Growing From Sports-Related Adversity:
Investigating the Role of Spirituality in the Resiliency Process of College Student Athletes

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Abstract

This present study investigated contributing factors, and their possible sources, that help student-athletes "bounce back" from sport-related adversity. Drawing directly from Galli and Vealey (2008) and utilizing the Richardson’s Resilience Model (1990), the study profiled student-athlete’s resiliency process as well as examined the relation between resiliency factors. The three key factors explored in this study included athletic coping skills, social support, and degree of spirituality, with emphasis on spirituality. Upon administering a battery of questionnaires regarding these three variable, a total sample of 74 college athletes was gathered, and from this sample, a sub group (N=10) was selected for interview. Interview participants were queried regarding the most difficult adversity they had encountered in sports, and of these, only one participant presented a profile of Resilience Reintegration, while the majority presented profiles of Reintegration Back to Homeostasis or Reintegration with a Loss.

Generally, survey participants reported high levels of perceived social support and athletic coping skills, while reporting low levels of spirituality. Implications and limitations are discussed. Additionally, previously unexamined factors in the literature relating to favorable outcome after an experience of sports-related adversity are also considered and discussed.

Introduction

As documented by Richardson (2002), the study of resiliency, in general, has evolved in three stages, or waves. The first wave of resiliency inquiry was grounded in investigator’s efforts to identify and describe resilient qualities that predicted social and personal achievement. Such studies yielded a list of ‘resilient qualities.’

The second wave, which the present study orientates from, framed resiliency as a process of coping with disruption (i.e., stressors, adversity) and reintegration from that disruption. This kind of research produced a model with four possible outcomes, namely (and in order of least to most favorable), dysfunctional reintegration, reintegration with loss, reintegration back to comfort zone, and resilient reintegration (see Figure 1).

The third wave of resiliency research has focused on the identification of motivational force(s) within individuals and groups that render resilient reintegration; it has taken the most favorable outcome of second wave inquire, namely, resilient reintegration, and has put it under a microscope of sorts, exploring its origin, nature, and accessibility. Moreover, resiliency inquiry has refined its focus to “growth or adaptation through disruption rather than to just recover or bounce back.” More specifically, this inquiry is driven by the question, What and where is the energy source or motivation to reintegrate resiliently? (Richardson, 2002).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1, Survey –
Student-athletes who report being more spiritual will have high athletic coping skills and high perceived social support.

Hypothesis 2, Interview –
Student athletes with high perceived social support, high athletic coping skills, and who report to be more spiritual will be more likely to experience resilient reintegration.

Methods

Participants – Student-athletes from the North Coast Athletic Conference (NCAC) were recruited for this study. All participants (N=74) were in active competition and ranged from 18-24 years of age, females (65%), males (35%). Thirteen total sports were resented in this study, with soccer, football, and basketball as the most represented sports (47% of all participants played one of these three sports).

Procedure – This study had a two-part procedure. The first part involved student-athletes answering a battery of questionnaires in the form of a survey, while the second part of the study entailed a follow-up interview with a sub-group selected from the pool of participants.

Survey – Participants were administered an online survey which included the following measures.

Measures

- Athletic Coping Skills Inventory- 28
- Social Support Questionnaire – Shorten Version
- Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality

Interview – A subgroup of 10 student-athletes was recruited from convenience for a follow-up interview regarding the most difficult adversity participants had encountered in sports, 7 females and 3 males. The interview followed a semi-structural approach.

- Approximately 60 minutes in length

Data Analysis – Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to codify and profile athletes’ resiliency experiences. Utilizing Galli and Vealey’s (2008) Conceptual Model of Sport Resilience (see Figure 2.), athletes were categorized into one of four reintegration outcomes, and analyzed with their survey responses regarding athletic coping, social support, and spirituality.

Discussion

Though our results, in regards to the process of resiliency (hypothesis 2), seem counter-intuitive to the findings of previous studies (Reese, 2000; Galli and Vealey, 2008), since those who generally scored high on athletic coping skills, perceived social support and degree of spiritually were farthest from experiencing resilient reintegration, while those who scored low on all three in fact experienced resilient reintegration, (i.e., student-athlete with ID No. 5 scored the lowest in ALL three categories yet was the only one to experience resilient reintegration), we must recognize the limitations of our study – namely, sampling out of convenience and operating with a small sample size.

On the other hand, results from our hypothesis 1 suggests a positive association between athletic coping skills and spirituality. If third wave resiliency inquire is to hold true, future empirical studies utilizing these two variables may be able to further support efforts of identifying the motivational force(s) within individuals and groups that render resilient reintegration among college student-athletes.

Hypothesis 1 – Pearson Correlation Test

Seventy four student-athletes were surveyed about their athletic coping skills (M = 76.97, SD = 9.74) and degree of spirituality (M = 5.59, SD = 1.61). A Pearson’s r data analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation, r = .37. Student-athletes who scored higher on athletic coping skills reported a higher degree of spirituality. See Figure 3. Statistical significance was not found between degree of spirituality and perceived social support.

Results

Profiles of the Ten Interviewed Student-Athletes

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Adversity Type</th>
<th>Spirituality</th>
<th>Social Support</th>
<th>Athletic Coping Skills</th>
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References


