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Planned disruptions and Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy

Karen Howells

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Planned disruptions

Planned disruptions involve the exposure of athletes to structured and deliberate training activities comprising increased and/or changing demands under controlled circumstances (Kegelaers et al., 2020) and can be used to facilitate the development of athletes' resilience (e.g., Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016; Galli & Gonzalez, 2015). Planned disruptions can take many forms, such as manipulating the physical and mental demands on the athlete including disrupting sleep or adding consequences to certain behaviours. In a qualitative study that explored coaches of elite athletes' use of planned disruptions, Kegelaers et al. (2020) identified nine types of planned disruptions namely, location, competition simulation, punishments and rewards, physical strain, stronger competition, distractions, unfairness, restrictions, and outside the box (i.e., non-sport-specific activities). When these planned disruptions are combined with formal reflection to create athlete awareness of their responses under pressure then they can be used to promote resilient qualities in athletes. An example of this in practice can be seen in the experiences of Richard Parks, a former Wales international rugby player who retired from professional rugby following a career ending injury and who, following a period of depression and agoraphobia, turned to adventure physical activity and became an extreme environment athlete (see Case Study 1).

CASE STUDY 1 Richard Parks—Pushing the Bounds of Human Endurance

Richard Parks is a former Wales international rugby player and extreme environment athlete who takes part in expeditions that push the boundaries of human endurance. His successes involve completing the 737 challenge where he was the first person ever to climb the highest mountain on each of the world's seven continents and stand on all three poles (the North Pole, the South Pole, and the summit of Everest) within seven months.

In a BBC Learning production, Richard talked about the use of planned disruptions to prepare for his extreme adventure expedition. He referred to this as 'deprivation training' and used the example of reducing his body to clinical hypothermia through submersion in an ice bath to learn how to control emotions, cognition, and anxieties. This specific deprivation training, he believes, allowed him to manage a fall into a crevasse in Alaska and successfully facilitate a rescue.

Source: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02xc4pk

In a study that utilised a mixed methods quasi-experimental design, Kegelaers et al. (2019) evaluated the effectiveness of a pressure training intervention for elite level female basketball players with a specific focus on planned disruptions. They measured resilience using the unidimensional 10-item Connor-Davidson resilience scale (CD-RISC-10; Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007) and through qualitative interviews. Their findings were inconclusive. Thematic analysis of their interview data indicated that their intervention was effective in developing certain resilient qualities and they interpreted that it may have a positive impact on a team's ability to deal with competitive stressors. However,

improvements in these psychosocial processes were not necessarily reflected by the answers on the CD-RISC-10. Although the authors hypothesised why this inconsistency occurred, they suggested that the intervention may have been more successful in having an impact on collective (e.g., team), rather than individual, processes. This is an important observation as the design of any intervention should be specific about whether the development of resilience is targeted at an individual or collective level. Furthermore, they noted that the CD-RISC-10 is not specific to sport and therefore given the wording, which is specific to general life stressors, may not necessarily reflect sport-specific competitive stressors. This study illustrates the importance of ensuring a theoretically informed design and appropriate measurement of resilience in any intervention programme.

Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy

REBT is a form of cognitive-behavioural therapy that is becoming increasingly popular in sport psychology. Practitioners who use REBT start with the assumption that many of the problems that an individual may experience in the sporting environment can be attributed to irrational thinking. REBT practitioners employ an ABC (DE) framework where A is the antecedent (adversity), B is the belief (irrational and/or rational), C is the consequence, D involves disputation and E a new effective rational belief. Importantly, REBT does not dispute the perception of the adversity (A); it assumes that the adversity is true and accepts that it is negative for the individual involved (even if others may not perceive the event or experience to be negative in nature). Rather, it is the beliefs (B) about the adversity that are disputed (D) and should be replaced with new effective beliefs (E). From an REBT perspective:

> *Resilience comprises a set of flexible cognitive, behavioural and emotional responses to acute or chronic adversities that can be unusual or commonplace. These responses can be learned and are within the grasp of everyone. While many factors affect the development of resilience, the most important one is the belief that the person holds about the adversity. Therefore, belief is the heart of resilience.*
>
> *(Dryden, 2011, p. 134)*

In a study involving five elite athletes who were low in resilient qualities as measured by the CDRISC-10 (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007), an REBT intervention was shown to reduce irrational beliefs and enhance resilient qualities in athletes (Deen et al., 2017).

Wood et al. (2017) suggest that the nature of elite sport may perpetuate an athlete's irrational beliefs; specifically, the transition to elite sport may involve a shift into a period fixated on success, failure, and perceived self-worth. When faced with setbacks (adversity) athletes may become susceptible to more irrational beliefs which, in turn, result in unhealthy emotions and maladaptive behaviours. By addressing an individual's propensity to irrational beliefs and adopting strategies that allow a disruption to create new effective beliefs, the individual will become resilient to (as in

protected against) further adversity. In Wood et al.'s (2017) intervention, a young cricketer developed a new formed rational philosophy that allowed him to "weather" (p. 274) further setbacks. Locating this within Fletcher and Sarkar's (2016) dual conceptualisation of resilience (i.e., robust and rebound), REBT may address both aspects. Through addressing the irrationals beliefs (B), the potential for rebound is enhanced, and through development of disruption strategies, robust resilience may be developed.

Irrespective of the type of intervention that a practitioner deems appropriate, sport psychologists have to be flexible and respond to a multitude of different factors in developing an effective intervention. The ability to deal with the unexpected is as important to the practitioner as it is to the athlete. This chapter opened with the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had on athletes. Practitioners also have to respond to unforeseen events and this applies to the interventions that are developed to facilitate athlete resilience. In the spotlight box, an example of how sport psychologists responded to developing resilience in a socially distanced world is presented.

Spotlight On: Developing Resilience in a Socially Distanced World

Practitioners often have to overcome challenges themselves to deliver effective interventions to athletes. Because of socially distanced COVID-19 2020, sport psychologists had to come up with innovative ways of developing resilience using socially distanced online platforms. One such example came from Swim England and sport psychologists Hannah Stoyel and Helen Davis who, informed by academic empirical evidence, encouraged swimmers to develop a personal highlight reel to develop resilience. They encouraged swimmers to:

1. Write down some of the things in your life that you are proud of. Add pictures and stories where possible.

2. Circle the highlights that involved a challenge that you had to overcome.

3. Then list what skills, actions and personal characteristics you used to overcome these challenges. Think about which of these you can build on to use again in the future.

Source: www.swimming.org/sport/resilience-personal-highlight-reel/

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