Consultancy Under Pressure: Intervening in the ‘here and now’ with an Elite Golfer.

Abstract

This case study is a reflective account of a consultation with a 30-year-old male professional golfer. The approach by the player was made on the evening prior to the final round of a European Tour event, needing a top 20 finish on the final day of the tournament year. Failure to achieve this objective would have resulted in forfeiting of his playing privileges on the PGA European Tour for the following season, with the associated loss of income, and in this case genuine threats to the livelihood of the client. The consultant used a number of interventions (e.g., best performance imagery, an external focus of attention, hypnosis and music) and an approach established in humanistic, phenomenological and transpersonal psychology. Effectiveness was determined by performance and the players' descriptions of his transcendental experience. The client provided social validation for the consultation approach and the intervention through his reflections. The intervention in this case appeared to elevate positive emotions and trigger a transcendental precursor to peak performance. While this type of intervention may provide immediate performance benefits for golfers experiencing low self-confidence, the case-study also illustrates how consultants are often asked to support athletes within severe time constraints.

Keywords: transpersonal psychology, humanistic psychology, existential-phenomenological psychology, CBT, confidence, PGA European Tour.

Context

At the time of this study, I (the first author) was working full time on the European Golf tour traveling with clients around the world following the tour's rigorous 'country hopping schedule'. The normal weekly routine would involve traveling (usually via an airplane), arriving on Tuesday afternoons, and then working with players each day until the end of the competition on Sunday evening. Opportunities to consult with clients arose throughout the tournament week. Typically, on-course work utilized practice rounds and Wednesday 'pro-am events', but consultancy work could also take place in practice areas, clubhouses, hotels, and airports. On tournament days (Thursday to Sunday) work with players was normally confined to the practice areas, the clubhouse, or the player's hotel. Most clients ritualistically wanted me present at the practice areas in advance of their tee-off times. They would often want to talk about their routines, the goals we had set for the day and other issues that may affect their performance (e.g., their attitude, their beliefs about the course, the difficulty with hitting certain shots, the slow play of other players, making the cut, caddy responsibilities, family, sponsors, managers and coaches). I would then observe their behaviors during competitions and meet them either in the practice areas or the clubhouse sometime after they had completed their rounds to debrief, and to reflect on the utility of strategies used during play. The debriefing was a standard expectation of work with players to identify what went well and what required attention moving forward. Through the process of reflection, important information regarding the client's experiences and beliefs were obtained. Reflecting also helped determine the efficacy of my approach and/or subsequent intervention strategy.

During my time on tour, I would often work with 1 to 4 clients at a time. The more clients I had, the more difficult my consultancy was to manage. I described my approach as 'psychology on the run' because I was always rushing around trying to meet the needs of the

client as well as gather the information, I required to be effective in my professional practice. The logistics of working with several players was always a challenge. My workload with each athlete would vary from day to day because it was dependent on the allocated start (tee-off) times given by the tournament officials. For example, if a player was a given a time to play in the morning, I would have to be available for that player at least 1 hour before his game commenced. If several players were given a morning time it would severely restrict the time, I could spend with one player and often the quality of my input. Typically, I would have players playing in the 'morning draw' and 'afternoon draw' and the draw for the tournament tee times would change from day to day. This meant my daily routine would have to change accordingly. This often creates additional pressures for both the athlete and consultant and requires adaptations on both sides. In sum, it was difficult to create and adhere to a daily routine.

While players typically played no more than three tournaments in a row to reduce burnout, the challenge for myself as a consultant was to monitor my own physical and psychological well-being while also serving the players to be best of my ability and meeting my professional obligations. This would be compounded if I had to travel to different time zones such as from Europe to America or Europe to Asia.

A further confounding factor was that players higher on the order of merit were often more demanding and preferred me to work with them exclusively because they felt I may give them an advantage. While this was flattering, I always reiterated my professional commitment to fully support all my clients without favor, and that to work exclusively would require me to be employed on a full-time basis by that player. This illustrates some of the political and logistical pressures I had to face. At the time of this intervention, I had worked on the tour as a self-employed sport psychologist for 2 years, normally as part of a

multidisciplinary support team that included swing coaches, physiotherapists, personal trainers and nutritionists.

Philosophical approach

I (first author) am a British Psychological Society Chartered Sport and Exercise Psychologist registered with the Health Care Professions Council in the United Kingdom. My philosophical approach to consultancy is eclectic and underpinned by three well established approaches. The first, *transpersonal psychology*, focuses on developing human potential using interventions that target peak experiences and altered states of consciousness (see Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992). The utility of psychological interventions associated with transpersonal therapy, namely, music and hypnosis (see Davis, 2003; Friedman & Hartelius, 2013) often form an essential part of my intervention strategy.

Existential phenomenological psychology is my second philosophical approach to consultancy. This approach is client-centered, placing the client at the center of the knowledge tree wherein their experiences are considered of primary importance (see Dale, 1996). Practitioners of this methodology regard the athletes as the real experts because they are deemed to hold important psychological knowledge (see Dale, 1996; Nesti, 2004; Newburg, 1992; and Ravizza, 2002). Open-ended existential-phenomenological interviews are used; this provides me with a rich source of experiential descriptions of performance that reflect the client's true meaning of their experience (see Dale, 1996). It also allows me to understand the central themes of the experience which provides invaluable information to inform an appropriate intervention.

The *humanistic psychology* philosophical approach overarches my work because I try to create a salutary environment that is comfortable, non-judgmental, empathetic, and emphasizes unconditional positive regard (see Rogers, 1951). I also focus on enhancing emotions that are unique to human existence and studied by humanistic psychologists, such

as happiness, creativity, hope, and optimism. Developing a self-actualized individual (see Maslow, 1943) is a central tenet of my approach. I believe this should be a principal goal of the practitioner in supporting the well-being and mental health of the client (see Gorman, 2010).

The philosophical approaches illuminated here are complimentary as they all provide a framework to foster the development of a higher human potential. In addition, they allow me to be client-centered (see Dale, 1996) and to work with the conscious and unconscious regions of the mind that maybe responsible for the peak performance experience. One identifying feature of this approach is that it allows for exploration of altered states of consciousness in facilitating connections with regions of the brain that are often unavailable through exclusively rational or cognitive approaches. The use of music and hypnosis for example, produces altered states of consciousness that may play a significant role in the development of the optimal performance experience (see Pates, 2013).

The case

The client was a 30-year old, professional golfer who had been a full-member (full playing rights) of the European Tour for 3 years. He approached me (first author) on the eve of the final day of the final qualifying tournament of the year; he needed to realize a top-ten finish to keep his playing privileges for the next season. He was lying in 45th position going into the final round. It is worth noting here, if a player does not finish in the top 115 money earners on the European Golf Tour they lose their playing privileges for the following season. In other words, their livelihood is potentially threatened by a failure to secure their playing rights. Given the pseudonym of ‘Boris’ to protect his anonymity, my client was facing the possibility of losing his playing status on completion of this event. On entering the event he was ranked 114th position on the Order of Merit, and, going into the final round of the tournament, a number of the players ranked immediately below him held better positions on

the leaderboard. In other words, he was facing a very strong possibility of losing his card and unsurprisingly reported feelings of ‘stress’ and ‘extreme pressure’.

For context, Boris had not achieved a top 10 finish all season and had changed his swing coach on several occasions to improve his game. In his early playing career Boris had been a world-class amateur, winning national and international titles. He was also on several successful Walker Cup (i.e., elite amateur team match-play competition between GB & Ireland and the USA) teams. Upon moving to the professional ranks, Boris described a failure to perform to his expectations; indeed, he marginally retained his playing privileges on the European Tour in the first 2 years of his professional playing career. His expectations were initially to be a dominant player on the professional stage, much in the way he dominated as an amateur, although these expectations had evidently tempered in recent years.

Taking on a new client in such a situation, with very little knowledge of their history, needs, and psychological skills, is not optimal for having a positive effect on performance. Preferably one has time to explore the client’s history and observe behaviors in competition and in practice settings. However, Boris wanted help, and believing I could help, it was a challenge that I could not resist. I had joined the tour with the motivation to help people and give them the guidance they needed to reach their full potential. I also valued engaging with new clients, but most of all, it was the exploration of their inner world and illuminating their keys to performance optimization that I found compelling. This process of inductive reasoning is highly creative and stimulating to me; I tend to see myself as a detective of elite minds and I utilize existential phenomenological interviews (see Dale, 1996) to do my detective work. I believe that this approach gives me greater access to a client’s inner experiences than alternative methods (e.g., psychometric testing).

Needs analysis

The first consultancy session took place in the player's hotel room, and with the client's consent, the interview was recorded using a smart phone recording application. I started by asking general questions to gather demographic information and detailed knowledge of his playing background. Rapport building questions were also used *(*e.g., "What do you enjoy most about playing golf?"; "Which is your favorite course or venue?"*)*. I then conducted an open-ended semi-structured existential-phenomenological interview (see Dale, 1996) focusing on his internal thoughts and feelings about his game during competitions. The following questions were asked: "Can you tell me about your recent experience playing competitions?"; "How are you feeling during competitions?"; "What are you thinking during your competitions?"; "What else do you remember about that experience?". I also used elaboration and clarification probing questions to provide the detail required to summarize his responses into themes, for example: "Can you tell me more about that?"; and "Could you expand on that?". After an hour or so to review the recording with the client, a number of themes around the client's competition experience emerged.

As one might imagine for a client who was struggling with his performance, the themes that emerged from the interview were: a loss of confidence; a loss of concentration on the task; negative automatic self-talk; frustration; negative emotions, and negative spontaneous images. More specifically, he revealed he had lost his confidence progressively for the last two years through playing so poorly. Further, he struggled to concentrate because he had images of playing poor shots from his past experiences. In addition to the negative imagery, he would find himself engaged in negative self-talk (e.g., "I don't want to mess up here"; "That is crap"; and "What are you doing?"). Unsurprisingly, he experienced associated negative emotions, alluding to feeling "anxious", "stressed" and "depressed" because of his poor performances.

After summarizing isolated statements into themes, Boris was given a brief summary to verify its accuracy. Following this procedure, I focused on interviewing Boris about his greatest experiences in golf. This involved asking the following questions: “Can you tell me about your greatest moments in golf?”; “Can you tell me what you were thinking and feeling during these experiences?";” What else do you remember about the experience?”. It should be noted here that I specifically ask questions regarding peak performances because I am interested in understanding the inner world of athlete experiencing optimal performance, and this is the main tenet of the humanistic and transpersonal philosophical approach. Researchers have provided robust support for the efficacy of this approach for training elite athletes (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Hanin 2000; Hanin & Hanina, 2009; Ruiz, Raglin & Hainin, 2016). The questions used to interview Boris were based on the work of Pates, Cowen and Karageorghis (2012) who provided insight into how elite golfers use their psychological skills to control the psychological state of flow by asking them to recall their greatest shots and best performance experiences.

Flow as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 2002) is an altered state of consciousness linked to peak performance across numerous athletic populations (see Norsworthy, et al., 2017; Swann, et al., 2017). In utilizing a transpersonal philosophical approach to consultancy, the aim is to provide athletes with skills to regulate altered states, which includes the flow-state experience. Persuading athletes to talk and reflect on their experiences of flow is important to achieve this objective. Similarly, getting the athlete to focus their attention on what they want to achieve evokes a more positive emotional response and helps them understand the pathways that lead to a previous peak performance experience. It also emphasizes that they are experts in forging these experiences. Resultant improvements in confidence and skills as an elite performer permits a perception of control over the optimal performance experience. This approach has been supported by researchers such as Nesti

(2004) and Ravizza, (2002) who believed sport psychologists should explore the experiential wisdom of the athlete they are working with. Additionally, reflecting and sharing their greatest moments is an effective way of forming a relationship. Clients often do not mind disclosing information about their best performances and will talk freely about their experiences, which allows the practitioner to learn and understand their human experience and inner self.

The themes that emerged from the interview were as follows: extreme confidence; positive self-talk; best performance imagery; attacking flags; and high energy. More specifically, Boris, stated his greatest moments in golf occurred during his amateur career; he felt he "could win everything". He also declared, "….all I had to do was turn up", and that he played his best when he was "….attacking the flags" and felt "extreme confidence and high levels of energy". Furthermore, he would often have images of "playing great shots" (*positive prospective imagery*) and would "sing to himself". Once the individual statements had been grouped into themes, Boris was given a summary of the findings, and ask to verify their accuracy. Following the interview, potential psychological interventions were discussed, along with how his knowledge of previous peak performances and psychological skills could be incorporated into his pre-shot and post-shot routines. For example, Boris reported he would imagine playing great shots during optimal performances, and thus the best performance imagery became integral to his pre-shot-routine. In addition to the existing psychological skills of the client, we also agreed to use hypnotic training methods. Though normally associated with cognitive behavior therapy (e.g., imagery) and transpersonal therapy (e.g., hypnosis) it has not considered in any great depth by researchers. Nevertheless, the duality of this approach provides a framework for the practitioner to utilize both conscious and unconscious abilities of the client to positively influence affective processes.

Intervention

The primary focus of the proposed intervention strategy was to enhance confidence. There is a wealth of evidence that suggests self-confidence is one of the most important psychological variables associated with optimal performance in sport (see Feltz, Short, & Sullivan, 2008). Research suggests positive emotions such as confidence help regulate and negate the effects of negative emotions such as anxiety (see Hanton, Mellalieu, & Hall, 2004; Mellalieu, Neil, & Hanton, 2006). Positive emotions effectively act as an antidote to the harmful effects of negative emotions (Hanton et al., 2004). Consequently, my focus is on enhancing positive emotions to abrogate a negative affect rather than attempting to regulate negative emotions.

Hypnosis has a rich history in sport psychology as an intervention that heightens self-confidence and peak performance (see Barker & Jones, 2005; 2006; 2008; Pates, 2013). Moreover, hypnosis and music have both been found to produce positive results, elevating both performance and psychological states associated with peak experiences (see Norsworthy, Gorczynski, & Jackson, 2017). In addition, hypnosis does not require a long-term training program to have an effect (see Hammond, 1990), and thus it was deemed appropriate to use as a psychological intervention in this case. Consent was given by Boris following explanation of the procedures and reference to the research that supports its benefits to golf performance and influence on optimal performance states such as flow.

The hypnotic training utilized in this case-study was based on the methodology proposed by Pates and Maynard (2000); it involved a single session (that took place in the player's hotel room) the night before the final day of the championship. The essential features of the hypnotic intervention comprised: a hypnotic-induction phase designed to create a state of deep relaxation; a hypnotic-regression phase designed to help athletes relive an earlier life experience of their optimal performance; and a trigger-control phase designed to bring athletes' ideal performance state under the control of a stimulus. The hypnotic intervention

was deemed as appropriate because it is one of the few psychological interventions that reliably produces positive results for performance (Norsworthy, Gorczynski, & Jackson, 2017). Moreover, as a qualified practitioner of clinical hypnosis, I also felt comfortable using this technique. In addition to hypnotic training, structured pre-shot and post-shot performance routines (see Cohn, 1990; Crews & Boutcher, 1986; Norsworthy, et al., 2017) were implemented in a session that took place on the morning of his final round. The pre- and post-shot routine was chosen to situate these parts of the intervention because previous research has indicated cognitive and behavioral routines in golf influence emotional regulation and attention control of elite golfers (Boutcher & Crews, 1987; Cohn, 1990; Crews & Boutcher, 1986). Researchers such as Cohn (1991) and Pates, Oliver, and Maynard, (2001), for example, have also found routines to have a significant impact on a golfer's self-confidence. Practically, routines present a window of opportunity to implement a psychological stratagem during performance. In addition, they act as a trigger for the well-learnt movement patterns you see in elite golfers (Boutcher & Crews, 1987; Cohn, Rotella, & Lloyd, 1990; Cotterill, 2008). Based on the overwhelming evidence that suggest routines enhance golf performance, refinement of both pre- and post-shot routines was deemed an appropriate performance enhancing strategy for the client.

Boris was due to tee-off at 13:30, affording approximately three hours to implement the intervention. The themes created from the needs analysis (gathered the night before) helped shape the structure of the routines. During the interviews, Boris clearly stated he performed his best when he is extremely confident, attacking the flags, and feeling high energy. In this case study, well known, evidence-based psychological interventions were used to augment these behaviors; the routines were used to help Boris implement the interventions during competition. The pre- and post-shot routine required many experimentations on the golf range where he warmed up hitting 7-irons to a 150-yard flag, followed by some

stretching. Research suggests an external focus of attention (e.g., focusing on a target in the distance) is most effective for skilled players (Wulf, 2013; Wulf & Su., 2007). Boris reported he played his best golf when he was target focused and had a clear picture of the flag in his mind. Based on the research findings of Wulf (2013) and Boris's descriptions of a previous peak performance he was asked to focus on the flag, take a snapshot picture of the flag, and keep that picture in his mind when executing his swing. After several shots using this strategy follow-up questions were used to facilitate understanding of his internal experience and to validate the utility of this approach, for example: "Can you tell me about your experience?"; "Can you tell me how you feel using this technique?"; responding, he stated that the swing '"…felt more automatic" and it "stopped me thinking of technique" and that he "…liked the freedom it gives me".

The second stage involved asking Boris to use *best performance imagery*. Best performance imagery involves recalling a memory of a shot that evokes a positive emotional response (Pates et al., 2012). This technique is used widely by golfers, with anecdotal and empirical evidence in support of this technique to optimizing the performance of golfers (Pates et al., 2012). The idea here is to use a memory of a shot that correlates with the club he is about to use. For example, if he was about to use a 7-iron, he would recall a memory of one of his best shots with that 7-Iron. For Boris, the 7-iron he recalled was the one he hit at Wentworth on the second hole of the PGA championships. This was a shot he almost holed, and it gave him the strongest positive emotion. He was then asked to hit a few shots having recalled that moment in time.

We then proceeded to go through all of the clubs in his bag recalling previous great shots before he hit the shot with the club. This was followed-up with a number of questions, such as: "Can you tell me about your experience"; and "Can you tell me how you feel using this approach?" He stated the best performance imagery helped his concentration, gave him

more energy and “a feeling of confidence”. He also suggested that, he “liked recalling the best moments because it makes me more confident and optimistic” and was able to recall some of the shots he had visualized during the hypnosis session.

In the third stage, Boris was asked to recall a piece of music that evoked the emotions he felt when he was performing his best. The utility of auditory imagery was based on studies that produced positive results in golf and athletic performance (see Pates, Cowan and Karageorghis, 2012; Snead, 1997). Having identified his preferred musical piece, he was asked to hit shots whilst recalling the song (i.e., to sing to himself). After several shots using this approach Boris was again invited to respond to the following questions: “Can you tell me about your experience”; and “Can you tell me how you feel using this technique?” He stated that the music “pumped him up”, and it made him “happy, excited and more aggressive”.

The final stage involved combining the techniques and constructing an appropriate pre- and post-shot routine. This involved about an hour of experimentation, after which Boris settled on using the techniques in the following way: first, before he attempted a shot he would stand behind the ball and recall one of the greatest shots. He would then recall his self-selected music, sing it to himself, and then stand over the ball, take a snapshot picture of his target, hold that picture in his mind, and then swing the club. During the post-shot routine (his walk-in between attempting each shot) he would recall his self-selected music and sing to himself.

Following the training and before his final warm-up, there was a discussion on how to use the strategy during his final round. It was agreed that the routines were there to augment his preparation for, and responses to each individual stroke. More specifically, Boris used imagery and music in his pre-shot routine, and music in his post-shot routine. We also discussed a strategy if the routine had a disruptive effect. In response to such an occurrence, we agreed on focusing solely on best performance imagery or music if this occurs. It should

be noted here my client did not express any reservations regarding the implementation of new skills into his pre-shot and post-shot routines.

Effectiveness of the intervention

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention was made after the final round in the tournament. A semi-structured existential-phenomenological interview was conducted in the player's hotel. The interview lasted approximately 20 minutes, and included the following questions: “Can you tell me about your experience during the competition today”; “What were you thinking and feeling during the round?”; and “Can you tell me your thoughts about the effectiveness of the intervention?”.

Boris reported that he started his final round using his old routines, as at the time he lacked the confidence to change what he had always done. However, by the time he got to the 4th hole he had found himself playing poorly (i.e., 2 over par and lying in 55th position), and reflecting on the situation decided to use the routines we had worked on. He birdied (one under par) the very next hole, and followed it with a par. Then, he declared, “….the magic started”. In his own words Boris described: When I birdied the next hole, I started to get a rush I had never had this experience before. I felt my body was being flushed with water and energy. I was so confident I felt I could do anything; it was as if my mind was controlling the golf ball. I hit every target and made every putt. I shot 9 under par for the remaining 14 holes. I have never done that before not even in practice or as an amateur. I’ve finished 14th today. I beat those guys on the order of merit and now I have my card for next year. My wife is going to be so happy. I am so happy. The routines were amazing. I had been to psychologists before and they always taught me how I should relax on the course. It never worked. I needed the opposite of that, didn't I? I need to attack every pin. I need to be aggressive. During the round as I played my music in my head, I could remember my greatest moments as an amateur. This spurred me on. It was a great day for me.

Following his description of events, I encouraged Boris to write this experience into a reflective performance diary that addressed the following questions: Can you describe to me what you experienced today?; What were you thinking and feeling?; What emotions did you experience?; How did your thinking, feelings and emotions affect your performance?; What did you learn from the experience?; What was good and bad in today's performance?; What do you need to perform better next time?; and, What are you going to do to prepare for the next tournament? This reflective approach to reviewing the human experience leads to an increase in self-awareness that forms the foundation for behavioral change and a corrective emotional experience (see Ghaye, 2008). Consequently, the effectiveness of the consultancy is likely supported by utilizing strategies previously associated with the client's best performances. It may also help evolve the client-practitioner relationship through providing information to inform discussions targeted at bringing about behavior change. Reflective processes on the part of the practitioner are critical in this respect; as a consequence of being open to examining and revealing her or his own experience, behavioral change and personal growth within the client is more likely to occur (Ghaye, 2008; Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004).

Boris employed me (the first author) as a consultant over the next 6 seasons. Consultancy sessions often involved goal setting and the restructuring of his negative beliefs. Lifestyle changes were also important topics for discussion. Although refinements to the routines were made, we did not change the original intervention strategy and philosophical approach. I considered my role was to reinforce the interventions and rituals we had practiced when we first constructed the pre and post-shot routines. While some of the shots we used to construct the best-performance imagery intervention were replaced by more recent memories and the compositions of the music/auditory imagery sometimes altered, the interventions are still used by Boris today. The hypnosis sessions continued for several years but input using

this intervention strategy diminished as the client took ownership of his mental approach. Although I have now left the tour, I still communicate with Boris before and during every tournament event. I have watched him win tournaments, play in every major and become a Ryder Cup player.

Reflections

The real cause of Boris's exceptional performance experience on the last day of the tour will never be known. There are so many variables that affect the performance of elite players you cannot attribute performance affects to a single intervention. Nevertheless, this case study is compelling, no other psychological or behavioral intervention (e.g., swing analysis) was implemented at the time of the consultancy, which suggests the intervention had some effect; social validation for this effect was provided by the client.

The utility of transpersonal intervention strategies such as hypnosis and music appeared to be positive. Additionally, this case study provides validation for utilizing best performance imagery, and interventions that focus attention on task-relevant information. However, as in all studies involving psychological intervention, a placebo effect should not be overlooked. Client beliefs and perceptions of a psychological intervention can have a significant effect on performance outcomes (Radin & Lobach, 2007). Researchers exploring the effects of hypnosis, Kirsch, (1994), for example, suggest that hypnosis can be thought of as a non-deceptive form of placebo. Kirsch argued that, similar to placebo treatments in clinical settings, it may change client expectancies about the future.

The client's beliefs and perceptions of the consultant may also have a significant effect on the outcome. Indeed, the personality of the consultant, and the working relationship that develops may play an important role in the success of any intervention (see Pates, et al., 2013). As Ravizza and Fazio (2002) observed when reflecting on their experiences as applied practitioners, "….who they are has been a large part of their successful consulting

relationships" (Ravizza & Fazio, 2002, p. 144). In spite of these considerations, it is my belief that the techniques employed played an important role in the success of the consultancy. Indeed, adopting a philosophy where clients are viewed as experts (Hardy & Parfitt, 1994) and inviting the client to co-lead in the development of interventions creates a strong client-practitioner relationship and a high level of trust. Additionally, phenomenological interviews allow the practitioner to understand the experience of the athlete in real-world situations; this adds to knowledge and understanding of the stratagems already used by the client to optimize their performance. In other words, it provides the consultant with greater insight into their secrets to playing the game of golf. I can then use my knowledge and consultancy skills to help my clients fit their psychological strategies into a pre-shot and post-shot routine.

It is also of value to document that interventions in this case study targeted both the conscious and unconscious resources of the mind. Hypnosis and music have both been described as unconscious intervention strategies (Leubner & Hinterberger, 2017; Pates & Maynard, 2000; Unestahl, 1986), whilst best performance imagery and strategies that focus attention can be viewed as explicitly conscious (Pates et al., 2012). Consultancy that utilizes this dual approach would presumably give the client access to both conscious and unconscious material important for athletic performance. The dual approach seemed to dramatically improve the efficacy and speed of the psychological support. It also appeared to help the client believe he could transcend his normal expectations of human potential and shoot 9 birdies in 14 holes. Methods of consultancy that utilize this dual approach should be documented and monitored to evaluate their efficacy.

Encouraging the client to focus on their previous peak performances is another important aspect that increases my chances of helping my clients. By reliving their subjective experiences of these events through hypnotic regression techniques, the emotions and

cognitions that are attached to these positive experiences can be revived and restored (see Hammond, 1990). The potential benefits of hypnosis for applied sports psychology are only beginning to be understood, however, it is evident that sport psychology practitioners could benefit from an increased understanding of its application. Furthermore, systematic research examining the utility and effects of such approaches would help illuminate its role in transcending human potential. Psychologists who adopt a transpersonal approach are uniquely placed to increase our knowledge and understanding of hypnosis and its function in enhancing performance in sport.

Conclusion and future recommendations

Based on the experience working with this athlete, existential phenomenological interviews appear to be an effective technique for psychological assessments because the interview directly focuses on the clients' personal experiences of the phenomenon. When using psychometric tests, it is sometimes difficult to gain a clear understanding of the client's needs. Moreover, some clients find completing psychometric tests 'is like going back to school'. In contrast, existential phenomenological interviews create a natural and often intellectual conversation between the client and the practitioner. This makes the client more comfortable and it provides detailed information to tailor a more individualized intervention. Additionally, the technique is often illuminating for the clients because during the conversation they often become aware of the factors that help them optimize their performances.

The overall effects of encouraging clients to focus on their peak performance experiences through hypnosis and best performance imagery are not known. However, this case-study implies interventions using best-performance imagery amplify positive emotions. Our findings also suggest music interventions may have a similar effect on the emotional system. This finding is supported by the work of Leubner and Hinterberger, (2017) who

found music interventions enhance confidence, self-esteem and motivation, There is also evidence that working at both a conscious and unconscious level may trigger a transcendental experience and a peak performance effect (see Pates et al., 2012). Nevertheless, while utilizing this paradigm is intuitively appealing when time is limited, the duality of conscious and unconscious psychological interventions is somewhat under-researched.

The combination of best-performance imagery and hypnosis may also help create positive expectations. Positive expectations may act to focus attention on potential future states and outcomes and allows clients to find pathways to accomplish those outcomes (Schwarz, Pfister, & Buchel. 2016). Imagery and hypnosis may also have a causal function; Imagining peak performance experiences may increase the likelihood that this experience will manifest in a future event (Libby, Shaeffer, Eibach, & Slemmer, 2007). In other words, what we create in our minds will change our perception of reality and ultimately our behaviors. Studies on placebo effects support this thesis, indeed, there is a strong relationship between beliefs/expectations and physiological responses; 'Beliefs become biology' (Radin & Lobach, 2007). The neuro-imaging literature significantly supports this conjecture; with appropriate training and effort, it has been demonstrated that participants in clinical studies can systematically alter neural circuitry associated with a variety of mental and physical states (Musso, Weiller, Kiebel, Muller, Bulau, & Rijntjes, 1999; Paquette, Le´vesque, Mensour, Leroux, Beaudoin, Bourgouin, & Beauregard, 2003; Schwartz 1998).

According to both humanistic and transpersonal psychologists, interventions that encourage clients to focus on their human potential will improve well-being (see Hartelius, & Ferrer, 2013; Maslow, 1970), and help develop skills that are described by Maslow as self-actualizing. The skills described by Maslow (1970), were: autonomy; moving toward capacity; displaying courage; being able to live in the moment while integrating experiences and future goals (time integration); being curious and open to experience; having democratic

character; a lack of fear about one's own greatness (Jonah Complex); a purpose in life along with self-acceptance; and a comfort with solitude (Sumerlin, 1995). These are the long-term aims of my approach and a consequence of adopting a philosophy embedded in humanistic and transpersonal psychology.

It is hoped that this study will inspire practitioners to explore the utility of similar intervention approaches. Adopting both a conscious and unconscious paradigm may be a good method for consultants who have a limited time to work with their clients. Based on this case-study, this approach appeared effective in accessing ideal performance states important for eliciting peak performance (Pates & Maynard, 2000). Finally, philosophically, consultants may be well served by adopting an existentialist phenomenological approach to gathering information and using experiential knowledge of athletes to develop performance-enhancing strategies (see Lyndsey et al., 2007 and Pates et al., 2012). Encouraging a client to focus on their previous peak performances and inviting the client to co-lead the development of interventions appears to be a fruitful from an engagement perspective. Moreover, time spent learning from the experiences of elite athletes may help consultants develop their approach, and based on my experiences, these methods and consultancy philosophy makes working with clients exciting, meaningful and ultimately more fulfilling for all concerned.

This case-study illustrates how consultants are often asked to support athletes within severe time constraints in situations which are less than favorable to effective professional practice. The study adds to the existing literature on crisis management in high performance environments (see Birrer, Wetzel, Schmid, & Morgan, 2012; Mcann, 2009), and highlights the need for practitioners to be trained to deal with these situations.

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