbell has been described as "The popular myth theorist no one but the public takes seriously" (BethsMomToo, 2006). That assessment has become less accurate in recent years as researchers have begun to use rigorous, scientific methods to examine some of Campbell's ideas (Allison & Goethals, 2011, 2013; Efthimiou & Franco, 2017; Robertson & Lawrence, 2015; Tomazos, 2016). In this paper, we evaluated some underexplored ideas of Campbell's and found that these ideas were generally congruent with the findings of modern research. It seems likely, therefore, that if psychologists took Campbell's thinking more seriously, then they could develop new integrative hypotheses and new strategies for attaining optimal functioning.

2 REFERENCES

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3 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.