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Exploring the efficacy of dissociative techniques during high-intensity exercise: An applied perspective

In the developed world, both music and video have become almost ubiquitous sources of distraction in the exercise domain. The use of personal listening devices is now considered *de rigueur* and music videos are routinely streamed into public gymnasia. This trend has been coupled with people's desire to squeeze physical activity sessions into ever-smaller timeslots in accord with their busy lifestyles. Albeit that we have long known about the potential benefits of distractive stimuli at low-to-moderate exercise intensities, it is only recently that there has been systematic empirical research into their efficacy at higher intensities. The central question to be addressed in this applied practice paper is: "How can practitioners harness the power of distractive stimuli such as music and video to enhance the experience of high-intensity physical activity?" Empirical research has shown some promising initial evidence in regard to music only (Stork, Kwan, Gibala, & Martin Ginis, 2014), music and highlight videos (Barwood, Weston, Thelwell, & Page, 2009), music and videos used to create an immersive "green exercise" experience (Jones, Karageorghis, & Ekkekakis, 2014), traditional music videos (Hutchinson, Karageorghis, & Jones, 2015), and verbal primes combined with video highlights and music (Loizou & Karageorghis, 2015). Collectively, the evidence from such studies indicates that the combination of auditory and visual distractions during exercise can promote attentional dissociation, as well as more positive affective responses at intensities below ventilatory threshold and up to 10% above. When the auditory stimuli are congruent with the visual stimuli (e.g., as in music videos), visual stimuli appear to have an additive effect when combined with asynchronous music. This paper will illustrate how music, video, and video-embedded primes can be integrated into high-intensity physical activity. The implications regarding the potential benefits for exercise adherence and some of the main limitations regarding this approach will also be examined.