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Making a Difference: A Review and Auto-Ethnographic Account of Applying Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) in Policing

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Abstract

The current article provides a review and auto-ethnographic account of the application of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) in a police setting. After reviewing literature that explores the application of both REBT in policing to date, the focus will then turn to a reflection of the personal experiences of applying the principles of REBT theory in the context of policing. This commentary will highlight the broad applicability of REBT across the many challenging facets of policing. From stress management and resilience enhancement to optimal performance and team cohesion, this article posits that REBT theory provides an accessible foundational framework on which individuals, teams, groups, and systems can perform effectively. The nuanced application of the approach in the face of exposure to traumatic events and cultural challenges within policing will also be discussed.

Keywords CBT · Occupational · Reflection · Irrational

Policing is a complex, fast-paced, 24/7 environment. Within the law enforcement/ police practice literature there has been a broad and growing interest in ensuring the ongoing psychological well-being of police officers and support staff (Cartwright & Roach, 2021). The fact that policing is stressful is well supported (Houdmont & Elliot-Davies, 2016), and the negative effects that stress has on police performance, and personnel wellbeing, is also broadly known (Nisar & Rasheed, 2020). As stress is largely a psychological challenge, the field of applied performance psychology is in a strong position to respond. Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT; Ellis 1962) is a psychological approach to human functioning that, at its core, aims to shift peo-

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ple's perspectives to achieve a profound philosophical change that greatly impacts their quality of life. It is posited that through changing their philosophy people can move from experiencing debilitating stress to functional pressure (Ellis et al., 2001). The aim of this paper is to reflect on the experiences of applying REBT theory from a performance psychology practice orientation within a British Police organisation, to draw pragmatic conclusions that inform its effective application in this context and to illuminate avenues for future research.

REBT theory is a goal-oriented comprehensive life philosophy which, it is claimed if applied robustly and rigorously, can bring about profound effective emotional relief and behaviour change (Ellis, 1994). REBT began as an evidence-based cognitive behavioural psychotherapy (CBT) that focused on the identification and disputation of irrational beliefs and the construction of rational beliefs as healthy and functional alternatives (Digiuseppe et al., 2013). REBT has several distinctive features that distinguish it from other forms of CBT (Dryden, 2009). Most notably, REBT places significant emphasis on the role rational and irrational beliefs play in shaping emotions and behaviours. In REBT rational beliefs are defined as beliefs that are flexible, non-extreme, and logical (i.e., consistent with reality), and in contrast, irrational beliefs are rigid, extreme, and illogical (i.e., inconsistent with reality). Irrational beliefs underpin unhealthy emotions and behaviours, whilst rational beliefs underpin healthy emotions and behaviours (Turner, 2016). The chief aim of REBT is to weaken irrational beliefs and to develop and strengthen rational beliefs to promote greater wellbeing (Digiuseppe et al., 2013).

Performance psychology is a branch of psychology that focuses on describing, explaining, predicting, and optimising performance-oriented activities in fulfilment of general and domain-specific ethical standards (Nitsch & Hackfort, 2016). In particular, performance psychology researchers are interested in the balance of optimal performance, development, and wellbeing (Williamon & Philippe, 2020). Recently researchers in the field of performance psychology have started to examine the role that REBT theory may have in relation to motivation (Artiran et al., 2020; Davis & Turner, 2020; Chrysidis et al., 2020; Jones et al. 2021). Motivation is a key component of change (Gagné & Deci, 2005) and the quality of motivation, as with the quality of beliefs (e.g., rational or irrational) and emotions (e.g., healthy or unhealthy) is thought to be important in a change process (Turner & Davis, 2019). The current paper is grounded in self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) as well as REBT theory. SDT represents a broad framework for the study of human motivation and personality (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT takes a unique approach to the concept of goal-directed behaviour as it differentiates the content of goals and the regulatory processes through which goals are pursued (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This process is outlined by organismic integration theory (OIT; Ryan & Deci 2017) which is one of six mini theories that capture different aspects of motivation and psychological integration within the SDT framework. Furthermore, SDT employs the concept of innate basic psychological needs (BPN; Ryan & Deci 2017) and their satisfaction as a foundation for the integration of developing behaviours.

The little REBT research that exists in policing (Jones et al. 2021; Onyishi et al., 2021; Nwokeoma et al., 2019) demonstrates that the application of REBT theory is effective in managing stress, improving motivation, and improving wellbeing. Hav-

ing noted that police contexts are vast and complex, the specific application of REBT may differ according to the context in which emotional distress occurs. This leads to calls for detailed professional practice literature that illustrates how REBT theory can be applied across and within a police context effectively. Along with a shortfall in empirical investigations into the theoretical tenets of REBT in policing, there is also an absence of professional practice literature that explores the nuances and challenges of applying REBT within policing. The effective application of REBT theory requires both a thorough understanding and innovative thinking so that accurate and relatable interventions can continue to evolve. Conventional research approaches, such as cross-sectional and experimental designs, do provide support and advancement in theoretical knowledge but do not often illustrate the detail of the experiences of professional practice. Literature that explores the nuances of professional practice has the potential to illustrate and provide an evidence base for a more detailed application of REBT and can provide important recommendations for practitioners working within policing contexts. To this end, the purpose of the present article is to discuss the emergence, application and future of REBT in policing. It is hoped that reviewing and synthesising practitioner reflections, through an autoethnographic account, will help provide a foundation that may inform future practice and stimulate innovative thinking to effectively support performance and wellbeing in this complex and challenging environment.

Methodology

This research is situated in a pragmatic research philosophy (Fishman, 1999). A pragmatic philosophical approach to research, with origins in the work of Dewey (1931), James (1907), and Peirce (1984), emphasises practical solutions to applied research questions and the consequences of enquiry (Rosiek, 2013). Critics of an extreme positivist approach to applied psychology research recognise that the reality of experience is influenced by socio-cultural conditions and subjective biases (Giacobbi et al., 2005). Pragmatism is an approach to research that attempts to explore and evaluate the practical value of knowledge as a tool for helping people cope and thrive within their specific context, as opposed to striving to reflect an underlying reality (Rorty, 1990). Pragmatic knowledge consists of the usefulness of research findings in terms of problem-solving and achieving goals in the context in which we operate (Fishman & Messer, 2013).

Autoethnography (Heider, 1975; Goldschmidt, 1977; Hayano, 1979) was adopted to chart the lead author's multi-faceted application of REBT interventions in the dynamic and complex world of policing. An autoethnography is a research method that draws on personal experiences to describe and understand experiences, beliefs, and practices within a specific culture or context (Adams et al., 2017). The rationale for adopting an autoethnographic approach is to complement and build on the growing body of research in REBT within high-performance contexts (e.g., Jordana et al., 2020). In this study, this rationale will be addressed through the exploration of the nuances of applying REBT from a performance psychology orientation in the context of policing. Such exploratory findings may, ordinarily, be masked by generalisation

in more traditional research approaches (Sparkes, 2015). Qualitative findings may be structured using narrative approaches, although this is not commonplace in the presentation of the results of scientific enquiry (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Autoethnography contains narrative components which have a potential contribution to broadening the understanding of psychological processes and building knowledge (Poerwandari, 2021), and is congruous with a pragmatic research philosophy as it allows for reflection on experience to take place (Rosiek, 2013). It is possible to apply an analytical approach to autoethnography which aims to capture the lived experience of professional practice in an ethical way but also stimulate collective progress in knowledge development (Wall, 2016), Furthermore, pragmatism grounds the first-person account through reflexive critique and locates enquiry in the context of historically and culturally constituted experiences. Reflexivity is the critical examination of personal experiences and is central to autoethnographic research (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Autoethnography involves the examination of the self while maintaining an outward account of the broader context where self-experiences occur. Autoethnographic texts are written in the first person and feature dialogue, emotion, and self-awareness as a narrative that are affected by history, social structure, and culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The context of autoethnography as a research method in this study is that there are many opportunities and benefits of adopting a rational emotive behavioural approach to address the broad psychological challenges faced in policing and the obstacles in doing so.

I, the lead author, am a performance psychologist. A performance psychologist applies interventions that focus on human performance in professions that demand excellence in performance, policing is deemed to be such a profession (American Psychological Association, 2014). Performance psychology is a sphere in which researchers and practitioners describe, explain, and predict human behaviour (Raab, 2020). Effective performance is denoted by an optimal mindset that keeps the performer focused on the task at hand at the expense of other competing stimuli (Cotterill, 2017) and seeks to understand the cognitions and behaviours initiated when working towards competent performance (Matthews et al., 2000). The general tasks of performance psychology are likely to be the description, explanation, prediction, and psychological optimisation of performance-orientated activities (Cotterill, 2017). Performance psychology is also especially concerned with contextual factors and their impact on performance as well as the impact that performance has on those contextual factors. For example, the external environment or emotional state of a performer are considered in terms of the quality of performance as well as the impact of performance tasks on wellbeing, and long-term performance (Matthews, Davies, Westerman, & Stammers, 2000).

The data generated for this study is drawn from my reflective experiences of first working as a performance psychology researcher in policing and then becoming an embedded performance psychology researcher/practitioner within the organisation over four years. Each theme arose through regular reflective practice based on an integration of reflective models proposed by Gibbs (1988) and Mason (2002). As a practitioner, I regularly reflect on my practice as a form of performance evaluation and as a means of developing my skills. To add depth and structure to my reflective process I draw on the discipline of noticing (Mason, 2002) which orientates my

reflective practice to surface experiences at the inner level (e.g., emotion, attention, memory) and outer level (e.g., assumptions, predispositions, biases) and deeper experiences at the inner level (e.g., rational/irrationality, motivation, behaviour changes) and outer level (e.g., critiquing ethical, social, political values). To add further structure to the analysis salient themes were selected, through reflexive dialogue with my supervisory team; consultation with texts that focus on the differentiation of REBT from other psychotherapeutic approaches (Dryden, 2009, 2021; Digiuseppe et al., 2013) Salient themes were also based upon practitioner experiences that are thought to echo and build upon previous practice literature. The process of identifying themes was as outlined by Chang (2016).

Findings

As a result of collating, reading, and rereading the data, sometime after writing the initial reflective entries, I identified units and then categories from the data. Nine key categories emerged from data analysis. Categories one to six directly reflect the GABCDE model popularised within REBT; G=goal; A=activating event; B=belief system; C=cognitive, emotional, and behavioural Consequences; D=disputes or discussions to reveal engagement of the irrational belief system; E=presentation of rational and effective new beliefs and their resulting consequences (Ellis & Dryden, 1997). For B, there is a focus in the present paper on irrational beliefs, which are beliefs that are dogmatic, inflexible, inconsistent with social reality, and hinder long term goal attainment, whereas rational beliefs are flexible, consistent with social reality, and aid long-term goal attainment (Turner, 2016). In the first category, I expand on G; goals and include values and motivations as a more representative description of my experience and way of working. Categories seven to nine felt important to include separately as a narrative of my experiences of professional challenges, my growth as a practitioner, and my ideas for the future.

Goals, Values, Motivations (gs), and Contexts in Policing

An emphasis on client goals, values, motivations, and context. In my practice, I have found it important to explore the goals, values, and motivations of the people that I work with, the importance of which is mentioned frequently in REBT theory and research (Ellis, 1994; Turner et al., 2020). The stressors and psychological challenges that people face in policing can often be linked to their goals, values and motivations. Emotional reactivity in the form of activating events occur when there is a perceived incongruence between expectations in terms of goals and reality (Chadha et al., 2019; Ellis, 1994). In this section, I reflect on the topic of exploring goals, values, and motivations in policing and within an REBT practice philosophy.

The values of policing and behavioural expectations of police employees in England and Wales are currently set out through the College of Policing's Competencies and Values Framework (CVF; COP, 2016). It espouses that the core values of policing are impartiality, integrity, public service, and transparency, all of which are grounded in the Police Code of Ethics (COP, 2014). Personal and organisational values align-

ment has been significantly related to anxiety and work stress (Posner, 2010), with poor personal and organisational values congruency correlating with higher work stress and anxiety. Many officers and staff that I encounter express intrinsic motives for joining the police service. That is, they sign up for reasons that tend to fall in line with giving to one's community as opposed to gaining wealth, fame, and image (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Without exception they tell me their motivation for being in policing is to fulfil a drive to "make a difference", but on closer examination "making a difference" is rarely the only life goal at play. Extrinsic motivators such as buying a house, looking after a family, and earning a secure and decent wage are also important.

The goals landscape becomes more crowded when you consider the complexity of policing, including the rising demands of policing, the cuts to police numbers, and the politics that swings policing priorities. While perhaps at the start of a policing career values are strongly in line with making a difference, that important intrinsic goal is often trumped by extrinsic aspirations. These extrinsic foci tend to include, maintaining a positive image in front of others, gaining respect, being promoted, making it to retirement, and drawing a generous pension. Such extrinsic foci are a facet of modern society and are by no means poor or immoral goals, but their presence builds complexity into the picture of goal achievement creating a prioritisation challenge for individuals to manage and an important area for focus in applied practice. The contents of goals are then coupled with how an individual is motivated in pursuit of their goals. Often the extrinsic goals of maintaining a positive image are coupled with introjected regulation or self-pressure and they can be experienced as having to do as one is told which is an external form of regulation. Both introjected regulation and external regulation are known to be associated with poorer goal achievement and psychological wellbeing outcomes (Ryan et al., 1996). Assessing the content and process of goal pursuit is therefore an important focus of applied practice also.

The complexity of goal focus is further compounded with the desire to avoid catastrophic policing mistakes. The goals of many of the individuals I work with tend to be about self-survival within policing (e.g., "I cannot/must not make a mistake, because mistakes can be catastrophic"). Such internal conflicts can be explained by an approach-avoidance conflict where individuals are both motivated towards and repelled from high-risk goals as there are elements of such goals which have positive and negative qualities (Ito & Lee, 2016). There is a lot of evaluation within and of policing. The word "scrutiny" is common parlance, often resulting in mindsets focused on egoic survival over masterful effectiveness. Motivation research has demonstrated that dominance of a performance/egoic motivational climate which is predominantly focused on results and performance outcomes predicts that individuals will fear judgment and failure and so are likely to experience increased stress, alternatively, the dominance of a mastery motivational climate which is predominantly focused on continually improving skilled task performance predicts that individuals will experience lower stress (Nerstad et al., 2018). In my experience, the dominant motivational climate in policing is a performance egoic motivational climate. This possibly stems from the high risk, high-profile nature of the context where performance failures can carry catastrophic consequences. The realities of the risks carried by those who work in policing coupled with their drive to protect the public can lead

to an extreme, yet predominant mindset of contingent worth, in that if individuals fail to solve all crime and perfectly protect the public they will be wholly bad people who have failed victims of crime. Developing the confidence to deliver effective police performance is a key reason for seeking psychological support.

Theoretically, when people can identify and perceive that they act/live in line with their goals, values, and motivations the distress that they experience is minimised (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In such situations, the volume of activity in pursuit of goals can appear to be extremely high. For example, during high-profile criminal investigations, there is often a relentless motivation to deliver justice and is experienced as "just doing the job". In those circumstances, the officers and staff seem fully connected to "making a difference" and don't tend to report high stress levels. Alternatively, I have examples of individuals experiencing extreme distress due to failure to reach the goals that *others had suggested for them*. For example, an officer not being promoted into a position after being asked to apply for that position. When we explored the distress of this individual, we discovered that they "didn't even want the job in the first place" but that they experienced a great deal of personal shame in not getting what they were told they would get. Exploring "who's goal was this anyway?" seemed to help the client recognise the reality of the situation and resolved their distress to a certain extent. Doing so allowed us to reflect on their shame through an REBT lens too. I think this makes the case for the importance of assessing goals, values, and motivations within the REBT framework. Clients' goals, values, and motivations can be assessed against the contents of goals (Ryan et al., 1996), the motivation types that are influencing clients, and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (BPNs; Ryan & Deci, 2008) and in conjunction with critical activating events (A) and consequences (C) (Ellis et al., 2001) with all hypotheses striving to identify irrational beliefs (B).

I draw on REBT and SDT theory to explore a client's choice of focus and goals. I think that raising awareness of what is important to humans (their goals and values) along with understanding what drives them (their motivations), and if what drives them is healthy or unhealthy is an important part of the therapeutic process. SDT also situates individuals in their social context and makes sense of human experience through the dialectic between the two. REBT theory does address goals, values, and motivations but does not explicitly focus on their importance as "disturbance factors". REBT theory is in agreement with SDT that a person's goals are preferably constructive, and intrinsic (Ellis, 1973).

When good goals go bad. I think the following reflection illustrates the complexity of competing motivations as experienced in policing. The most common police value that I think is misinterpreted is the public service value of selflessness (UK Government, 2014). It states that holders of public office should act *solely* in terms of the public interest. It seemed in many of my early one-to-one meetings with police officers and staff through Socratic examination of their "overdoing it habits" that this argument seemed the most solid reasoning that they would give for compromising their wellbeing to the extent of burnout and breakdown. Those who seemed to suffer most "could not believe" how others could take a break adding to their emotional disturbances about not matching up to apparent superhuman levels.

While practising within policing I came across the concept of public service motivation (PSM; Perry & Wise 1990). PSM is a person's predisposition to respond to motives grounded in public endeavours. Four dimensions are reported to be empirically associated with PSM, these are an attraction to public policymaking; commitment to the public interest and civic duty; compassion; and self-sacrifice (Perry, 1996). It seems to explain, to some extent, how the habits of overdoing it can happen in policing. Being public service motivated extremely and dogmatically, i.e. where one believes that they absolutely must be committed to serving the public at all times may be the causal route of negative outcomes associated with the construct.

While having PSM is thought of as positive to foster (Ritz et al., 2016) my immediate thoughts were how would that lead to detrimental wellbeing and performance outcomes. I could see that it might be possible that reducing resources would perhaps have a psychological effect on strengthening intrinsic motivation which might ignore the signs of burnout because the work being done was for the greater good. Indeed, in the initial formulation of the concept, there were concerns that PSM could produce negative outcomes through overcommitment (Perry & Wise, 1990), a point that was largely ignored as the concept gained research momentum. More recently the darker side of PSM has been researched (Schott & Ritz, 2018). The compassion and self-sacrifice components of PSM have been shown to foster resigned satisfaction (Giauque et al., 2012) and as an overall concept PSM has been positively related to stress (Gould-Williams et al., 2013); burnout and job dissatisfaction (Van Loon et al., 2015); involuntary or long-term absenteeism (Koumenta, 2015); presenteeism (Andersen et al., 2016), and negatively to physical well-being (Liu et al., 2015). This is bleak reading for researchers and practitioners who focus on purpose and values as key to motivation. It seems that an over-emphasis on PSM could be detrimental to wellbeing, particularly if we see and promote motivation as a unidimensional construct and focus solely on the goals and values of public service which are easily interpreted in extreme and dogmatic ways.

PSM theory does not account for contextual factors and is a theory that has developed independently of broader social psychology. SDT is a broader and more empirically supported motivation theory and posits that contextual factors are vitally important (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This means that there is more than one way to be healthily motivated and while a person's PSM may be high, other sources of motivation may add to or come into conflict with the drive that they experience. External and partially internal types of motivation may factor into the equation. For example, an officer may have a strong sense of public service motivation (intrinsic motivation), along with a desire to please their boss (external regulation) which clashes with the importance they would like to give to their home life commitments (identified regulation) all topped off with believing that they ought, should, or must meet all of their goals and that they are terrible people if they do not (introjected regulation). Each motivational element can be supportive of psychological wellbeing so long as officers' basic psychological needs are satisfied and not frustrated in the process of managing the progress towards achieving their complex goals and values in complex contexts. It is my view that managing progress towards achieving and maintaining psychological wellbeing can be achieved through applying many of the principles of REBT. Of particular importance is motivation through introjected regulation which

seems to be the clearest alignment of SDT and REBT theory. Irrational beliefs are created when people elevate their goals and values to dogmatic absolutes (e.g. I must achieve my goal). This, in turn, creates the setting for events to become activating (As) which consequently trigger stressful emotional disturbances (Cs).

If PSM is generally thought of as having a positive impact on individual performance through healthy motivation (Perry & Wise, 1990) because individuals scoring high on PSM measures are expected to perform well due to the meaningfulness of their work (Petrovsky & Ritz, 2014), how does PSM contribute to stress and burnout? It has been argued that those with high PSM suffer due to the discrepancy between what they think should be the outcome of their work and the actual outcome of their work (Koumenta, 2015). From an REBT perspective, it is the demandingness applied to the achievement of outcomes that is the causal factor in stress. Stress in these instances results from the fact that individuals cannot meet the high demands they have set themselves (Schott & Ritz, 2018).

We have seen that in other contexts, for instance, sport, overly- high self-expectations lead to poor athlete wellbeing outcomes (Tait et al., 2020). In policing self-expectations play out against a backdrop of real and potentially traumatic events regularly. Making a stand for rational emotive behavioural mindsets is arguably even more important in policing contexts. In general, the irrationally stressed police officers who believe that they "must" make a difference can be stoic in their stance. Disputation has been difficult in some cases. The evidence for the apparent irrational "They or I must perform more or better or I am not protecting the community that I serve" can feel difficult to counter. The psychological collisions that my clients and I discuss in sessions of political policies, public safety, and personal resilience are challenging to navigate. It's hard to convince a committed police officer to be less self-sacrificing. Initially, I felt that I was teaching police personnel to care less about the work that they do. Ethically doing this felt wrong, however, through self-reflection and exploratory supervision conversations, self-disclosure and honesty with my clients I came to rest in the notion that REBT doesn't challenge us to think less, believe less, feel less, or act less. Instead, it challenges us to think effectively, believe effectively, emote effectively, and act effectively in relation to our important goals and values. The message that has stuck with several of my clients in policing is *not to care less*, but to *care differently*, to care in a way that helps for now and for the long-term and that an effective formula for quality care is adopting a rational approach.

Typical Activating Events (as) in Policing

Activating events (As) represent perceptions of objectionable or unfortunate occurrences (Digiuseppe et al., 2013). Specifically, "As" represent the feature of a situation that a client is most troubled by (Dryden, 2009). "As" may be an external environmental stimulus, i.e., an event that has happened and/or an inference about reality. There are a wide variety of potential activating events reported in policing including working in negative social situations such as crime and suffering (Henry, 2004), along with organisational red tape (Queirós et al., 2020). My experience has echoed those reported but also extends to issues of inclusion within the organisation and personal matters such as relationship challenges. The most prevalent activating events

that clients have reported in my practice emphasise personal internal pressure to perform, self-confidence and organisational issues. It seems that operational matters are less overtly activating, although the carrying of risk seems to be a prevalent activating event. In this section, I offer a brief description of the typical activating events or stressors that I have noticed in my tenure in policing so far.

Performance confidence Some of the most prevalent activating events in policing are associated with an individual's relationship with their performance. These range from questioning one's skills and abilities within policing to feeling frustrated that time and resource constraints do not allow for individuals to deliver quality performance where individuals are likely to experience competence and autonomy frustration. Transitioning into new roles brings activating events associated with imposter cognitions which may also frustrate an individual's BPNs. Frustrations also arise when people feel disconnected and ignored which connects with the frustration of the relatedness need.

Functional performance conversations. For many talking about performance in the policing culture is an activating event, as the word performance is often interpreted as poor performance, blame, and punishment. Moving the climate forward where performance conversations are a welcome exploration of collective goal achievement is a challenge. A functional performance conversation is an opportunity to reflect on the performance processes of an individual to support future performance optimisation. Individually and privately, officers and staff make evaluations of their performances and are so overly concerned about their abilities and capacities, that functional performance conversations are often avoided. This is probably the biggest contrast that my work in policing has with my work in sport. In sport, there is a relentless appetite for performance evaluation. While subordinate staff found it difficult to challenge upwards due to a lack of psychological safety there was also a range of stress associated with challenging poor performing individuals by line managers. This sort of awkward conversation was often avoided by those who found tackling such issues uncomfortable which in turn led to greater and more breadth of activating events as the poor performances perpetuated. Often line managers felt held to ransom with their fears that tackling poor performance would result in individuals falling sick and placing a greater burden on an already stretched service.

Vicarious stress. One Detective Inspector (DI) described what he saw as vicarious stress. Vicarious stress can be compared with experiencing secondary traumatic stress and vicarious traumatisation which is common in policing (Conn & Butterfield, 2013) In this example the critical A was that the team leader experienced that his colleagues were stressed about the stress that they observed or perceived others were experiencing. Another DI spoke about how others' descriptions of experiencing "dark" or suicidal thoughts which were catalysed by the volume of work faced by an individual felt like his responsibility for having asked that person to take on the cases that were duly his. Feeling responsible for his team's wellbeing led to his observations of stress within his team and his colleague's disclosure of suicidal thoughts becoming activating events which, through the activation of associated irrational beliefs, created a sense of debilitating guilt.

Big As (something bad happened) and Little As (nowhere to park). Managing risk, the high volume of work, dealing with personal challenges are all common

activating events in my experience of policing. There are some typical activating events associated with "the little things" which have been referred to in research as hindrance stressors (Lockey et al., 2021). Hindrance stressors don't need to and are not causal of stress but if there are small blockers to efficiency and effectiveness organisations would do well to address them. These often included, in my experience, email volume, lack of car parking spaces, the quality of the estate, and the Wi-Fi connectivity to name a few. Such "little things" are easy to overlook but each is a potential activating event within the police context with chronic stress as a consequence in such cases.

Equality and inclusion – from ignorance to awareness. As a practitioner equality and inclusion emerged as an important source of activating events and adversity throughout my time in policing. As awareness is raised within our societies of the biases that lead to institutionalised inequality and exclusion, those that make a stand can experience those inequalities as distressing adversities. On the other hand, those who are perhaps unaware of how institutionalised racism and exclusion affect their behaviours are distressed and surprised when they are blamed as a whole for racist and exclusionary acts. Activating events emerge as not being listened to or supported when raising concerns about issues of equality and inclusion and alternatively being seen as a symbol of a biased and prejudiced part of society by being a police officer.

Rational and Irrational Beliefs (B) in Policing

The activating events described in the previous section can activate a range of irrational beliefs that underpin psychological distress. Irrational beliefs are beliefs that when examined are absolute, dogmatic, rigid, illogical, inconsistent with reality, do not support goal achievement, and lead to dysfunctional emotional experiences (Digiuseppe et al., 2013). I am particularly interested in the extent to which the quality (irrational or rational) of a person's beliefs helps or hinders them in pursuit of their goals (G) in the face of activating events (A). Within REBT activating events can generate up to four core irrational beliefs. These are demandingness, awfulising, frustration intolerance, and global evaluations. Demandingness is an absolute expectation of events or individual behaviours (e.g. the beliefs that events absolutely must be congruent with one's expectations), awfulising is the extreme exaggeration of the negative consequences of a situation (e.g. it is terrible, even catastrophic that events do not live up to expectations), frustration intolerance reflects beliefs of coping ability (e.g. the belief that one cannot tolerate or survive a certain event), and global evaluation beliefs imply that humans and complex life events can be rated or judged at solely good or exclusively bad (e.g. that a person or the world is wholly bad in the face of expectations not being met). There is a range of typical context-specific IBs for each belief type. In this section, I reflect on each belief type in turn. In my experience, irrational beliefs are rarely singular and occur within a complex network of associated beliefs, some of which are irrational, and some of which are rational. For ease of reflection, I review each belief category in turn.

Demandingness. Based on the typical activating events discussed in the previous section there is a range of beliefs that are characterised by demandingness, which appear within two broad overarching categories; demandingness associated with

performance, and demandingness associated with professional relationships. The demandingness associated with performance can be directed at the self, colleagues, and the system and include unrealistic expectations based on how one would want to respond versus how one does respond to performance-related activating events. For example, performance drivers which may be underpinned by irrational beliefs (e.g., I must perform well) are ineffective/inefficient decision making (particularly in making prioritisation decisions), managing time, and feeling able to meet organisational goals. In particular, there is a prevalence of believing that one can perform beyond one's limits in terms of time capacity and volume of work. Unfortunately, there is a constant imbalance of work volume and one's time and ability to respond to that volume. Officers and staff typically believe that they must be able to respond to all the work that they are faced with. Working towards promoting effective new beliefs (i.e., I would like to, but I do not have to, respond to all the work that I am faced with) is important so that individuals can explore functional ways of meeting the realities of the volume of work that they face. This is to say that staff should not strive to meet their work commitment, rather, staff should work towards limiting the demand to meet work commitments and strengthen processes that make successful performance more likely.

The demandingness associated with professional relationships also stems from unmet expectations. Those expectations can be of oneself and others. For example, when aimed at the self this can be the belief that one must not let others down, particularly the victims of crime. When aimed at others typical demands are associated with the expectation that a team member "does what they are told" in a disciplined service or that a senior leader is fully aware of the realities of being a police officer on the frontline. From a systems perspective, the capacity of the service to respond effectively to the growing volume of work demand of policing is a source of systematic and cultural irrational demandingness beliefs. There is an expectation that the government invest more in policing, and that the service is armed with enough resources so that it can respond to all the calls from the public. This expectation is often elevated to demandingness which leads to stress and demotivation. There are expectations on police, and demands placed on them, however, a key feature of irrational demandingness is that the preference for meeting expectations is transferred into a demand, which is activated by an event that may prevent expectations from being met. Of course, police personnel want to meet public demand but elevating that "want" to a "must" creates stress if the resources simply do not exist.

One defining characteristic of an irrational belief is the rigidity with which it is held. In my experience, the irrational demandingness beliefs individuals hold are, often, so rigid that when change occurs which may address some concerns, such as modernising the promotion process, providing support for wellbeing or effectively implementing change programs, those holding demandingness beliefs are unaware of steps being taken to address the real concerns that they raise. I often experienced this in support sessions in which individuals complain of a lack of support from the organisation, the very thing that I was providing to them at that time. My observation seems to concur with REBT literature which highlights the discrepancy between expectation and reality as causal of emotional arousal (Digiuseppe et al., 2013). While people may not try to solve a problem that they believe should not exist, it

could also be that through selective attention people do not see that the problem that is distressing them is being addressed.

In police stress research a distinction is made between occupational stressors (stresses arising from how the organisation functions, like red tape and people management) and operational stressors (stresses relating to operational policing such as exposure to traumatic events). My observation is that irrational demands are more prevalent when individuals focus on occupational stressors. There is a view that occupational challenges like red tape, people management, working with HR, emails, and car parking spaces are easy to fix and so *should*, *must, or have to* be fixed easily. Invariably, in a public service organisation, this is not the case. In contrast, when faced with the extremes of violent crime there seems to be an operational and professional ability to cope with the job. It seems that when reviewing a crime there is a tendency to respond rationally even in the most traumatic of cases and there are support services in place which can be used to support the processing of traumatic events. It seems that police professionals know, to a certain extent, when it is vital to draw on their cognitive coping abilities and that this occurs when events are inherently stressful. This may be because procedures, processes, and training support preparation and coping in this domain. I think there is a difference here in terms of what is expected to be stressful. While the principles of REBT can assist with coping in both scenarios, organisational stressors which are the result of irrational beliefs are in danger of being trivialised and not problem solved.

Frustration Intolerance. While demandingness is at the core of emotional disturbance (Digiuseppe et al., 2013) stress can be experienced in policing through the route of frustration intolerance (FI, Ellis & Dryden, 2007). Tolerance beliefs seem to play an important role in the production of dysfunctional stressful reactions. FI beliefs are beliefs associated with how much frustration and discomfort humans can tolerate (Ellis, 2003). A person can have rigid expectations about their ability to sustain effort, survive, or continue in the face of frustration, discomfort, or pain. I have found it useful to apply the theoretical categories of FI (Harrington, 2005) when exploring FI with clients. These are emotional intolerance (e.g., the belief that emotional distress is intolerable and must be avoided or controlled, and uncertainty reduced), entitlement intolerance (e.g. the belief that desires must be met), discomfort intolerance (e.g. the belief that life should be easy, comfortable, and free of hassles and effort), and achievement frustration (e.g. the belief that it is intolerable to perform below ones best). While the cognitive process is fundamentally the same in FI it is thought that the above categories lead to different emotional and behavioural experiences. This highlights the importance of fully exploring the content of IBs with the people I am working with.

Policing comes with a unique set of challenges to tolerate and often officers and staff are required to tolerate more than the average person as they are exposed to inherently stressful realities as well as extremes of work volume. Specifically, my practice has covered tolerance of stressful police-related incidents, tolerance of risk, tolerance of high workload, tolerance of one's limits, and tolerance of system constraints. Stressful police-related incidents are an accepted part of the job in policing but there is a requirement to be able to withstand the details of police incidents. Achieving positive outcomes for the victims of crime often means that officers and

staff focus on tasks that are inherently frustrating and uncomfortable with a core assumption that they can tolerate doing so. Tolerance of risk seems to be a more challenging task to achieve. Often officers describe living with a feeling of discomfort due to the risk of crimes being committed and their responsibility to prevent them.

Awfulising. Explaining and disputing awfulising beliefs in policing is challenging. Awfulising beliefs are beliefs that are magnified negative evaluations about specific situations or people including oneself (Digiuseppe et al., 2013). When working in policing I have deliberately emphasised the survivability of socially awful events and have taken a great deal of care to handle awfulising disputes sensitively and with empathy and validation of my client's beliefs. It tends to get to a point where I articulate that I agree with the awfulness of the traumatic events that are reported in policing but then challenge my clients to explore whether they are adding to the awfulness through the perspective that they choose to take. I feel that the timing of this sort of conversation is very important. In addition, it is possible to not disagree with a person's evaluation that a situation is awful, whilst also questioning whether holding onto this belief is helpful for them (Dryden, 2009).

Beyond the traumatic incidents that occur in the daily work of police officers and staff, there is a societal culture where the extremes of language are used to describe situations that might be experienced as bad but that in reality are peripheral to one's goals. Such situations include being late for a meeting. Using extreme language to describe daily challenges tends to lead to an exaggeration of the negative consequences and can be extremely disruptive in many ways. One example I recall was of a senior officer losing patience with his children because it would be awful to be late for the first meeting of the day. The frustration that ensued caused upset at home, and disrupted his ability to focus on the long term goals that within his role.

Global Evaluation. Global evaluation beliefs describe a philosophical stance that when events, performances or behaviours do not meet expectations the individual will tend not to accept, approve, or regard themselves, others, or life positively at all (Digiuseppe et al., 2013). This then derails one's focus from what could be done to correct or improve performances or behaviours in the future. This fourth irrational belief is also referred to as a depreciation (Dryden & Branch, 2008). These negative global evaluations are negative evaluations of human worth which can be directed at one's self, others, and life. REBT theory recognises the complexity of humans and life events and so holds the position that humans cannot be rated as wholly good or of worth or wholly bad or worthless, however, I observe that there is a prevalence of the philosophy of contingent worth within western society, where success is seen as a sign of human value. The belief that a person should be competent and failure-proof to be able to be considered worthwhile has been a core observation of irrationality since the first inception of REBT in the 1950s (Ellis, 2002).

Fearing failure and believing that failing equates to a global evaluation of one's self, others or the world has been voiced by many of my clients within policing. Policing is a high-risk context where overlooking small details can impact the outcomes of cases in major ways. As a result, many officers and staff develop performance-related anxiety underpinned by global evaluation beliefs that affect their sense of self-worth and self-confidence. As described earlier, typical activating events such as focusing

on performance, examining failure, challenging others, and feeling responsible for the wellbeing of colleagues can activate global evaluation beliefs.

Discussions about fear of failure centre on a range of topics from failing operationally to failing to perform in a promotion board or meeting, and letting others down, particularly the victims of crime, team members, and senior leaders. Furthermore, there is a pattern of frustration and disappointment in others who are perceived to have failed to perform. Layering on to this there is also a pattern of expectation that others should change rather than change being a self-responsibility and self-led. I have encountered this in group sessions which have led to little change for individuals and merely provide a space for venting one's stresses to the group. When I have tried to challenge irrational beliefs in these cases and encourage self-responsibility there has often been resistance to adjusting the focus of change to one's self. I elaborate further on this point in the "challenges" section of this paper. REBT theory suggests that demands for high standards may reflect self-worth along with FI. Indeed, it may be a functional goal and value to be a high performing and caring police officer, however, when failures occur they can become activating events that trigger global evaluations of one's self and, in turn, lead to unhealthy negative emotional distress.

Typical Emotional, and Behavioural Consequences of Police Work (C)

In REBT theory the "C" represents the emotional and behavioural consequences that are experienced about particular activating events. In my work in policing, I have dealt mostly with stress and have observed a wide range of emotional and behavioural consequences which hinder both an individual's wellbeing and performance. Stress and anxiety are currently the most commonly cited reason for absenteeism in policing (Cartwright & Roach, 2021). In this section, I briefly reflect on the common emotional and behavioural consequences that I have experienced in my practice within policing.

Anxiety. In terms of emotions most prevalent are feelings of anxiety related to being able to deliver on expectations. Here when the goals and values (e.g. to be an effective performer) of an individual are disrupted by conflicting realities (e.g. high volume of work) and expectations are not met, irrational beliefs create unhealthy anxiety, which is characterised by catastrophising related to fear of rejection, fear of failure, and fear of anxiety itself (Digiuseppe et al., 2013). Many individuals I have worked with experience anxiety and associated cognitions centre on identifying with imposter phenomenon (Clance & Imes, 1978), the feeling that one is not qualified to take on the responsibilities of a role and that they will soon be "found out. Any expectation of performance evaluation, in this case, can become an activating event and trigger demandingness (i.e. I must perform well) along with associated awfulising (i.e. it will be a disaster to fail), frustration intolerance (I can't stand failure), and global evaluation (If I don't perform well it means that I am a truly incompetent and bad person, cheating everyone who thinks that I am capable), which in turn leads to further distorted cognitions and unproductive behaviour (e.g. procrastination, overpreparation). It is common to observe further dysfunctional negative emotions when people fall beneath their perceived performance expectations. Such emotional conse-

quences including guilt, shame, and hurt tend to stem from global evaluation beliefs (Dudău, 2014).

Unhealthy Anger. In other cases, client's present with unhealthy anger. Unhealthy anger which can be categorised as hostility, rage, or contempt interferes with goal-directed behaviour (DiGiuseppe et al., 2014). Often unhealthy anger and frustration stem from the expectation that others act in a way that is fair and supportive which, disappointingly, may not always be the reality that individuals are faced with. Hurt and anger can also occur when there are generalised negative judgments of police conduct that are regularly reported in the media. Research has demonstrated that those that work within policing are vulnerable in terms of their long term mental health (Jetelina et al., 2020). Such adverse mental health outcomes associated with policing include occupational stress, anxiety, depression, psychiatric symptoms/psychological distress, burnout, and suicidal ideation (Purba & Demou, 2019).

Moral Injury. Trauma exposure over a career in policing can have a detrimental effect on an individual's psychological health and motivation within policing. Primary and secondary trauma exposure also has long term insidious effects on individuals which impact their health and enjoyment of life. One area of research within the field of police wellbeing that may explain some of the emotional and behavioural consequences that happen over time in policing is known as moral injury (MI; Jinkerson 2016). A construct with its roots in spiritual, religious, and philosophical traditions and traumatic exposure, moral injury is a particular trauma syndrome that can emerge following perceived violations of deep moral beliefs by oneself or a trusted individual. The emotional consequences of which are reported as dysregulated feelings of shame, guilt, contempt, anger, and disgust. Beyond emotions, MI seems to challenge a person's sense of self, spirit, trust, core beliefs, meaning and purpose (Lentz et al., 2021).

Moral Distress. Moral distress (Jameton, 1984), a related concept, is defined as a negative experience stemming from a sense of knowing what the right thing to do is and being prevented or blocked from doing the right thing due to institutional constraints (Papazoglou & Chopko, 2017). Such institutional constraints include high workloads which equal a lack of time to provide adequate attention to detail. Beyond this, there is a culture of wanting to attempt to respond effectively to all emergency calls, and be able to support all those that suffer as a result of crime and feelings associated with failure sometimes ensue if this expectation is not met. In recent months these concepts have come to my attention as prevalent "C"s in policing. As yet no research examines the impact of REBT on moral distress or moral injury although through the application of REBT within policing I believe that REBT could play a preventative and therapeutic role.

Disputation, Strategies that Bring About Philosophical Change in Policing (D)

Disputation of irrational beliefs is a central change mechanism within REBT practice (Digiuseppe et al., 2013). In my work within policing the targets of disputation are those in REBT in general. That is, I focus on targeting irrational and rational beliefs (demands/ preferences, LFT/FT, awfulising/anti-awfulising, depreciation/uncondi-

tional acceptance). In this section, I reflect on my disputing process within my work in policing.

Disputing in the context of long-term goals. REBT theory states that disputes tend to fall into three categories, empirical, logical, and functional. What seems to be less focused upon in REBT literature is that disputation takes place within the context of the long-term goals of the client. This, I think, is of particular importance when exploring the functional nature of irrational beliefs. Holding the goal within conscious awareness within the process seems to yield efficient functional results. Specifically, when I dispute a client's irrational beliefs I continually refer to the long term goals of the client and ensure that we test the belief in terms of its relationship with the goal. Interestingly Ellis (2003) referred to functional disputes as both pragmatic and juristical which may hint at the importance of the contextual aim of holding certain beliefs. Of course, the pragmatic quality of a belief can only be assessed against progress towards goals making awareness of goals an important foundation upon which disputation of irrational beliefs takes place. When working with non-clinical populations I think it is more challenging to know if emotional reactions are healthy or unhealthy due to fact that they may be low in intensity and relatively transient. So, I tend to rely on assessing the functionality of a belief in terms of how it aids progress towards a goal. That way I think it is possible to recognise the junction between rational and irrational beliefs and how the consequences of either may be untangled and categorised.

Context relevant disputation. Along with disputing *strategies* explored above several, disputing *styles* have been identified – Socratic disputing, didactic disputing, metaphorical disputing, humorous disputing (DiGiuseppe, 1991), along with self-disclosure, and enactive disputation (Dryden, 1990). In my practice, I regularly combine Socratic and humorous disputing by playing the role of a detective and using context-relevant comparisons. I think that using context-specific criminal justice-related language can help strengthen the disputation. By asking a police detective "do you think that (the evidence that you have given) would stand up in court?" about rational or irrational beliefs, it seems easier for clients to assess the rationality of their beliefs. I also adapt this presentation of disputation for different contexts. In the world of sport I might refer to the rules of a game for example.

Use of humour. Humour can play a major role in the processing of emotion, is a common antidote to distress (Samson & Gross, 2012; Strick et al., 2009) and is a hallmark of REBT (Digiuseppe et al., 2013). Humour can also be a source of distress both deliberately, and accidentally. What has been perceived as acceptable "banter" is now recognised as discriminatory. The effective use of humour in practice is underpinned by a sense of a robust working alliance. I think it is important to recognise that humour may role model irrational beliefs. When I reflect on my style of practice, I have leaned on the use of humour frequently. I remember a client telling me that once during a presentation they watched me encounter technical problems to which I responded with humour and was unflustered. Something that they would find difficult to do. I also use humour to build rapport and to meet client resistance effectively. Coupling assertiveness and using humour has helped me to do this on several occasions. One occasion that stands out to me occurred within my first month in the role. The use of humour in that session enabled me to ground myself with the group and

foster engagement. I reflected that I didn't need the group to like me, but I wanted them to listen to me and using humour to build rapport meant that the group were able to let go of resistance and engage in the session.

Self-disclosure and self-comparison. Self-disclosure and self-comparison have also emerged as key disputation styles for me. Much has been written in counselling and psychology literature about self-disclosure and I tend to take caution when using this. I think what assists some of the people I work with is that they can observe me in executive leadership meetings, giving presentations, and so on and in sessions I can reveal irrationalities that might occur for me and use a self-comparison technique. What I mean by this is because I have had parallel experiences within the hierarchy, I can disclose my stressful emotional consequences and show them how I use REBT to navigate these myself. In this sense I role model rationality (and being human) via my behaviour. What is common is that people assume that I am never irrational and that I don't get stressed about anything and that "it's easy for me" but I can demonstrate and talk about my similar experiences.

Effective New Beliefs, Philosophical Change and Effective Policing (E)

The effective new beliefs that are constructed through the REBT process must be assessed against the long and short term goals of the client. In this section, I reflect on the process of developing effective new beliefs in my work.

Goal focused effective beliefs. As noted in the previous section on goals, there may be several competing goals and the one to one environment has been the easiest place to explore an individual's goal priorities. Sometimes there is a strategic goal of building a relationship or tolerating a "difficult" personality that becomes most salient and stress-provoking for a client. By far the most challenging effective new beliefs to build, in my experience, are those that involve unconditional acceptance when personal and policing core values are challenged. For example witnessing the underperformance of others, witnessing prejudice, and accepting one's limitations in the face of the extreme demands of the job seem particularly challenging for individuals in this context and can lead to moral distress. However, when the therapeutic work undertaken articulates the process of acceptance effectively, i.e. that unconditional acceptance beliefs represent beliefs that lead to active problem solving towards long term goals rather than passive continued suffering in the status quo then effective new beliefs can ensue and lead to, often, profound change. This can, sometimes, take time and it is my view that I will continue to articulate the benefit of therapeutic sessions until I can see that the client can apply REBT theory at a philosophical level. I have been lucky that my role has afforded me the freedom to do this.

Philosophical change. Witnessing philosophical change is a privilege of working using REBT as a framework and focusing on goals, personal values, and mastering performance (in whichever way that shows up for an individual) seems to be an important part of the process in my experience. When people weaken and relinquish their rigid beliefs they can often realise that the choices that may have a major impact on their lives are theirs to make. It seems during the process of recognising that they do have a choice some have felt empowered to change their careers and their lives. It felt to me that their philosophical freedom seemed to play out in behaviour immedi-

ately and sometimes perhaps before they had the opportunity to explore these decisions fully. For example, when one senior leader in the organisation recognised that they didn't "have to" experience the stresses of the job they felt empowered to resign from their post following some post-session reflection. Later they reflected further are recognised that resignation was not the right decision for them but that drawing on better coping skills, such as building rational beliefs, and negotiating better working conditions was a more optimal way of problem-solving for them. Another client described feeling very different and uncertain about his new philosophy. Although the philosophy brought positive change they felt that it was important to continue to explore the breadth and depth of their new way of seeing the world. I recognise this pattern of behaviour as a catapult effect after change. It was described to me by one client as almost a rush of rational motivation. Having noticed this pattern along with feedback from clients about how strange it can feel to embody their new philosophies I feel that it is important to support a full transition until the client's new philosophy is integrated into their lives. Once experienced there can also be a need to support the maintenance of changes in mindset and this can be achieved through continuous personal reflective practice and continued rational correction. I think it is possible for people to fall back into dysfunctional thinking patterns and so I help clients to develop strategies to stay aware of their thinking patterns.

Challenges

In this section, I discuss the challenges that I have encountered which I think are specific to the police context. I can identify and reflect on two types of challenges in my work in policing. First, there are some practitioner challenges and second, there are challenges that I think are specific to the REBT approach. The practitioner challenges that I encounter most often are adopting the cultural mindset; clarity of role/boundaries, and working with the right people. The REBT approach - specific challenges that I feel are most salient are concerned with how rational thinking is applied; communicating acceptance as active; confusion over conditional shoulds; encouraging self-responsibility rather than self-blame; recognising linguistic imprecision and working with it; using REBT to inoculate individuals against the stresses of working within a system that is under-resourced when it is clear that additional resources are an optimal solution. In the next section, I will elaborate on each challenge.

Practitioner Challenges

Adopting the cultural mindset. As one psychologist within this environment, I have noticed that there have been periods where I have felt like I have been swept away by the tides of policing. More accurately the volume and pace of work within policing has often meant that I have felt compelled to mirror the cultural norms of policing. Policing is a reactive environment. In some circumstances and areas of police business, it has to be this way. For example, detectives talk about a "golden hour" in which they have the best chance of gathering evidence in a criminal case. I have found that this reactivity (working at a heightened pace and under pressure to deliver

the products of work) extends beyond the circumstances in which it is needed. I have found myself responding to both the volume and timeframe of requests in an unrealistic way simply because I am mirroring the culture. When I reflect on this, I see my role as grounding myself and those with whom I work to the reality of what is necessary. Doing so is an important stress management strategy in itself. I am trying to be the change.

Assessing who would benefit from support. On several occasions, I have been asked to intervene to help someone else to change rather than help the individual with their change journey. When I began practising REBT I fell foul of this quite often and this could sometimes make the situation more challenging if the relationships became even more strained. It is difficult to assess who needs help and sometimes difficult to confront people with this perspective. In this situation, I talk through with the referrer to explore the extent to which they may be able to develop psychological skills to tackle the issues and assess who would most benefit from an intervention. Often it is both parties.

REBT Approach Challenges

Literal Rational Thinking. In my experience sometimes the danger of rational mindsets are that they can produce what can be perceived as uncaring and unethical messages. One message that springs to mind is a well-being message to officers and staff that aimed to help individuals recognise their choices in terms of the constraints and challenges that they faced as police officers. Rationally there is always the option to leave the job if its strain is too much, but this message was received by some as offensive. There is a sense in policing that much more could be done to protect officers from the strain of the job. In REBT and SDT the perception of choice is an important element that supports psychological wellbeing. Leaving the job would be an effective means of managing stress but in the face of not being able to provide better working conditions in the here and now another choice might be to develop robust psychological coping strategies grounded in REBT theory. In my experience, many police officers and staff begin to feel trapped in the job. Often they are waiting to reach pensionable age and counting the years, months, and days down to their retirement. Due to financial constraints, their experience of life means that leaving, even if the job feels unhealthy for them is not an option. Of course, the psychological choice helps to support one's well-being as it acts as a vehicle for autonomy satisfaction but there may still need to be some validation of the fact that members of police organisations have strong psychological connections with their police force, along with practical constraints that make the rational statement "leave if you don't agree" meaningless and unhelpful. I think validation of individuals perceived reality is very important in the process of application of rational arguments. Sometimes one's experience is that they have no choice as to whether they leave so their psychological choices may lie in developing effective coping skills.

Communicating acceptance as an active foundation for change. One of the biggest goals of the work I do is to help people understand acceptance as it is presented within REBT theory. Often the idea can be questioned and rejected by individuals and groups when we tackle the wrongs that people have faced or are facing. Particu-

lar examples in policing have been discussing issues of ethical and moral integrity. For example, inclusion issues and acceptance are difficult to talk about together. It seems that our default understanding of acceptance is passive and a "do as your told" mindset is adopted. The passive default that I experience in policing may be a facet of the idea that policing is a disciplined service. This, of course, is not conducive to a context where bias is often unconscious, people are stressed and there is a strong power distance at play. Unconditional acceptance in REBT involves intentionally allowing stressful or seemingly unacceptable events to be present so that they can be examined in enough detail to be able to move forward in a valued direction (Matweychuk et al., 2019).

Equality, inclusion, and unconditional acceptance. Within my first year in policing I was asked to provide support, in the form of a workshop to constabulary employees during an inclusion awareness week. I had also been asked to work with the group that supports women in policing. My workshops were well received and their content always relied on the principles of REBT to some extent. However, focusing my work in this direction, initially felt out of my depth. Exploring the boundaries of my practice and reflecting on whether I should or was qualified to tackle these subjects took me on a path of self-discovery that declining the invitations would not have.

It seems that to begin to see the answers to the equality and inclusion challenges that we face it would be of value for us to perhaps adopt the REBT view that humans are all equal in their worth, and cannot be rated because of their complexity. I think through REBT theory I can see the potential that unconditional acceptance holds on a societal level. Not only as an antidote to many mental health issues but more broadly for us to question the legitimacy of our actions. For example, can I be open to the unconsciousness of my biases, the answer is yes, through unconditional self-acceptance, I can.

Encouraging self-responsibility rather than self-blame. One unintended side-effect of acceptance has often been the experience of self-blame. I think when this occurs both rational and irrational thinking can be observed simultaneously. In this case, I try to help clients recognise the difference between self-responsibility and self-blame and also to help them be aware of when blame occurs and explore with them how to shift from blame to responsibility. Is blame a facet of irrationality? I would argue that it is. I think we can hold the thought "who or what is responsible for this occurrence?" on a platform of rationality, which might mean that beneath the questions there is tolerance. In reality, such questions are perceived with rigid demands and intolerance and irrational consequences ensue. From a leadership perspective, I would advise that we predict a default irrational response by the perceiver and encourage leaders to build strong relationships and choose their words carefully so that the receivers of such questions can recognise the rational space from where they come.

Self-care and respect for others. There is an emphasis in REBT on self-responsibility but there is a lesser-known emphasis on responsibility to others. I think REBT can be misinterpreted as an excuse to be rude and un-empathetic to others because it teaches that one creates their disturbances. I think we do have a responsibility to others to balance our goals and values with connection and empathy. More often than not it is within our best interest to develop positive relationships in our work and our

lives (Ellis, 1972). Beyond the core theory of REBT, I have relied on the principles of self-care and respect for others (Dryden & Constantinou, 2004) to assess and develop healthy assertion skills with clients.

Recognising linguistic imprecision and working with it. Being embedded within any organisation or team comes with its political challenges but policing within senior ranks deals with the realities of politics. The challenge of this is that political messages designed perhaps to make strong political arguments can be perceived as truth to members of a police organisation. Often those arguments are negative and tend not to reflect the reality of frontline experience. Such politically and irrationally charged messages often have ulterior motives (to gain votes, or sell newspapers) but simultaneously promote disconnection between the lived experience of police officers and staff and those that lead and govern. Often in sessions, I talk about the use of language, linguistic precision, and explore referenting when it occurs but there has also been a need to encourage individuals to acknowledge the imprecise language of those that are in positions of power, politicians especially. To this end, a functional dispute seems to help refocus individuals on the realities of what they can control.

Self-Awareness and Personal Growth of the Psychologist

I feel privileged to have been working with the police. Doing so has given me a lot of opportunities to build on my skills in using this approach. I have been exposed to several hours of one to one, group, and team sessions. I have also given several educational seminars to help the workforce cope with the stresses and pressures of policing. Through evaluation of my practice and reflection, I have been able to integrate REBT into my way of being and through my personal experiences, stresses, and pressures I have explored how REBT helps me to continue to strive forward.

I feel like I am still developing my core REBT skills through reflective practice and regular peer supervision. I think there is further opportunity for me to develop resources on which the police population can draw to support their adoption of rational philosophes. I think that I have learnt a great deal about the theoretical underpinnings of emotional stress responses and that has helped me to apply are REBT more robustly. Specifically exploring Socratic questioning and emotion theory has helped me to build a solid foundation on which to help others to make philosophical shifts.

More broadly my training and initial exposure to REBT was through sport psychology. Working within a performance but the non-sport context has challenged me. A core competency in my training program is to adapt to the context within which I work. The policing context (as any context) requires that the fundamentals are translated and tested against the variety of nuanced challenges faced by individuals within those contexts. Sport psychology is adaptable to policing to a certain extend but every context is different. Policing is a word that covers a plethora of roles, and skills. Each role and skill carries with it its psychological implications. Using REBT as an approach gave me the ability to support a broad range of psychological challenges. REBT has empirical support for its application in trauma-related stress (Ellis, 1994) as well as within coaching (Kodish, 2002) and stress counselling (Ellis et al., 2001). I took the approach of "testing the theory" in sessions to aid the translation process

and I drew on evidence where I could. What was of particular use to me were case study research papers and practitioner reflections which discussed the nuances of the translation process. For example, applying goal-setting theory in policing required some consideration of dealing with prioritisation and completing goals. In sports contexts, it is usually much easier to make prioritisation decisions. Currently, there is little supervisory support for performance psychologists that work within the policing context. This brings challenges to me as a practitioner. For example, when I translate an intervention from a sport context there is little support in terms of knowing if I am doing this well. Furthermore, the policing context is vast and there is no real guidance as to what it would be effective for me to know as a performance psychologist in this field. Trauma knowledge may be a prerequisite for example. This lack of collegiate support leads to a vulnerability for me as a psychologist where it would be easy for me to question my utility and my effectiveness within this world. Luckily my rational philosophy is protecting me for now until in the future a broader support network grows.

The Future

We know that people generally experience policing as stressful. I think as we begin to understand stress and particularly vicarious traumatic stress there is a clear opportunity to provide better mental preparation and ongoing support for those who serve within the police. Furthermore, formulating guidance on applying the principles of REBT within the police system appears to be an important next challenge. For example policing can take the challenge of becoming more a psychologically informed environment (Johnson, 2012). Such environments focus on breaking cycles of dysfunctional behaviour. There is also a consideration of the psychological needs of employees, specifically developing skills and knowledge, increasing motivation, job satisfaction, and resilience. Psychologically informed environments consist of five key elements, one of which is the adoption of a psychological framework. REBT could be an effective psychological framework that could be adopted within a police context. While trauma care is vital in a police context a broad psychological model may ensure that issues beyond trauma can be viewed through a psychological lens. Such a lens would provide a perspective and platform on which wellbeing and ongoing work engagement can be supported.

Drawing on SDT theory I have been able to demonstrate the impact that IBs have on motivation and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. SDT is a dialectic theory that observes the ongoing relationship between an individual and the environment. Understanding the SDT motivation dialectic from an REBT viewpoint in policing is becoming an important goal of mine. I believe that recognition of how these theories fit together will enable the application of much more structure in our police performance and wellbeing endeavours. This is because, as with any public service, there will always be limited resources in policing and the nature of police work will always carry the risk of trauma and vicarious trauma.

REBT has a unique view of emotion which can help officers process emotions in more functional ways. Teaching emotional responsibility, and the ability to experi-

ence healthy negative emotions is an important focus of REBT and a main focus in my work in policing. This can help officers and staff identify the protective proactive things that they are already doing as well as provide a foundation on which functional changes may be made. This could permeate the day to day wellbeing tasks associated with policing. For example, debrief conversations at the end of shifts could focus, in part, on the discussion of appropriate emotions, and what behaviours are associated with them in contrast to unhealthy negative emotions, thoughts, and behaviour.

Concluding Remarks

REBT, as an approach, has long been criticised for lack of empirical support and this lack of support blamed, in part, for its marginalisation in the field of applied psychology, psychotherapy, and coaching (Ellis, 2001). In contrast, the approach is reported to be popular among practitioners (Still, 2001) and many of its insights are assimilated by the psychological mainstream (David, 2003). In writing the current paper my goal was to share my reflections and stimulate the readers thinking in terms of applying REBT philosophy both within the context of police psychology and beyond it and to provide an alternative approach to building the evidence base on which REBT may be evaluated. In my view, the universality of REBT makes it an excellent approach to apply within the complex world of policing.

Author Contributions JJ and MT conceived the research idea and structured and drafted the manuscript. MT made comments on the final version.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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