

1 **The *What, How, Where* and *When* of Resilience as a dynamic, episodic, self-**
2 **regulating system: A response to Hill et al. (2018)**

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10
11 **Abstract**

12 Resilience research is undergoing a shift away from trait approaches, acknowledging the inherent
13 process and dynamism of stress interactions. Hill et al. (2018) suggest that in order to understand
14 the iterative nature of the multi-factorial resilience process, a dynamical systems approach needs to
15 be employed. We suggest that explaining resilience through Whetten's (1989) *What, How, Where*
16 and *When* of theory building will elucidate our understanding of both the disruptive and
17 reintegrative pathways of resilience. Adopting this approach to resilience, we clarify (a) self-
18 regulatory and episodic pathways to positive adaptation in the face of a broader range of stressors
19 and (b) we use conservation of resources theory to explain the fluctuation and developable capacity
20 of resilience. Researchers and practitioners are encouraged to develop resilience interventions for
21 specific predictable adversities in sport. Building strategies around the dual-pathway model will
22 promote preventive and reintegrative resilience approaches optimizing performance episodes and
23 well-being in ongoing sporting endeavors.

24
25 **Keywords:** resilience, dynamic process, self-regulation, performance, sport, conservation of
26 resources.

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31 **Resilience as a dynamic, episodic, self-regulating system: A response to Hill et al. (2018)**

32 Sporting environments can engender significant adversity and researchers are increasingly
33 interested in how we respond to these experiences in both the short and long term. As a
34 consequence, mental toughness (Gucciardi et al., 2015) and resilience (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014)
35 have become topics of interest among applied sport psychologists. However, as research has
36 accumulated on these topics there has been much debate regarding their conceptualization. In this
37 commentary on Hill, den Hartigh, Meijer, de Jonge and van Yperen (2018), we evaluate their
38 proposed dynamical approach to resilience, explore other dimensions of resilience and provide
39 directions for future research. In our analysis, we employ Whetten's (1989) model of what
40 constitutes a theoretical contribution to examine and advance a dynamic approach to resilience. We
41 posit that a dynamical perspective addresses the *how*, but we also need to elucidate the *what*, *why*,
42 *when* and *where* of resilience processes. To support our contention, we draw on broader theories of
43 psychological resources and conservation of resources to consider how concepts of resource
44 trajectories can augment our understanding (the *how*). Furthermore, we discuss issues of
45 temporality to demonstrate resilience at the momentary 'match play' level in comparison with other
46 less pressurized or longer timeframes (the *when* and the *where*).

47 We commend Hill et al. (2018) on the use of the dynamical systems approach (Van Geert,
48 2009) which is gaining consensus among researchers (Bryan, MacIntyre, & O'Shea, 2017; Sarkar
49 & Fletcher, 2014). Considering how resilience unfolds over time helps researchers capture the
50 *critical slowing down* of resilience for both chronic long-term stressors and more acute episodes. As
51 Hill et al. (2018) suggest knowledge about the temporal dimension of resilience can assist
52 researchers and practitioners to develop strategies to regulate incidents that would negatively affect
53 resilience, well-being and performance.

54 Whetten (1989) proposed that a comprehensive theory must contain essential elements,
55 summarized as *what*, *how*, *why*, *who*, *where* and *when*. *What* comprises which factors (e.g.

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56 variables, constructs, concepts) should logically be considered as part of the explanation of the
57 phenomena of interest. The next question is *how* are these factors related, normally operationalized
58 through the use of a visual representation of arrows connecting variables. The *what* and *how*
59 constitute the domain of a theory. *Why* relates to the underlying psychological, economic or social
60 dynamics that justify the selection of factors and the proposed causal relationships (Whetten, 1989).
61 *Who*, *where* and *when* are conditions that place boundaries on the generalizability of the theoretical
62 model. The dynamical systems approach to resilience examines primarily *how* resilience is a
63 dynamic process, but, as we contend, the *what*, *where* and *when* could additionally be examined to
64 expand our theoretical understanding of a dynamic approach to resilience.

65 **The *what* of a dynamic approach to resilience**

66 If we conclude that the development and maintenance of resilience is a dynamic process, we
67 need firstly to explain *what* resilience is from a dynamic process perspective. Hill and colleagues'
68 (2018) approach dynamic resilience from the perspective of disruption and depletion. However, this
69 perspective overlooks the basic tenets of many resilience definitions. Bryan et al. (2017; p. 8)
70 defined it as “encompassing the capacity to maintain regular functioning through diverse challenges
71 or to rebound through the use of facilitative resources”.

72 Drawing on theories of self-regulation may be beneficial for defining the *what*. From a self-
73 regulation perspective, performers regulate their day-to-day actions based on their own perceptions
74 about themselves, their environment, goal progress and current affect, which subsequently
75 influences their effort (Foo, Uy, & Baron, 2009). This type of self-regulation relies on meta-
76 cognitive monitoring processes (MacIntyre, Igou, Campbell, Moran, & Matthews, 2014), which can
77 be depleted through use (Baron & Henry, 2010), and when depleted may render the individual less
78 able or willing to work or perform optimally (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007), and potentially leave
79 them at risk of reduced capacity for resilience.

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80 Furthermore, it may be beneficial to understand how resilience changes across key time
81 points or performance episodes. A performance episode can be defined as a “within person
82 temporal unit of performance”, which is a naturally segmented, relatively short episode,
83 thematically organized around relevant immediate goals or desired end states (Beal et al., 2005; p.
84 1055). O’Shea, Buckley and Halbesleben (2017) examined how the reciprocal regulation of action,
85 cognition, emotion and motivation occurs in an episodic model of self-regulation (the A-CEM-A
86 model). This model can be used to provide more explanatory value with regard to the dynamics of
87 resilience development. For example, when a tennis player consistently loses points returning serve
88 with their backhand in a match, this may cause the performer to cognitively reflect and perceive
89 their ability when performing this type of shot as poor. This belief will then precipitate some
90 emotional response (e.g. frustration), which may in turn motivate them to either reduce their
91 reliance on this skill or to refine the skill before their next match. This cyclical model demonstrates
92 the mechanisms through which self-regulation may promote and deplete resilience during
93 adversities, but *how* they are related and then developed needs to be understood.

94 **The *how* of a dynamic approach to resilience**

95 In addition to explaining the *what* of the dynamics of resilience, we need a more detailed
96 understanding of the role of resources and resource trajectories to fully understand the *how* of a
97 dynamical approach to resilience. Hill et al. (2018) suggested resilience is a complex multi-factorial
98 process. However, the authors did not explain in great detail *what* these underlying variables are
99 (which we discussed above) nor *how* they fit into the dynamic perspective on resilience. We apply
100 the conservation of resource theory to explain this issue (COR; Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-
101 Underdahl, & Westman, 2014).

102 Life changing stressors may result in maladaptation, which can be explained as a loss of
103 facilitative resources leading to a dysfunctional resilience reintegration (Richardson, 2002). Hill et
104 al. (2018) have pointed to the value of detecting early warning signals of critical transitions (e.g.

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105 critical slowing down, (Scheffer et al., 2012) and taking preventive actions before breakdowns in
106 performances occur however they have not explained *how* this might happen. The concept of
107 resources has been associated with notions of adaptation, coping and resilience since the inception
108 of research in this area (Hobfoll, 2002). As noted by Hill et al. (2018) a dynamical system
109 represents elements which dynamically interact over time. However, we need to define these
110 elements and the nature of their dynamic interactions. Hill et al. discussed past research on
111 protective factors which include resources. Similarly, COR defines resources as “anything
112 perceived by the individual to help attain his or her goals” (Halbesleben et al., 2014; p. 1338).
113 Resilience can be seen as one type of psychological resource amongst many others (e.g. self-
114 efficacy, optimism, hope, energetic resources; Hobfoll, 2002). In addition, elements, like resources,
115 may not solely be a function of an individual, but may also comprise contextual resources, such as
116 social support, resources required to perform one’s sport, access to appropriate facilities, expertise
117 and training (Hobfoll, 2002). Our understanding would be enhanced by a more detailed exploration
118 of how resources interact and change over time in a dynamic process to build resilience, which
119 COR can provide.

120 Integrating COR with a dynamical perspective goes beyond identifying the relevant
121 resources, but explains how they can be enhanced or depleted. The *primacy of resource loss* (COR
122 principle 1) is the idea that it is psychologically more harmful for individuals to lose resources than
123 it is helpful for them to gain the resources they lost (Halbesleben et al., 2014) and may explain the
124 dynamics of resilience loss versus gain. For example, resilience may be consumed at a higher rate
125 during adversity than can be developed or gained back. This is not dissimilar to what Hill et al.
126 (2018) suggested whereby the history of past adverse events led to attractor states subject to tipping
127 towards between relatively low and high resilience capacities. Resource theories offer an
128 accumulative capacity of resilience which explains *how* this capacity depletes, *how* it can be

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129 developed and *how* associated factors may work together in this dynamic process. COR is also a
130 dynamic theory and the fluctuation of resources is a natural part of this (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

131 It is likely that resilience is gained or lost in a similar fashion to resource trajectories posited
132 in conservation of resources theory (Halbesleben et al., 2014). To explain resource trajectories,
133 Halbesleben et al. (2014) take an episodic perspective (Beal et al., 2005). A resource trajectory may
134 take the form of an upward spiral when individuals use current resources to acquire new resources
135 (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Thus, players may invest their resilience to gain other resources (e.g.
136 optimism etc.), or conversely may invest other resources (e.g. hope, social support) in order to gain
137 resilience, especially in the face of adversity. Similar to resilience research (Smith, Smoll, &
138 Ptacek, 1990), Halbesleben et al. (2014) suggest that there is a fundamental allostatic load which
139 means that while resources are being acquired, the investment required to achieve resource
140 acquisition means that there is some downward pressure on the general upward trend in resources.

141 A second type of resource trajectory is where there is an initial gain in resources but over
142 time this changes to a loss of resources. This may be where an initial investment in resources does
143 not yield the expected returns (Halbesleben et al., 2014). For example, it may be where an
144 investment in resources does not reduce or remove the adversity being experienced and so, over
145 time, and with continued resource investment, resilience loss occurs.

146 Finally, resource passageways are a relatively unexplored aspects of resource trajectories,
147 which emphasize environmental conditions that may accelerate the change in resource for either
148 better or worse (Halbesleben et al., 2014). They may add to the allostatic load of preservation,
149 leading to a “bad-to-worse scenario” (Halbesleben et al., 2014; p. 1352) or conversely may fuel
150 broaden-and-build dynamics (Frederickson, 2003) which benefits goal achievement and additional
151 resources. For example, a reminder from a coach of a player’s long-term goals when they are
152 struggling (e.g. you have to win this competition to qualify for the Olympic team) may encourage
153 that player to dig deep and invest more resources for an upcoming event. On the other hand, if it is

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154 perceived as just additional pressure from the coach and beyond their current resources, it may have
155 the opposite effect and just remind them of a perceived threat and the consequences of losing the
156 competition. Thus, resource trajectories have much to offer in terms of explaining the *how* of a
157 dynamic approach to resilience.

158 **The *when* of a dynamic approach to resilience**

159 Given the complexity of resilience where processes may depend on the situational needs,
160 exposure to, and severity of an adverse experience, a comprehensive dynamic model of resilience
161 needs to clearly address the issue of *when*. Hill et al. (2018) have offered a strong conceptual
162 rationale to explain how the ongoing daily process of resilience occurs both in the short to long
163 term. However, we also need to consider the magnitude of the effect that various types of adversity
164 have on resilience and the motivational and situational needs occurring during the adverse
165 timespan. Hill et al.'s (2018) dynamical perspective of resilience in sport can be understood using
166 the *dual-pathway model* (Bryan et al., 2017), which allows us to consider constant dynamic
167 reactions to varying environmental demands, as well as acute pressurized situations. The timespan
168 of an adversity results in two distinct dynamic pathways to resilience, and thus any dynamic
169 approach to resilience must consider this duality. The temporal aspects of resilience highlighted by
170 the pathway model illustrate the distinct effects of adversity on resilience as a result of *when* the
171 adversity occurs in combination with the magnitude. The maintenance of optimal functioning
172 pathway, which is associated with minimal impact resilience, is characterized by a short to medium
173 term adversity where the magnitude does not to exceed the individual's available resources. In
174 contrast, the pathway involving a facilitated rebound with stronger learned qualities is characterized
175 by significant adversities which do exceed the individuals' available resources. For example, take a
176 tennis player who loses the opening match of a tournament; (a) a player with situational experience
177 and broadened resources will have the resilience capacity to buffer any significance adverse effects
178 on well-being or performance before their next match (minimal impact resilience) or (b) a player

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179 with lower situational experience and available resources will suffer a temporary disruption in
180 performance and well-being leading into the next matches and with further loses may experience a
181 depletion of personal resources and resilience capacity. However, over time and through learning,
182 reintegration can occur (emergent resilience). Stress appraisal styles have been shown to be
183 important in determining adaptive responses and reintegration to adversity (Armeli, Gunthert, &
184 Cohen, 2001), in particular challenge appraisals (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015).

185 Although minimal impact resilience and emergent resilience represent different timeframes
186 and thus, engender somewhat different processes, they can still be viewed under the same
187 framework from a self-regulation perspective. Hill et al. (2018) outline how differing situational
188 demands may require different facilitative resources and responses from athletes depending on the
189 stressors, be they competition or personal. For the minimal impact resilience pathway, resources
190 such as coping strategies (Secades et al., 2016) and optimism (Owens, Kirwan, Lounsbury, Levy, &
191 Gibson, 2013) may be more relevant to maintain homeostatic resilience during competitive tasks.
192 Practitioners should focus on developing this pathway by creating pre-performance routines
193 (Cotterill, 2010) and instilling effective mental imagery practices (Moran, Guillot, MacIntyre, &
194 Collet, 2012) with their athletes. The emergent resilience pathway contains levels of both disruption
195 and reintegration. Hill et al. (2018) have already suggested focusing on periods of critical slowing
196 down that may precede a disruption in resilience, where practitioners can detect early warning
197 signals and develop preventative strategies. Reintegration refers to the rebound ability (i.e. a return
198 to previous functioning and resilience capacities) and resilience development (i.e. a facilitated
199 learning response to adverse experience). Fletcher and Sarkar (2016) highlight that resilience
200 training can therefore be both proactive (i.e. reintegrating before critical slowing down) and
201 reactive (i.e. to increasing the speed of rebound ability). Sport research points to the development
202 of support (Lu et al., 2016), and self-efficacy (Cardoso, 2014) as a basis for developing this
203 emergent resilience pathway. The magnitude and situational needs of each adversity is relevant in

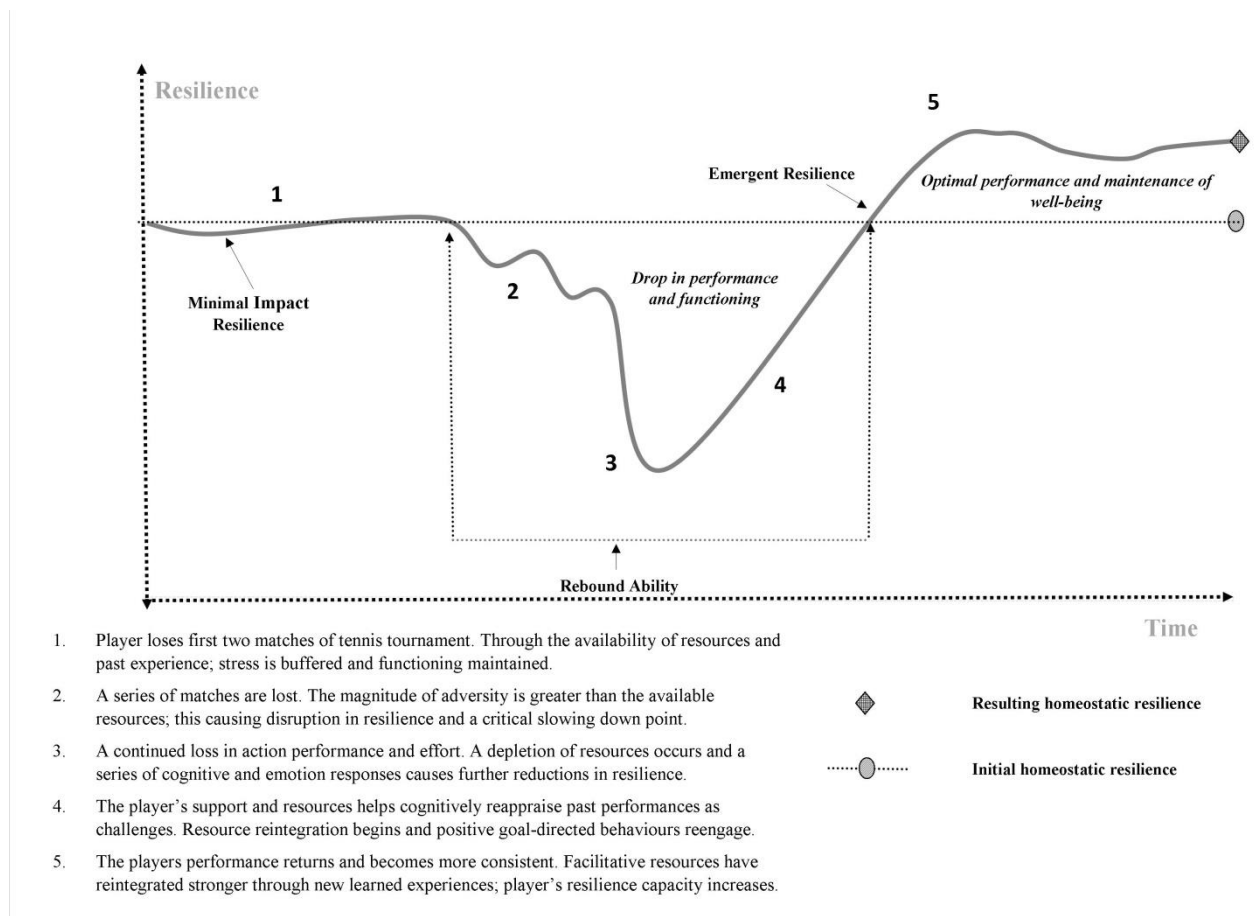
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204 determining which resilience pathway is utilized. Available resources and resilience capacity will
205 contribute to the potential for an adaptive response. Flexibility is key for minimal impact resilience
206 while self-managing learning may be key to emergent resilience. Thus, the ability to engage in self-
207 regulation or self-management processes is key for resilience adaptation and reintegration of
208 resources.

209 **The *where* of a dynamic approach to resilience**

210 Zautra, Arewasikporn and Davis (2010) characterized resilient adaptation by the speed and
211 thoroughness of stress recovery (rebound), the capacity to sustain purpose (minimal impact
212 resilience; maintain regular functioning), and the capacity to attain a form of psychological growth
213 that reveals a greater maturity of the mind (emergent resilience). Before any stress-resilience
214 interactions, a stable homeostatic state of resilience is thought to precede a perturbation and the
215 capacity of resilience fluctuates as the magnitude of adversity exceeds resilience capacities which
216 depletes available resources (Richardson, 2002). Figure 1 represents a practical example of both
217 *when* and *where* resilience may fluctuate in sporting practice and highlights examples of the dual-
218 pathway model (Bryan et al., 2017).

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220 Whetten (1989) highlights the importance of visual representation during new theory explanation.

221 Figure 1 reflects examples offered throughout this commentary and offers the reader a practical

222 view of dynamic resilience processes. In the fluctuation of resilience, we can see a minimal impact

223 perturbation (causing no lasting effect on performance and a return to stable homeostatic state), a

224 rebound ability (time taken from initial disruption until a reintegration and return to initial

225 homeostatic capacity) and emergent resilience (a reintegration of resilience surpassing that of initial

226 homeostatic capacity). This new resilience capacity is the result of effective reintegration of

227 facilitative resources together with broader perspectives of past historic adverse events. There is a

228 need for researchers and practitioners to understand each pathway and fluctuations of resilience

229 disruption and reintegration in order to understand *where* and *when* in the resilience process is most

230 relevant to each specific adverse situation.

231 **Moving forward: The next steps for resilience research as a dynamic, episodic, self-regulating**

232 **process**

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233 We propose and discuss four avenues that are required to realize the potential of a dynamic
234 approach to resilience. Firstly, we contend that there is still further work required on the definition
235 and conceptualization of resilience (the *what*). We need a definition and conceptualization of
236 resilience that moves away from trait approaches and acknowledges the inherent process and
237 dynamism of resilience. Although definitions of resilience have tended to acknowledge the
238 underlying trait-like protective factors and mental processes (Fletcher & Sarker, 2012, Hill et al.,
239 2018), the first step in advancing a dynamic approach to resilience is to define it as such. The
240 aforementioned definition in this article by Bryan et al. (2017) specifies resilience as a dynamic
241 process, but also adopts a broad consideration of reactions to adversity which can include both
242 chronic adaptation to adversity as well as an acute ability to persist in the face of adversity.

243 Second, we suggest that the process of resilience is more than just dynamic, but also
244 benefits from inclusion of the concepts of episodic performance and self-regulation. The A-CEM-A
245 model highlights the need to consider how self-regulation episodes unfold over time (O'Shea et al.,
246 2017). Performance episodes would identify timeframes or time periods that either consumes,
247 conserve or develop resilience. These episodes can be momentary, such as the example used by Hill
248 et al. (2018) or can be longer term, depending on the magnitude of and exposure to adversity
249 (Bryan et al., 2017).

250 Third, a broader perspective on resources and resource trajectories is required to understand
251 the *how* of the dynamic process. Hill et al. (2018) offered an interesting basis for *how* this complex
252 dynamical process works. This commentary offers an understanding of the *what* (cf. self-regulation
253 and A-CEM-A model), expanded on the *how* (cf. resource theory) and detailed the *when* and *where*
254 (cf. dual-pathway model and Figure 1) of dynamic resilience. Researchers and practitioners can
255 now develop interventions to promote dynamic resilience along a spectrum of maintenance,
256 disruption and reintegration in order to effectively maximize specific individual resilience
257 processes.

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258 Finally, the magnitude and performance situation of the stress-resilience process needs to be
259 considered particularly with regard to what the optimal resilience pathway process looks like and
260 whether associated resources and skills are the same or different for each pathway. As we have
261 discussed in detail above, it is unlikely that the *when* of resilience is a unitary construct, but rather
262 the temporal nature of resilience dynamics (e.g. in the moment versus longer-term) interacts with
263 the magnitude of the stressor and the individuals current resource levels to result in two distinct
264 pathways (minimal impact resilience or emergent resilience).

265 **Conclusion**

266 In this commentary, we have expanded upon the model of Hill et al. (2018) using Whetten's
267 (1989) criteria for a theoretical contribution. We have shown how recent research investigating
268 dynamic approaches to self-regulation (Vancouver, 2008), episodic model of performance and self-
269 regulation (Beal et al., 2005; O'Shea et al., 2017), and conservation of resources theory
270 (Halbesleben et al., 2014) can deepen our understanding of the *what, how* and *where* of dynamical
271 resilience. Furthermore, we drew on the work of Bryan et al., (2017) to show how the timeframe of
272 this dynamic system may result in somewhat different processes with distinct effects on resilience,
273 and thus, demonstrated that the *when* of dynamic resilience may not be a unitary construct. This
274 commentary has highlighted the importance of developing specific situational resources and self-
275 regulatory processes in preparation for upcoming pressurized episodes as well as for unforeseen
276 significant sporting adversities.

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