Psychodynamics in Sport Performance Enhancement Consultation: Application of an Interpersonal Theory

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Psychodynamic concepts have only recently begun to attract serious attention in the sport psychology literature. A dynamically based, interpersonal approach to sport psychology consultation is outlined in this article. Key interpersonal constructs such as important persons and their internalized representations (IPRs), copy processes, and self-sacrificing gifts of love are described to portray how a case formulation may be developed to explain and guide interventions to overcome some performance problems. Two cases, one involving a performance phobia and the other an enduring slump related to a fear of success, are presented to demonstrate the unique contributions of interpersonal case formulations in performance enhancement consultation.

Judging from the literature, conference presentations, and conversations with colleagues, applied sport psychology consultations are often focused on teaching psychological skills as mechanisms for performance enhancement rather than addressing possible underlying issue(s) that might be creating the performance problems. Psychological skills training (PST) refers to a didactic approach "designed to teach or enhance mental skills that facilitate performance and a positive approach to sport competition" (Vealey, 1994, p. 495). A PST approach can be helpful and appropriate when athletes have not developed basic self-regulatory tools. Yet, some athletes have well-developed psychological skills and still experience performance problems. Expanding the scope of consultations to explain perfor-
mance problems with theoretically-relevant factors (e.g., the performer's interpersonal experiences) may yield specific recommendations to address the presenting problems and improve the efficacy of the consultation.

Applied sport psychologists have often emphasized possessing a set of basic psychological skills over fostering performers' insights into their performances and into themselves. Stimulating insight by facilitating self-exploration can be profitable. Meta-analytic research has indicated that interventions with specific cognitive restructuring components were an average of 130% more effective than PST interventions lacking cognitive restructuring components (e.g., imagery, goal-setting, relaxation; Meyers, Whelan, & Murphy, 1996). Although the techniques used in PST are often used in the covert rehearsal stage of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), CBT is more sophisticated because it precedes this conditioning stage with problem identification and cognitive restructuring stages that target and elaborate on individual symptoms. These additional stages can be important because they relate directly to the mechanisms by which psychological skills may enhance performance. Consider, for example, the skill of mental imagery.

Taylor and colleagues (Taylor & Pham, 1996; Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Armor, 1998) provided evidence that mental simulations (e.g., imagery) directed at coping with obstacles encountered in the process of performance can enhance the ability to problem solve and regulate emotions. Based on these findings, it appears that imagery may be most effective when used to address the aspects of a performance that an individual may fear or avoid because of the discomfort presented by those performance features. Thus, it seems possible that addressing the motivating fears and wishes as well as the symptoms of the performance problem themselves may further enhance the effectiveness of imagery rehearsals.

Sometimes PST and CBT approaches will not resolve performance problems. For example, coach-athlete conflicts, a frequent concern in performance enhancement consultations, might not be resolved by incorporating mental skills or reframing strategies. In these cases, it may be advantageous to extend the cognitive restructuring convention to include interpersonal components deriving from significant relationships during the developmental cycle (cf. Benjamin, 1996c). The interpersonal approach to be presented here requires that the idiosyncratic constellation of presenting symptoms be accounted for by an integrated case formulation that links presenting symptoms with interpersonal patterns and early experiences with important figures. This approach assumes that underlying interpersonal wishes and fears can account for important elements of some performance problems, especially those problems involving self-sabotage. Under this assumption, if performers possess sound psychological skills and the most popular strategies (i.e., PST, CBT) fail to resolve performance problems, these additional psychodynamic factors might be useful to consider.

Psychodynamic Concepts in Sport

Strate and Strate (1998) argued for developing a more thorough and effective approach to sport psychology practice by incorporating selected psychodynamic concepts. Specifically, Strate and Strate described how free association, resistance, transference, and countertransference might be useful concepts in performance enhancement consultations. For example, the use of free association was encouraged "to help athletes become sensitized to how they write problematic or
maladaptive scripts” (p. 213). On the other hand, resistance, transference, and countertransference were described as omnipresent components of the consultation process that may not receive sufficient attention (and therefore impede progress) in sport psychology consultations.

Of these psychodynamic constructs, transference and countertransference may have attracted the most previous attention in sport psychology. Henschen (1991) and Yambor and Connelly (1991) addressed the transference potential in cross-gender sport consulting and offered suggestions for dealing with (or attempting to prevent) such phenomena. Yambor and Connelly emphasized the importance of establishing professional boundaries early in the relationship to minimize problems that could arise from being cast as a “mother/girlfriend/sister substitute” (p. 307). Henschen described how many sports have normalized physical contact between coaches and athletes (e.g., young, female gymnasts hugging adult male coaches) and cautioned consultants to “avoid these expressions of affection in order that they not be misconstrued” (p. 315). Ogilvie and colleagues (Ogilvie, Tofler, Conroy, & Drell, 1998) also have described erotic and nonerotic transference and countertransference traps that led to relationship violations between coaches and athletes. Ogilvie et al. identified early emotional deprivation from parents as a prominent antecedent of “transferral hunger” (p. 883) that increased young athletes' vulnerability to relationship violations with unethical coaches. Additionally, coaches with “serious emotional or social deprivation in their own lives” (p. 884) were proposed to be at the greatest risk for committing relationship violations with athletes. This recent momentum for considering psychodynamic concepts in sport is promising, and we hope to add to it by demonstrating how similar principles may be applied in performance enhancement consultations.

Giges (1998) cautioned that psychodynamic constructs and theory can easily be misapplied in the sport context and recommended that those who do attempt to build this bridge shift “from a medical model of illness to a growth and developmental model” (p. 225). We attempt to extend Giges’ recommendation by presenting a specific interpersonal approach to performance enhancement that is focused on development and learning and may provide a useful alternative for sport psychology consultants. The present approach is related to, but somewhat more tightly operationalized than, the typical use of psychodynamic concepts. For example, unlike most traditional psychodynamic theories (cf. Strean & Strean, 1998), this approach can be tested using the Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (SASB; Benjamin, 1974, 1979, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c), a system that evolved from the circumplex tradition of personality models begun by Leary (1957) and Schaefer (1965). The SASB represents one empirically-validated interpersonal circumplex model that can codify interpersonal behavior and operationalize psychodynamic constructs such as transference and countertransference in a way that is meaningful for both researchers and practitioners (Carson, 1994; Henry, Schacht, & Strupp, 1990; Humphrey, 1986; Lorrr, 1994).

Familiarity with the SASB system would enhance the readers’ understanding of the insights gained from this interpersonal approach and provide a method for empirically testing many of its predictions. The SASB has been described in great detail elsewhere (e.g., Benjamin, 1974, 1994, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1996d) so only a very basic summary of the system follows. The SASB utilizes three dimensions to describe interpersonal and intrapsychic behavior: focus, affiliation, and interdependence. Focus reveals which of the three circumplex surfaces should
Figure 1 — Three surfaces of the SASB simplified cluster model. Bold, underlined, and italicized labels correspond to the focus on other, focus on self, and introject surfaces of the model, respectively.


be used to describe the behavior in question: focus on other (transitive interpersonal behavior), focus on self (intransitive interpersonal behavior), or introject (intrapsychic behavior, i.e., self-talk). The affiliation dimension describes the friendly or hostile quality of the behavior. The dimension of interdependence describes whether the behavior enhances or reduces the individual’s autonomy. These orthogonal dimensions of affiliation and interdependence form three circumplexes corresponding to each of the three foci in the model.

Using these three dimensions, specific codes can be generated for a wide variety of specific interpersonal behaviors. The full SASB model comprises 36 specific behaviors on each surface of the model (108 total behavioral codes) but the simplified cluster model (8 clusters per surface, 24 total behavioral clusters) shown in Figure 1 is more frequently used by researchers and practitioners. For clarity, codes for the focus on other surface of the model are depicted in bold type; codes for the focus on self surface are underlined; introject codes appear in an italic typeface. For our purposes in this article, detailed knowledge of the SASB is not essential and key constructs can be described and applied with the above information about SASB codes, provided the reader has a basic understanding of psychodynamic and interpersonal theories.

A Brief History of Psychodynamic-Interpersonal Approaches

Psychodynamic is a broad term describing theories that emphasize the interaction of external (e.g., interpersonal relations) and internal (e.g., wishes, fears, relational schemas, attachment style) factors to explain changes in affect, behavior, and cognition. The scope of psychodynamic approaches and object relations theory evolved greatly over the course of the twentieth century (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983).
Freud and Early Psychodynamic Theory

Sigmund Freud's contributions in developing psychoanalytic theory and revolutionizing psychology cannot be understated. Freud received and continues to receive a great deal of criticism for many of his assertions. The novelty and sexual emphasis of many Freudian ideas and the cultural climate of the early 20th century certainly combined to influence many early criticisms of Freud's ideas. The metaphorical nature of some major Freudian concepts (e.g., drive and structural models of personality) and inability to test related propositions also led to charges of irrefutability that provided further fuel for critics.

From a contemporary perspective, it is clear that Freud was well ahead of his time in many ways. Westen (1999) reviewed recent evidence demonstrating empirical support for once controversial Freudian ideas related to (a) the importance of unconscious processes in affect, cognition, and motivation; (b) the possibility for multiple conscious and unconscious psychological processes to affect psychological decisions; (c) the contribution of early childhood experiences to personality development; (d) the function of mental representations in social behavior and psychopathology; and (e) the presence of common developmental tasks that, if interrupted, are associated with disrupted social functioning. Other Freudian concepts (e.g., transference, countertransference, identification, internalization) continue to hold relevance for many contemporary psychologists. Theoretical hits and misses aside, Freud's ideas planted the seeds for more recent psychodynamic and object relations theories that have stimulated a great deal of empirical work linking past and present interpersonal relations to affect, behavior, and cognition.

Early Interpersonally-Based Theories

Competing theoretical movements emphasizing relational models of behavior, learning, and motivation emerged in response to dissatisfaction with the Freudian psychoanalytic approach. Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) and members of the British school of object relations (e.g., Fairbaim, Winnicott) were among the first to offer the interpersonal domain as the instrument for psychoanalysis. Sullivan emphasized that it was important for therapists to become participant observers. That is, therapists should try to understand the patient's world from the patient's perspective rather than from the perspective of a third party. By assuming the role of a participant observer, therapists may begin to understand how specific environmental events (e.g., interactions with important figures) might influence the patient's internal mental life. Collectively, these contributors drew on the idea that personality was based on recurring interpersonal themes, with particular emphasis on the interpersonal patterns from a child's early years when primary attachments were developing.

Attachment Theory

The added theoretical emphasis on interpersonal relationships also has been supported in empirical research and contributed to the development and articulation of attachment theory. Bowlby (1988) conceptualized attachment as a behavioral system responsible for increasing protection and survival odds by regulating (i.e., increasing or maintaining) physical proximity between individuals and their attachment objects who are individuals "conceived as better able to cope with the world" (p. 27).
Bowlby argued that these attachment relationships were primary and not the secondary products of conditioned associations between children and the parent figures because parents feed them. His interpretation received compelling support from Harlow and Zimmerman (1959) who found that young primates preferred soft mother-surrogates that did not feed them to hard mother-surrogates that did feed them. In other words, these animals sought contact comfort independent of their primary need for nourishment. Thus, the need for an affectional bond was distinguished from the mother-figure’s ability to nurture the young animal.

As the relationship between infants and attachment objects develops, it is assumed by attachment theorists that so too do internal working models or representational models that individuals construct of themselves and those around them based on their experiences. These models summarize an individual’s expectations of the environment and provide the “rules and rule systems for the direction of behavior” (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985, p. 77). Bretherton (1985) paralleled internal working models to event schemas or scripts that children develop to organize the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of behavior (p. 32). Internal working models can provide a “secure base” that permits children to feel safe while exploring the environment (i.e., children believe that their attachment object will be available and responsive if needed, even if not currently present). In contrast, children without a secure base are less willing to explore and will demonstrate attachment behavior (i.e., behavior designed to increase or maintain proximity to an attachment object such as approaching, calling, crying, smiling; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969) in the absence of their attachment object (Bowlby, 1977).

By observing infants’ behavior during and following a forced separation from their mothers, Ainsworth et al. (1978) identified individual differences in attachment styles. Three specific patterns of behavior were distinguished. The most distinct group of infants were found in Group-B and described as securely attached. These infants had harmonious, cooperative, and compliant relationships with their mothers. They explored when the mother was present and were not disturbed by brief separations in a familiar environment. During unexpected or long separations, they protested intensely but (typically) calmed quickly upon reunion. In contrast, infants in Group-A and Group-C “cried more and showed more separation anxiety than did Group-B babies” (p. 316). Group-A infants (described as avoidant) showed “little or no tendency to seek proximity to or interaction with mother, even in the reunion episodes” (p. 59). Group-C infants (typically described as ambivalent or resistant) also avoided interaction with their mothers during reunion but sought proximity and interaction with their mothers at other times.

These attachment classifications for 12-month old infants have demonstrated considerable predictive validity. Bretherton (1985) reviewed evidence demonstrating that early attachment styles predict a variety of later outcomes, including cognitive and affective functioning during toddlers’ free play, discourse fluency, emotional openness, overall functioning, seeking problem-solving help from parents, social functioning in preschool, play between peers, and children’s behavior with secondary caregivers. Some life events (e.g., stressful family events, maternal depression) can predictably influence and change a child’s attachment style but these early attachment styles were relatively stable even over a 6-year interval (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Although these studies do not assess internal working models directly and cannot rule out plausible rival hypotheses for the relationships
documented above, the evidence is consistent with Bowlby’s theory (1988) that internal working models influence many aspects of behavior.

**Key Constructs in an Interpersonal Approach**

Influenced by interpersonal and attachment theory, Benjamin (1993, 1996c) developed an interpersonally-based approach to object relations. Six assumptions underlie Benjamin’s approach: (a) problems are the consequence of (mal)adaptation and not breakdown; (b) genetic and environmental factors interact to influence an individual’s behavior; (c) problem symptoms may be understood as consequences of specific experiences; (d) symptoms can be understood as logical adaptations when viewed from the perspective of the client; (e) original object relations influence our present behavior; and (f) attachment is a fundamental human motive. These assumptions appear to have substantial clinical validity and are consistent with emerging research (Benjamin, 1996d) in the assessment (Pincus & Ruiz, 1997), behavioral genetics (McGonigle, Smith, Benjamin, & Turner, 1993), dyadic therapy (Henry, Schacht, & Strupp, 1990), family (Florsheim, 1996), group therapy (MacKenzie, 1997), individual psychopathology (Armelius & Granberg, 2000), marital (Humphrey, 1986), personality (Henry, 1994), and therapist training (Hilliard, Henry, & Strupp, 2000) literatures. Three constructs are central when adopting and attempting to apply this approach: (a) important persons and their internalized representations, (b) copy processes, and (c) self-sacrificing gifts of love.

**Important Persons and Their Internalized Representations (IPIRs)**

Benjamin (1993, 1996c) used the SASB model to operationalize specific interpersonal patterns constituting Bowlby’s internal working models; these patterns define important persons and their internalized representations (IPIRs). IPIRs may either correspond to traditional attachment objects or be separate aspects of identity. Because of the frequency of athletes’ social interactions with coaches and family members and the figures’ importance in the athletes’ lives (Hilbert, 1987), these figures may be relevant IPIRs in sport psychology consultations.

Benjamin also identified two specific intrapsychic IPIRs that should be considered in reconstructive psychotherapy: the growth collaborator (GC) and the regressive loyalist (RL; see Benjamin & Pugh, in press). The GC refers to the part of clients that is motivated to enhance the healthy and adaptive aspect of their behavior and overcome maladaptive patterns. The RL is the part that clings to and repeats dysfunctional or problematic behaviors. This distinction can be valuable in psychotherapeutic settings, and its value in sport psychology consultation will be demonstrated in a case at the end of this article. We maintain that current maladaptive patterns detracting from performance may be repeats of older interpersonal patterns with IPIRs.

**Copy Processes**

Old patterns with IPIRs may be replayed in current relationships via three types of copy processes: identification, recapitulation, and introjection (Benjamin, 1996c). We choose to operationally define these three copy processes very specifically in a
way that is consistent with many, but not all, uses in the analytic literature where they were first introduced. Identification describes copying that occurs when individuals treat others like their IPIRs treated them. For example, athletes who were blamed or criticized by parents could identify with those figures by putting down their teammates or coaches. Recapitulation describes copying that occurs when individuals behave as if their IPIRs were still present and in charge. In other words, individuals reexperience their relationships with the IPIRs although in reality the IPIRs may neither be present nor still in charge (or both). For example, athletes who readily trust their coaches may be recapitulating a relationship with a loving and protective parent. The final copy process, introjection, refers to situations where individuals treat themselves as the IPIR treated them. Athletes who are encouraged to accept themselves as is by parents may introject that message and affirm themselves with their self-talk during performances. Collectively, these copy processes provide a more specific way of describing how past interpersonal patterns may affect present interpersonal and intrapsychic behavior than traditional conceptualizations of transference and countertransference. Skillfully-conducted developmental interviews can generate testable hypotheses related to the IPIRs and copy processes that are creating the undesirable behavior (see Benjamin, 1996c, for an outline of such an interview). The question remains, however, as to why individuals would copy patterns from their past that are clearly maladaptive in the present.

**Self-Sacrificing Gifts of Love**

Bowlby (1969) established that young children engage in attachment behavior (e.g., approaching a parent or crying to draw a parent closer) to regulate physical proximity to attachment objects. Benjamin (1993) extended this idea by suggesting that individuals may attempt to create a *psychic proximity* to the IPIR by copying patterns from their past experiences with the IPIR (via identification, recapitulation, and introjection). In other words, individuals may try to create a sense of security by behaving in ways that they believe would please the IPIRs if the IPIRs were present. For example, athletes who learn that key figures like parents or coaches are most pleased with them when they are submissive can create a sense of psychic proximity to the IPIRs representing these figures and feel more secure in other contexts by behaving in a submissive manner. These testimonial sacrifices are gifts of love to the IPIR and may be self-destructive if the patterns from the original relationship are no longer (or never were) adaptive.

**The Five Steps**

Benjamin (1993, 1996c) outlined five steps to guide therapy based on IPIRs, copy processes, and gifts of love. Although this approach was developed for clinical treatment, we adapt it here to describe the relevant tasks for performance enhancement consultants who choose to use this approach. The first step involves building a collaborative relationship with the client. Next, the client and consultant must learn about the maladaptive patterns (step 2) and the wishes and fears that motivate the client to transport old patterns into the present context (step 3). Step four involves blocking the maladaptive patterns, and the final step involves learning new, more adaptive patterns to replace old ones. The ordering of these steps is an ideal type, and they need not necessarily be employed in sequence. Different consultations will require different interventions. All interventions should fall into
one of these five steps.

The interpersonal approach described above has worked well in therapy settings for patients with a variety of disorders. We believe the approach could be profitably extended to performance enhancement consultations. This link is based on the assumption that a theory of behavior, learning, and motivation should encompass normal, pathological, and exceptional performance. A first step in applying constructs like these to consultation typically involves narrative case descriptions. We too invoke that method to illustrate the approach. The cases of two highly-skilled athletes with different presenting problems are described below to demonstrate how various aspects of this interpersonal approach can contribute to case formulation and treatment planning with performance-impairing issues.

Case Study #1 – Barbara (18 year old freshman, NCAA Division I diver) – Performance Phobia. Barbara was referred to one of the authors because of an intense fear associated with a particular dive (back 2.5) that had frozen and terrified her during several recent practices (she would not perform the dive in competition). In the initial consultation, it was clear that she was carrying a tremendous emotional burden that was affecting her performance. The season had approximately six weeks remaining, and there did not appear to be a clear antecedent that could account for Barbara’s fear except for a single dive that was missed by the narrowest margin but did not cause a great deal of pain. This missed dive was used as a preliminary hypothesis to guide the case formulation and treatment, but this hypothesis was radically revised as the consultation progressed.

In the interview, Barbara was asked to reflect on and describe her self-talk during practices and performances. In most situations, she was unaware of her self-talk but was certain that it was fairly innocuous. In situations when she was trying to perform a back 2.5, her self-talk appeared to be unduly self-critical (typical SASB code for her examples: SELF-BLAME). “Stop being such a baby” was an example of a milder version of her self-talk in these situations. The majority of her comments questioned her toughness (a characteristic on which she prided herself). Her most critical comments were vicious attacks on herself. When asked if those comments reminded her of anybody, she did not hesitate to describe a horrific tenure with a former coach. This coach would call her names (SASB code for behaviors given as examples: BLAME) and pressure her to progress at a much faster rate than she felt comfortable. For reasons as yet unknown, Barbara’s current negative self-talk mirrored his old comments (suggesting that he was a relevant IPR) and would paralyze her efforts to perform the back 2.5. She spent time crying at the top of the 3-meter board as she attempted to prepare herself for the dive (SASB code for her description of the event: SULK). For the past few months, however, she had not been able to extend her performance beyond this preparatory stage to the point where she would actually attempt the dive. Instead, she had to perform an easier dive or climb down off the board. Sometimes she would even make herself vomit in the locker room to get out of practice. She described her current coach as being extremely supportive (SASB codes of her description of his behavior: AFFIRM + PROTECT) during this difficult and trying time. A meeting between the consultant and the coach corroborated Barbara’s assessment that he was supportive and interested in helping her to grow beyond her present difficulties at a pace that was comfortable to her.

The most obvious treatment for sport performance phobias is systematic desensitization in a cognitive-behavioral mold (cf. Silva, 1994). Initial attempts at
intervention were designed to reconstruct Barbara’s trust in her performance abilities related to the dive. The consultant and client collaborated to deconstruct the problematic dive into motor skill and environmental components. Barbara then organized these task components into a hierarchy based on the degree to which each component provoked fear. The consultant taught Barbara relaxation skills to help her regulate her activation level and she began to work on the early components of the motor-skill progression she had established. The first step of this progression involved practicing back-flips on a trampoline in the gymnastics team’s practice gym. The location of this practice was important because the pool environment had begun to trigger anxiety about feeling fearful for Barbara. Following the trampoline practice in the gymnastics gym, Barbara practiced her back-flips on a trampoline located on the pool deck. Once Barbara felt comfortable performing back-flips on the poolside trampoline, the remaining components in her progression involved practicing (a) back flips into the water from the pool deck (i.e., no diving board), (b) back dives from the 1 meter board, (c) back flips from the 1 meter diving board, (d) back 1.5s from the 1-meter board, (e) back 1.5s from the 3-meter board, (f) back doubles from the 1-meter board, and finally (g) back 2.5s from the 3-meter board. At each step in the progression, Barbara and the consultant examined her routine, affective responses, attentional focus, and self-talk. Because Barbara had no formal, structured routine, she worked with the consultant to develop a performance routine. One of the most revealing products of this work was the finding that, following an unsatisfactory dive, Barbara’s self-talk became increasingly critical (SASB code for the observation: SELF-BLAME) and her attentional focus was much less disciplined relative to her self-talk and attentional focus following a “successful” dive when she was very task-focused (SASB code for the observation: SELF-CONTROL).

As Barbara began to reconstruct her trust in her own performance capabilities through the desensitization procedure (and develop a trusting, collaborative relationship with the consultant), she mentioned several stressors that had been bothering her. These stressors included a challenging course load in her first year at university, problems with a long-distance relationship, frustration over not being able to communicate with her concerned mother about her fear, and some interpersonal problems with her roommate who was also on the team. The roommate was one of the divers who competed ahead of Barbara, and similar to Barbara, the roommate had critical and even abusive self-talk (SASB code for the examples provided: SELF-BLAME + SELF-ATTACK). The roommate would verbally whip herself after every competition, saying how awfully she had performed. Because Barbara’s roommate consistently scored higher than Barbara, Barbara interpreted her roommate’s self-criticism (SASB code for the reported behavior: SELF-BLAME) as a criticism of herself (SASB code for her perception: BLAME). This blame brought her old coach’s criticism to the surface and her self-talk began to take the form of this pattern (i.e., SASB code for her self-talk: SELF-BLAME). In other words, Barbara appeared to be recapitulating her relationship with her old coach by acting as she did when he was present and blaming her. She also appeared to have internalized both his negative comments and her roommate’s negative self-talk through the copy process of introjection. At this point, it was clear that Barbara was having difficulty distinguishing between the relationship patterns exhibited by her former coach and her current roommate (even though the
relationships were quite different on the surface). Her copying appeared to be a symbolic gift of love to the IPIR representing the former coach.

Awareness of the copy process pattern (identified using SASB codes) was essential in the present consultation. Once aware of the nature of the copying, helping Barbara to differentiate from the IPIR became the primary task of the consultation. This differentiation began by considering her relationship with her roommate who rekindled the maladaptive pattern for her. The critical turning point in the consultation came almost immediately as Barbara decided that she was tired of her roommate’s criticism (an example of how anger can be used in the service of change). She wanted to score better than her roommate at the conference championships so that when the roommate began complaining about how horribly she did (typical SASB code for this dialogue: SELF-BLAME), Barbara could quietly say to herself that she agreed (SASB code for this new stance: AFFIRM + SELF-PROTECT). She began to take steps to differentiate herself from the roommate by rooming with another teammate during the remaining road trips and by going out of the apartment or to her room whenever her roommate began her self-flagellation (SASB code for this new behavior: SEPARATE + SELF-PROTECT). In SASB terms, her self-talk changed from SELF-BLAME to SELF-PROTECTION. Although Barbara did not address the wish to please the coach, she successfully differentiated from the pattern of hostile control that her roommate had rekindled. She ended up performing her troublesome dive (twice) in her next practice, went on to compete successfully in the conference championships, and earned a varsity letter for her efforts in her freshman year.

Case Study #2 – Harold (22 years old, world-class swimmer) – Performance Slump. Harold was a college swimmer who competed internationally in the collegiate off-season. He presented to one of the authors with a performance slump that was entering its third year. Two years before the consultation, Harold swam what he called the “best race of his life” in his country’s national championships. Since then, he had consistently failed to reach that mark and could not understand why, because he reported being in better shape than ever before. The initial assessment revealed that Harold currently had a haphazard, unsystematic performance routine that contrasted sharply with the systematic routine he had used in earlier years and in his best race. He also had limited coping abilities to help him recover from a poor performance (i.e., if he swam what he described as a poor race in a qualifying heat, he would not be able to perform well in the finals of the event). After about three meetings, Harold mentioned that he had initially sought help because he was seriously considering quitting his sport at the end of the collegiate season. He was still having motivation problems and was not sure if he would make his lifelong dream of swimming in the Olympics. With two international competitions scheduled for the coming months and the Olympic qualifying cycle approaching, he began to question whether he was even capable of returning to the level of performance that he had achieved before. A survey of the key figures in Harold’s past revealed that his parents were very supportive but not overinvolved in his swimming, and his coaches had also been supportive but not overinvolved. Harold did report some stress from not having a girlfriend and not really being in a position to start a relationship because he was about to spend the summer traveling around the world to swim meets. This information would become important later in the consultation.
It became obvious that part of Harold's problem was that he constantly compared his performances to his "best race ever." This method of comparison never allowed him to be satisfied with a performance that was anything less than his best. Harold had created a bind for himself because he appeared to have made his "best race ever" into an IPIR and feared destroying that part of himself. This pattern could be described as a fear of success (cf. Ogilvie, 1968). His conscious motivation to swim as well as he could (his GC) was supplanted by an unconscious wish to protect the part of himself that had this best performance (his RL). This wish was manifest by deterioration in his preparation for his races. This complex pattern was interpreted as the RL neglecting the GC (SASB code for this behavior: IGNORE) and the RL protecting itself (SASB code for this behavior: SELF-PROTECT). Having collaboratively identified this pattern, Harold was asked whether he wanted to continue to sacrifice his current and future performances to protect his "best race ever" (a symbolic gift of love to his "best race ever" IPIR).

He acknowledged that his wish to protect his "best race ever" was self-defeating but did not know how to give up this attachment to the race. The consultant asked Harold whether he had ever tried to give up or lessen his attachment to a loved one like a girlfriend. Harold replied that it was interesting that the consultant should ask this question, because he had, in fact, gone through a difficult break-up with a girlfriend shortly after his "best race ever." She was a swimmer too, and he described how he had gone out of his way to avoid her and their mutual friends at swim meets following their break-up even though the social aspect of swimming was one of his great joys. Eventually, he grew tired of avoiding her because of the pain and sat down to talk with her about how he missed her as a friend and wished that they could continue that aspect of their relationship even though the romantic part was over. She said that she missed him too, and from then on, the tension was lifted from their relationship, and he no longer felt the need to continue avoiding people at meets. The consultant asked Harold to reflect on whether there were any similarities between that situation and his current problem. Harold then realized that the part of him that swam that great race two years before could continue to exist even if he had a better race, and that race would always be special because it was his first breakthrough on the national scene. Harold was trying to move from a complex position of the RL ignoring the GC and protecting itself (SASB codes for this position: IGNORE + SELF-PROTECT) to the simpler position of the GC affirming itself (SASB code for the desired position: SELF-AFFIRM) at a three-month follow-up, Harold reported that he had a very successful summer season and was excited for the first time in several years about training for the intercollegiate season.

Conclusions

In each of these cases, performance problems were interpreted as products of (mal)adaptation based on the performers' interpersonal histories. In light of these histories, the specific adaptations (i.e., a phobic response to a difficult dive and subconsciously performance sabotage despite peak physical conditioning) were understandable and even logical. When the performers interpreted these self-sabotaging patterns as symbolic gifts of love to the relevant objects (i.e., the demeaning coach, and "best race ever" IPIR), they were able to overcome the obstacles they constructed. Thus, copy process theory framed the self-sabotaging gifts of love
that were central in two performance crises that would not otherwise appear to have much in common.

Based on these two case studies alone, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the efficacy of the interpersonal approach compared to other approaches that could have been used in working with Barbara and Harold. It is possible, however, to highlight the unique contributions of this interpersonal approach. In Barbara’s case, the standard desensitization package that was originally initiated was slowly increasing her comfort with the dive. Once the dynamic component was introduced, and her underlying fear of not being as tough as her previous coach wanted her to be was examined, it seemed that this fear may have been responsible for her hostile self-talk and phobic response to the dive. Her quick response to that insight was remarkable and appeared to add to the contributions of the existing desensitization protocol. The SASB lens provided a tool for identifying the nature of the copy processes (i.e., recapitulation and introjection) that were relevant in Barbara’s case. With Harold, the key to the dynamic formulation came in recognizing that the self-sabotaging behavior appeared to be motivated by an unconscious wish to protect the “best race ever” IPIR. Once he distinguished his competing wishes to perform well and protect the “best race ever” IPIR, he began to separate his current performance from his past performance and open the possibility of having new “best races ever.” These unique contributions of the interpersonal approach suggest that this approach may merit future consideration, especially when traditional routes of intervention fail.

With all the promise that this interpersonal, dynamic perspective to performance enhancement offers, it is hoped that more sport psychology practitioners and researchers will see the benefits of considering this theoretical perspective in their work. We agree with Strean and Strean (1998) that psychodynamic concepts can have a place in applied sport psychology; we also agree with Giges’ (1998) assertion that these concepts should not be incorporated haphazardly without careful consideration of the consultant’s theory of change and the context. From our perspective, psychodynamic concepts are especially valuable when couched within a developmentally-sensitive, interpersonally-grounded framework such as the copy process theory reviewed here.

References


**Authors' Notes**

1 Idiosyncratic situational factors may make it difficult to link current behaviors with older patterns, but the SASB lens can be useful for identifying subtle patterns that are repeated in different contexts and may be detracting from an individual's achievements.

2 Potentially-identifying details in each of these case descriptions have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the individuals involved.

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