RESILIENCE AND COPING IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION

A presentation by
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Introduce psychological theory about stress, coping and resilience.

Review research about coping strategies and resilience in outdoor education (OE).

Explore how OE can use coping strategies to contribute to the development of resilience.
RESILIANCE – RELATED CONCEPTS

- Hardiness
- Resourcefulness
- Mental toughness
Psychological Resilience

- **Capacity for adapting well** in the face of tragedy, trauma, threats or significant stress (American Psychological Association, 2010)

- **Bouncing back** from a challenging experience (Smith et al., 2008)

- Conceptualisation has changed from being a special, invulnerable characteristic of some individuals to a normal achievable and basic human adaptation system.
RESILIENCE – SOURCES

some types of risk make individuals vulnerable

Antecedent → Adversity
(e.g., experiences that are difficult to adjust to)

Coping

protective factors lessen an individuals response to adversity (or make them more resilient)

Response → Positive adaptation
(e.g., behavioural competencies that are symptoms of internal well-being)
Coping = behavioural and cognitive attempts to manage stress (Carpenter, 1992)

Diverse range of coping skills enables healthy adaptation.

Transactional model of stress and coping
(Lazarus & Folkman, 1987)
1. Primary appraisal = perception of a threat as irrelevant/benign or stressful.
2. Secondary appraisal = selecting a response to the threat to best manage it.
3 main categories of coping responses
(Folkman & Lazarus, 1980):
- Problem-focused
- Emotion-focused
- Avoidant

We should be cautious about labelling particular coping strategies as positive or negative because each may be effective in particular situations.
**Stress Inoculation Model**
- Similar to development of immunity against disease
- Small dosages of stress allow the system to build resilience

**COPING & RESILIENCE**

- **Challenge** (Stress-inducing experience)
- **Adaptive coping behaviour**
- **Increased resilience and adaptability**

**Stress** → **Coping** → **Resilience**
Psychoeducation sessions (x4) for stressed uni students:
  - resilience and stress models, coping strategies, responsibility, changing disempowering interpretations, creating meaningful connections, and self-leadership

Results (compared to control group):
  - Significantly higher resilience scores
  - Greater use of problem-focused coping strategies
  - Lower use of avoidant coping strategies

Techniques to develop coping (what we can do in OE):
  - Psychoeducation
  - Change environment/ stressor to test and practice responses
  - Coping effectiveness training and practice
OE AS A RESILIENCE INTERVENTION

- Unfamiliar, wilderness environments
- Challenging nature of adventure activities
- Guided facilitation of experiences
- Group dynamics

- In theory, this can create constructive anxiety or dissonance
- Participants are required to engage coping strategies and therefore build resilience

- Generally positive but variable results in studies examining change in resilience through OE programs
Neill and Dias (2001): Adult participants in a 22-day Outward Bound Australia program
(large change: $d = 1.10$, $N = 41$)

Shellman (2009): Youth participants in 14 to 30 day Outward Bound USA programs
(large change: $d = 0.87$, $N = 63$)

Hayhurst, Hunter, Kafka, & Boyes (2015): Youth participants in a 10-day New Zealand sail training voyage
(moderate change: $d = 0.59$, $N = 66$)

Ewert & Yoshino (2011): US college students outdoor adventure education semester program
(moderate change: $d = 0.40$, $N = 66$)

However, other studies have found no significant changes:

- Skehill (2001): 99 adolescents in initial 5-week period of residential program that combined outdoor education with traditional school curriculum.
Investigated development of psychological resilience and the contribution of different coping strategies

Outward Bound program for adolescents

Mixed method (quantitative & qualitative)
Resilience → Outdoor Education Program → Resilience

Coping Strategies
- Active Coping
- Positive Re-interpretation and Growth
- Planning
- Emotional Support
- Instrumental Social Support
- Humour
- Religious Coping

- Acceptance
- Denial
- Mental Disengagement
- Behavioural Disengagement
- Focus on and Venting Emotions
- Restraint
- Suppression of Competing Activities
I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.
I have a hard time making it through stressful events. (R)
It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.
It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens. (R)
I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.
I tend to take a long time to get over set-backs in my life. (R)

BRIEF RESILIENCE SCALE
(SMITH ET AL., 2008)
CHANGE IN RESILIENCE FOR EACH PARTICIPANT
RESULTS - CHANGE IN RESILIENCE

QUANTITATIVE: Small increase in resilience -
effect size = .2 (small)

- Positive change
- Typical of OE/Resilience results

QUALITATIVE: over half 14 interviewed participants had positive changes in resilience.
INDICATE HOW YOU USUALLY RESPONDED TO STRESSFUL EVENTS IN THE PAST FORTNIGHT.

Respond to each of the items on the next pages by circling one

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I usually don’t do this at all</th>
<th>I usually do this a little bit</th>
<th>I usually do this a medium amount</th>
<th>I usually do this a lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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1. I tried to grow as a person as a result of the experience.
2. I turned to other substitute activities to take my mind off things.
3. I got upset and let my emotions out.
4. I tried to get advice from someone about what to do.
5. I concentrated my efforts on doing something about it.
6. I said to myself "this isn't real."
7. I put my trust in God.
8. I laughed about the situation.
9. I admitted to myself that I couldn’t deal with it, and quit trying.
10. I restrained myself from doing anything too quickly.
11. I discussed my feelings with someone.
12. I got used to the idea that it had happened.
13. I talked to someone to find out more about the situation.
14. I kept myself from getting distracted by other thoughts or activities.
COPING STRATEGIES DURING AN OE PROGRAM

Average overall use of strategy
4 = a lot
3 = a medium amount
2 = a little bit
1 = not at all

Resilience-enhancing
Resilience-undermining
RESULTS – CONTRIBUTION OF COPING TO CHANGE IN RESILIENCE

3 coping strategies partially explained change in resilience:

- **Qualitative data showed greater use of:**
  - **Positive Reinterpretation:** Construing a stressful transaction in positive terms e.g., “I learnt something from the experience.”

- **Quantitative data showed lower use of:**
  - **Acceptance:** Accepting the reality of a stressful situation e.g., “I learnt to live with it.”
  - **Focus on and Venting of Emotions:** Focusing on what is distressing or upsetting and ventilating those feelings e.g., “I felt a lot of emotional distress and found myself expressing those feelings a lot.”

predicted greater positive changes in resilience
Resilience is a core psychological outcome targeted by outdoor education programs.

There is positive but varied evidence about effect of OE on participants’ resilience levels.

Psychological theory suggests coping strategies can influence development of resilience.

Thus, to improve outcomes of OE programs, consider:

- Greater integration of psychoeducation to help guide participants’ coping strategy skill and choices
- Facilitators can be influential in teaching, facilitating, and role modeling use of adaptive coping skills

Specially target:
- Positive reinterpretation (↑)
- Acceptance (↓)
- Focus on and venting of emotion (↓)
FURTHER INFO AND CONTACTS

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Jew, C. L., & Green, K. E. (1998). Effects of risk factors on adolescents’ resiliency and coping. Psychological Reports, 82, 675-678. doi:10.2466/pr0.1998.82.2.675


