



University of HUDDERSFIELD

University of Huddersfield Repository

Locke, Abigail

"If I'm not worried, I'm nervous, does that make sense?" The use of emotion concepts by athletes in accounts of performance

Original Citation

Locke, Abigail (2003) "If I'm not worried, I'm nervous, does that make sense?" The use of emotion concepts by athletes in accounts of performance. *Forum: qualitative social research/Forum qualitative sozialforschung*, 4 (1). ISSN 1438-5627

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/4343/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

"If I'm Not Nervous, I'm Worried, Does That Make Sense?": The Use of Emotion Concepts by Athletes in Accounts of Performance

Abigail Locke

Abstract: Traditionally research into emotions in sport has focused on the impact of specific emotions upon performance, most notably anxiety. This paper approaches emotion from the perspective of discursive psychology, drawing on the methods of discourse analysis and conversation analysis. Using interview data from high level athletes, this paper examines the uses of emotion concepts in accounts of athletic performance. What becomes apparent through the analysis is that athletes claim that specific emotions such as nervousness are normal in sporting performance. In contrast, when accounting for failure, the athletes construct their build-up to the competition as containing no experience of these emotions. Rather than in traditional sports psychological research whereby emotions are seen to be quantifiable, this paper demonstrates how emotion terms form a rich interactional currency that are embedded within our accounting practices.

Key words: *emotion, athletes, sport psychology, discursive psychology, accountability*

1. Introduction

1.1 An introduction to the topic of emotion

1.2 The study of emotion in sport: From anxiety to confusion

1.3 Emotion and discursive psychology

2. Aims of the Paper

3. Data

3.1 Interviews and setting

3.2 Participants

3.3 Data handling

4. Analysis

4.1 "If I'm not nervous I'm worried."
Nervousness as a normal aspect of a good performance

4.2 No nerves as an account for failure

5. Concluding Remarks

Acknowledgements

References

Author

Citation

Appendix

1. Introduction

1.1 An introduction to the topic of emotion

The topic of emotion is one that has been of interest in the social sciences for many years. It does however remain a topic of huge debate and philosophical argument. For many within psychology, emotion remains a "real" phenomenon and one that is open to experimental or positivist enquiry. Within other social sciences, the philosophical basis of emotion has been explored and some have questioned the existence of the concept of emotion itself (SARBIN, 1986). [1]

Many of the criticisms linked to psychology's take on emotion are due to problems in definition. Most definitions contain three elements—subjective experience, physiology, and action, but depending on theoretical standpoint, differ on the amount of emphasis they place on these factors. As Section 1.2 demonstrates, sports psychologists tend to rest on a cognitive viewpoint

(the mind), with some physiology brought in (the body) and as such, view cognitions concerning emotion, related to felt/somatic experience as crucial. This theoretical perspective that underpins sports psychology's interest in emotion is more obvious once the parts are broken down. Sports psychology's endeavour is to apply psychological perspectives to sport, thus for them, both the mind and the body are relevant. [2]

Let us now consider the elusive nature of an emotion definition. For FRIJDA (1986, p.1) "a definition of emotion can only be a product of a theory; it can thus be reached only at the end of the investigation". MANDLER (1975) proposes a similar point that it is pointless to search for *the* theory or *the* definition of emotion as there are so many varying viewpoints and starting points. Hence demonstrating that any definition of emotion that may be provided is laden with theoretical assumptions. Traditional psychology and sports psychology treat emotion as a matter of the individual—it is an essence, within us and some argue that there is a basic set of emotion terms that are universal (EKMAN, 1992). However, etymological studies (e.g HARRE, 1983, SARBIN, 1986) and cultural work (e.g. LUTZ, 1988) have presented problems for this view. [3]

This paper begins from the premise that the way to study emotion is to focus on what emotion concepts achieve in interactions and approaches the topic from the perspective of discursive psychology (EDWARDS & POTTER, 1992). That is not to say that the author holds that there is no such thing as an "emotion". Rather, due to conceptual problems with traditional psychology's essentialist assumptions, emotions are best studied for what they *do* rather than what they *are*. That is, what the invocation of emotion terms accomplishes for the speaker, rather than attempting to identify and quantify underlying emotional states. If we consider both the definitional aspects of emotional experience and the claimed existence of a basic set of emotion terms, this still does not account for the wide vocabulary of emotion terms that exist within the English language. According to CLORE, ORTONY and FOSS (1987) there are five hundred and eighty five words in the English language alone for emotions. Thus the existence of all these terms would suggest that even if there is a basic set of emotions, the invocation in language of emotion concepts may serve some interactional purpose. This becomes the focus of the paper—what the invocation of emotion terms accomplishes for the athletes in the local interaction. More background to the discursive perspective on emotion is provided in Section 1.3. [4]

1.2 The study of emotion in sport: From anxiety to confusion

Sports psychology initially approached the study of emotion from the perspective of its effect on performance, and traditionally regarded the experience of too much emotion as detrimental to sporting performance. There may be a contextual influence here in that emotions are typically seen in contrast to rational thought (EDWARDS, 1997, 1999) and perhaps in the sporting arena, rational thought processes are seen as important, with the ability to make clear decisions crucial. [5]

This approach rested of course on which theory of emotion was ascribed to and to what sense it was a bodily experience or more routed in cognition. The relevance of emotion to sport came about due to the experience of the sporting situation. One could argue that sports psychology's role is to assist the athlete or performer to achieve as high a level of performance as is possible. Sports performers aiming for their optimum performance must, according to sports psychologists, reach a psychological state that will facilitate this level of performance. However, there are many factors that can influence this desired state which have been described as stressors (JONES & HARDY, 1989). The major assumption behind this approach is that sport revolves around stress and thus a major motivational factor for participation in sport is a deep-seated human need or drive to withstand and overcome stress (PATMORE, 1986). The premise behind this was that the nature of the sporting experience is such that competitive pressure places great demands on the body's resources to deal with these stressors and in turn these produce emotional responses. In sports psychology these emotional responses

have tended to focus on, and be termed as, anxiety (e.g. JONES, 1995), and consequently the measurement and study of competitive anxiety became one of the dominant areas of research in sports psychology. [6]

Early theoretical underpinnings were borrowed from or based on the wealth of test anxiety literature in educational, clinical, and organisational psychology, originating mostly in the 1950s and 1960s. Initially it began as the study of uni-dimensional anxiety (YERKES & DODSON, 1908), then moved to viewing its differing effects on individuals as due to underlying trait dispositions or as a situationally specific response (SPIELBERGER, 1966). In the early 1990s, a multi-dimensional approach to anxiety was proposed (MARTENS, VEALEY & BURTON, 1990) which drew on cognitive (thoughts) and somatic (felt experience) anxiety. It is this multi-dimensional approach to anxiety that informs much of the recent work within sports psychology. [7]

These initial theories rested on the notion of too much anxiety having a detrimental effect on performance. In more recent years, new dimensions to the anxiety response were proposed including the notion of directional anxiety which led to the creation of the concepts of facilitative and debilitating anxiety, such that anxiety could either have a facilitative effect or debilitating effect on the performer (BURTON, 1988; JONES, 1995). It was claimed that elite athletes experienced more "facilitative" anxiety than non-elite athletes (JONES & SWAIN, 1995). The directional hypothesis put a conceptual spanner in the works of anxiety research and was somewhat controversial and opened the possibility to sports psychologists that anxiety may not be the key *emotion* in sport, but rather an umbrella term for varying emotional states. That is, for example, whether this facilitative anxiety is *positive anxiety* or *positive emotions* in general. Consequently, more recent work has focused on the effects of different emotions on athletic performance (LAZARUS, 2000). [8]

Such perspectives differ from the work presented here in two main ways. The first is that *mainstream* sports psychology conceptualises emotion as an inner, discrete mental state containing both an element of felt experience or sensation and a cognition related to the emotion, drawing on cognitive emotion theorists such as Richard LAZARUS (1984). Rather than following these cognitive assumptions, this paper looks at what the deployment of emotion terms accomplishes within the local interaction. This links into the second main difference between the approaches: rather than relying on quantitative methodology to explore emotion, often in the form of questionnaires whereby athletes typically choose an answer from a set of pre-determined options, the paper utilises interviews with athletes. Discursive approaches are *participant led* rather than the traditional *analyst led* work of sports psychology. As such what becomes the topic for analysis is what the participants construct as relevant to them. The retrospective interviews used in this paper provide an in-depth study of the potential rhetorical uses of emotion terms when accounting for performance. [9]

Although sports psychology has traditionally been a quantitative enterprise, more recently there have been discussions of what a qualitative perspective can contribute to the discipline (BIDDLE, MARKLAND, GISBOURNE, CHATZISARANTIS & SPARKES, 2001). Much of the qualitative methodologies that are employed are rooted in realism, such as content analysis. With the result that language is treated as representational of inner essences, such as emotion or attitudes. Discursive psychology draws on both discourse analysis (POTTER & WETHERELL, 1987) and conversation analysis (SACKS, 1992) and approaches talk as active, claiming that people actively construct versions of events in their discourse. Although in the area of sports psychology, such discursive approaches have been ignored. Within its *twin* discipline, exercise psychology, discursive approaches are recently being offered with FAULKNER and FINLAY (2002) proposing the use of conversation analysis as a research tool and MCGANNON and MOORE (2000) suggesting the use of discursive psychology to study exercise adherence. It seems that discursive approaches are being considered within the exercise psychology field but until now their applicability to more *performance related* sports psychology has been neglected. One reason for this may be the perceived lack of practical applicability of discursive work in that discursive psychology does seek to understand or identify the *true nature* of

psychological phenomena such as memory or emotion. Instead it focuses on their uses in talk as social action (WILLIG, 2001). It seems that sports psychologists interested in the relationship between anxiety (or other emotions) and performance would not consider a discursive perspective as it would provide little in the way of *a priori* predictions. However, the study of emotion in sport is readily applicable to discursive psychology. As emotion terms are part of the interactional currency of the sports culture, an exploration into the social actions that their usage may perform is necessary. [10]

1.3 Emotion and discursive psychology

Discursive psychology (EDWARDS & POTTER, 1992) approaches psychological states such as emotion as talk's categories and concerns rather than its causes. That is, as topics for analysis in the discourse under examination, rather than as theories or explanations offered by the analyst for why people say the things they do. This approach differs from a traditional sports psychology perspective as it approaches language as active and treats the athlete's accounts as constructions of events rather than in traditional sports psychology research whereby language is treated as representational or a passive communicator of thoughts. Therefore in this paper when an athlete claims to have experienced a particular emotion prior to or during a performance, the examination of what the invocation of this emotional state does in the interview interaction is undertaken rather than simply claiming that for example, an athlete was nervous before the competition. [11]

With specific regard to emotion, anthropological studies (e.g., LUTZ, 1988; ROSALDO, 1980) have shown that emotion discourse is important in how social accountability is produced. More specifically within the realm of discursive psychology, emotions have been studied to look at what they accomplish in local interactions. Richard BUTTNY (1993) and Derek EDWARDS (1997, 1999) have looked at emotion discourse in settings such as relationship counselling and therapy. BUTTNY shows how emotion concepts such as *angry* or *upset* are used in narrative accounts to imply that circumstances are problematic or out of the ordinary. EDWARDS shows how emotional states are invoked in everyday discourse, in opposition to rational thought but also in making narrative sense of actions, disposition and accountability. [12]

2. Aims of the Paper

This paper approaches the study of emotion in sport from the perspective of discursive psychology (EDWARDS & POTTER, 1992). The aim is to examine the uses of emotion terms by athletes in accounts of performance. It is not the paper's interest to ascertain the *truthfulness* of the athletes' reports of their emotional states at the time of performance. Rather, the analytical interest is how athletes use emotion talk in ways that are constructive, performative and rhetorical, and oriented to in their accountability for performance. Accountability in this sense is of primary interest to discursive psychology and its premise is that:

"When people describe events, they *attend* to accountability. That is to say, they attend to events in terms of what is normal, expectable, and proper; they attend to their own responsibility in events and in the reporting of events" (EDWARDS, 1997, pg.7; original emphasis). [13]

What the analysis offered here will demonstrate is how the athletes' use of emotion concepts are embedded within their performance narratives, where descriptions of emotion such as feeling anxious or nervous are rhetorically structured in order to account for success and failure. One example of this is from the opening quote of the title "If I'm not nervous I'm worried, does that make sense?" If this statement is taken at *face value* it shows how emotion talk is part of the sports culture, in that athletes talk in these terms of *worry* and feeling *nervous*. However, there is a second possible reading of the quote and it is this reading that is of interest to discursive psychology, looking more specifically at the interactional currency of emotion terms. That is, how athletes use these emotional terms when accounting for their performances. [14]

3. Data

3.1 Interviews and setting

The interviews were semi-structured and the athletes were asked to narrate their experiences of competition, with specific reference to the emotions that they experienced across the time frames of pre-, during- and post a good performance and a poor performance. Typical questions included: "What emotions were you experiencing before the competition?" "What do you think caused these emotions?" "Did you feel that you needed to cope with how you were feeling?" After an initial pilot interview, fourteen interviews were conducted with *high-level* athletes, lasting on average for one hour. The pilot interview was not audio taped but was an opportunity to check whether the interview questions were satisfactory. The interviews took place in the interviewer's residence over a period of one month. [15]

3.2 Participants

The athletes in this study were high-level and were selected on the basis that they had competed for their country at either junior or senior level in their chosen sport. Many of the sample due to age, were coming to the end of their junior careers and beginning to compete at senior level. The majority of participants were collegiate athletes and the others were recruited through contacts within sporting societies. [16]

3.3 Data handling

The resulting tapes were transcribed according to conventions established for conversation analysis by Gail JEFFERSON (see ATKINSON & HERITAGE, 1984), which are summarised in the Appendix. [17]

The transcripts were read repeatedly and sections were identified and coded as pertaining to the uses of emotion terms by athletes in accounts of performance. Two main themes were identified: (1) the experience of nervousness as a normal and needed part of a good sporting performance; (2), citing a lack of "good" emotional experience as one reason for failure. [18]

4. Analysis

The analysis will use five extracts to demonstrate the interactional currency of emotion discourse by athletes when constructing their accounts of performance, across the two themes. [19]

The analysis presented here does not attempt to generalise its findings beyond the data. The analysis provides a micro-level examination of how emotion concepts are used by the athletes in the local interaction, i.e. the interview situation, in order for the athletes to account for their performances. Work within the areas of discursive psychology and conversation analysis, uncovers mundane ways of talking and conversational rules which can be seen across many different interactions and topic areas. The analysis presented here expands previous work into the interactional uses of emotion concepts for accounting purposes (cf. BUTTNY, 1993; EDWARDS, 1997, 1999), and their use in narrative (EDWARDS, 1997; SARBIN, 1989) by applying it to the sports arena to demonstrate the rich interactional currency of emotion concepts. The analysis that follows and the claims that are made are representative of findings from a larger corpus of data (LOCKE, 2001). [20]

4.1 "If I'm not nervous I'm worried." Nervousness as a normal aspect of a good performance

Throughout the interviews, a pervasive theme was that of experiencing particular types of emotions in competitive sport as normal and expectable. The following two extracts from Scott (extract 1) and Dave (extract 2) will demonstrate this point. Athletes constructed the experience of specific emotions such as nervousness before competition, as normal for them, and by implication, for anyone. This is shown in the following extract (extract 1), where Scott looks at the importance of the emotional experience in relation to the pending competition. Scott has previously cited being nervous as his main emotion in the build-up to the performance, in this case an international rugby union match.

1	Scott:	>it's it's it's< a <u>positive</u> sort of nervousness
2		[because]
3	Int:	[right]
4	Scott:	y'know (0.4) like (.) I think it's just
5		you- like you're looking forward to the game but
6	Int:	mmm=
7	Scott:	=y'know it's (.) like I don't see it as a as a
8		sort of a <u>negative aspect</u> in the sense that (0.5)
9		it (.) >sort of< hinders my <u>performance</u> =
10	Int:	=okay
11	Scott:	y'know I just see it (.) I think it's <u>positive</u>
12		because (0.2) if I'm not feeling nervous (.)
13		I'm probably thinking well (.) I'm not focused I'm
14		not (.) I haven't got my <u>mind</u> on the <u>game</u> (0.4) but
15		by <u>being</u> nervous (.) it uh (.) >sort of< (0.7)
16		makes me feel as if (.) °well you <u>are</u> focused
17		because you <u>are</u> nervous about it (.) so (0.2)
18		I'd see it as being a positive aspect°

Table 1: Positive nervousness (Extract 1 – I1: Scott: 2) [21]

Scott begins in line 1 by stating that the nervousness that he experiences is "positive" and begins to provide a justification for this, that the nerves are linked with "looking forward to the game" (line 5). His account is produced in normative terms, demonstrated through his use of "y'know" (lines 5,9,13), "you're" (line 5) and "you" (lines 5,16, 17) throughout the extract. What this does is to portray Scott's claims as generalisable to other athletes in this position, that this is not necessarily just his experience but that of other athletes also. [22]

From line 6 onwards, Scott continues with his justification of why his nerves were positive and he does this by setting it up with a contrastive "but", that he does not feel that it "hinders my performance" (line 10), in which case, going along with the line of (constructed) reasoning here, presumably the lack of emotion would be "negative" (line 8) and detrimental to performance. [23]

Scott continues in subjective and personalised terms that "I just see it (.) I think ..." (line 12). His constructed "subjectiveness" offers his account as non-definitive but more a matter of his opinion, and as a personal rather than general point of view. Again, this very contrast is an orientation to norms in accounting for oneself, in that it locates his own thoughts and feelings in comparison or contrast to those of others. He takes his account further to discuss the importance of feeling nervous in lines 13-18 where he argues that if he is not nervous then "I'm

probably thinking well I'm not focused, I haven't got my mind on the game". The use of "probably" here is interesting, he is not offering this as a definitive exact self-quotation instead he offers it as quotation which is displaying his inferences as a set of narrated thoughts. This serves to display Scott as reflective, analytical, appraising his mental states and thinking, rather than focusing on his performances and results. [24]

Another point of analytical interest is the way Scott links the experience of nerves with the mind and thought processes, and perhaps there is a folk or rhetorical use of emotion being invoked here in that the emotion is produced as a reaction to something, *you can't be emotional if you're not bothered about the outcome*. In addition there appears to be a mind-body theme that can be drawn on when talking about emotions and sport, in that by citing that you experienced *nerves* before a competition, it signifies not only that the mind will be focused and ready to perform but also by implication, that there is a certain readiness in the body to act and respond to the demands of the competition at hand. Scott constructs the experience of nerves prior to competition as normal but also necessary for him to perform well. The following extract (2) from Dave addresses this notion more directly. [25]

In extract 1 Scott discussed how being nervous was "positive" for him as it meant he was thinking about the game and was therefore focused. In the following extract Dave takes up this point that he needs to feel nervous if he is to perform successfully. The first turn of talk comes after the interviewer has previously asked Dave why he felt nervous before the competition.

1	Dave:	a:nd (0.4) if I'm <u>not</u> nervous (0.6) >if I- if I<
2		sa:y (0.2) if I'm not nervous I'm worried (.) does
3		that make sense?
4	Int:	yeah (.) it does
5	Dave:	Heh
6	Int:	I've heard that before believe me
7	Dave:	heh [he-hh heh heh
8	Int:	[heh ehheh yeah
9	Dave:	so yeah- >I mean yeah< from:: (.) I suppose from a
10		sports psych- y'know <u>aroused</u> (.) is probably a
11		better word than-
12	Int:	Okay
13		(1.2)
14	Dave:	than nervous [°y'know-°]
15	Int:	[yeah]

Table 2: Importance of nerves (Extract 2 – 18: Dave: 11) [26]

In lines 1-2, Dave says that he would be worried if he was not nervous before a competition and immediately seeks clarification from the interviewer "does that make sense?" (lines 2-3). As mentioned briefly in the overview of the paper, this turn hints at the interactional uses of emotion terms as it illuminates the problems and overlaps in talking about and labelling different emotional states. In more conversational terms, the interviewer aligns herself with Dave's statement that it makes sense to her and that she had "heard that before believe me" (line 6) and once more with her laughter in lines 7 and 8. [27]

Dave continues to explain what he means by his first turn through making explicit reference to his knowledge of "sports psych-" (line 10), and says that from this point of view "aroused" is a better "word " than "nervous" (lines 9-14). His invocation of sports psychology may also be an orientation to the interviewer, and her purposes within the research, who at the beginning of the interview explicitly makes relevant her status as a sports psychologist. A previous hint of this

shared knowledge between them is demonstrated with Dave's "does that make sense?" (lines 2-3) and the interviewer's subsequent response. [28]

Dave's turn here displays his problems with the labelling of the terms or *word* for this feeling. As touched on briefly in the introduction, arousal is a common place term and concept in sports psychology and is reflected in theories such as uni-dimensional anxiety (YERKES & DODSON, 1908), as the basis of anxiety or nervousness. The labelling issue aside, Dave constructs himself as needing to feel either "aroused" or "nervous" in order to perform successfully and if he does not feel this then he is "worried" (line 2). Once more, this link between the emotional states of nervousness or arousal as needed for the athlete to perform well invokes a certain notion of mind and body. Without the felt experience of the emotion (body), Dave constructs himself as becoming worried (mind) that he is not ready or able to perform to the best of his ability. [29]

As well as the mind-body issue, there may be an element of accountability for the athletes to construct their emotional experience as positive. Emotional states such as nervousness or anxiety outside of the sporting realm are typically seen as negative and in some cases, a high level of anxiety is regarded as pathological. Take for example the following quote from LAZARUS and LAZARUS (1994) on anxiety:

"When we are anxious, we are unable to relax. We experience the sense that something is wrong in the situation or in our lives. We are uneasy, worry, are troubled with intrusive thoughts that we cannot put to rest, and we want to avoid or escape from upcoming confrontations that are the concrete manifestations of our concern" (1994, p.46). [30]

The quote portrays being anxious as a bad or negative aspect. However, the more recent work in sports psychology on facilitative anxiety (JONES & SWAIN, 1995) discussed in Section 1.2, claims that for some athletes, most notably elite performers, anxiety has a facilitative effect on athletic performance. Hence in the interview interactions here, coupled with the interviewer's declared status as a sports psychologist, the athletes may feel accountable to construct their experiences in this way, i.e. as a positive aspect of the competitive experience. [31]

What this section has demonstrated is how the participants in accounts of their emotional experience claimed that emotions, such as nervousness, were a normal, natural, and inbuilt part of any sporting performance. However, the athletes may also be accountable to construct their emotional experience as positive. Indeed they went further to construct the experience of nerves as necessary to perform well. This need for arousal or nerves invoked a kind of mind-body synthesis whereby the emotion affects both the mind and demonstrates from the body, a readiness to act. Nowhere is the (constructed) importance of this emotional experience more apparent than in the following and last theme where the athletes talk about their lack of nerves or other positive emotion terms, when failing in sporting competition. [32]

4.2 No nerves as an account for failure

The paper discusses how the experience of the emotion, *nervousness*, is constructed by athletes as necessary for a successful performance. This is most starkly apparent when looking at accounts of failure, when the athletes claim that no nervousness was experienced prior to the event. As the previous theme demonstrated, athletes talk in emotional terms when accounting for performance and construct the experience of emotions such as nervousness as a usual and needed aspect of performance. Both of the previous extracts have focused on when athletes were discussing the build-up to a good international performance. In contrast this section focuses on the athletes' accounts for failure and demonstrates how they claim not to have experienced the previously cited *positive* emotions. The analysis focused on the accountability work that such claims accomplish within the local interaction. Through the analysis it seems apparent that claiming to not be experiencing the *right* emotions prior to competition forms one part of an account for failure. [33]

Extract 3 from Ross examines this notion of lack of emotional experience, specifically nerves, in relation to competition. This extract concerns the middle race of a three race swimming meet where in this race, the interviewee performed badly but in the first and last race, he performed well. It is a feature of this context though that due to a good performance in the first race, "over-confidence" and "complacency" are cited as the probable cause for the subsequent poor performance.

1	Int:	the circumstances behind the (.) <u>o</u> ver confidence
2		and the <u>com</u> placency (0.4) because you'd got a PB in
3		the last <u>r</u> ace
4	Ross:	yeah I- I wasn't nervous before the race
5	Int:	okay=
6	Ross:	=and I know- that (.) and if I'm not nervous (.)
7		I don't (0.2) swim well (.) and I suppose going into
8		the race I <u>k</u> new that I wouldn't do a very good
9		ti:me (0.4) because I wasn't <u>n</u> ervous and I tried
10		making myself nervous >but it wouldn't happen
11		somehow<

Table 3: Lack of nerves (Extract 3 – I6: Ross: 8) [34]

The interviewer attributes Ross' previously cited feelings to his attaining a personal best time (PB) in the previous race (lines 1-3). Ross demonstrates acceptance of this formulation and goes on to state that he "wasn't nervous before the race". He goes further from line 6 onwards and constructs a general, *scripted* (EDWARDS, 1994) account of how he should feel before a race "I know- that ... if I'm not nervous ... I don't (0.2) swim well" (lines 6-7). This more general account works to portray Ross as knowledgeable and reflective of his own previous performances and sets up his following account that he can claim a lack of nerves as his main reason for failure without having to provide too many further details. He moves his account back to this particular race (lines 7-8) to claim that he "knew" going into the race that he would not swim a good time because of his lack of nerves. Thus, here Ross uses his already set up general rule of lack of nerves as his reason for failure in this race. This demonstrates the interactional currency of emotion terms within the sports arena in that after Ross has set up his lack of nerves as his reason for failure, the interviewer does not request any further justification from him. [35]

As previously discussed however there may be an element of accountability for the athletes to enter the competition in a state ready to compete and the first two extracts in this paper demonstrated, this *ready state* was constructed as feeling nervous or aroused. Ross orients to his potential accountability of not being nervous in lines 9-11 whereby he claims to have "tried" (line 9) to make himself nervous "but it wouldn't happen somehow" (lines 10-11). His use of "tried" implies that he put effort into changing his emotional state and attends to his accountability of being in the right "mind-set" going into the competition. Ross's second formulation, predicated with a contrastive "but" of the nervousness not happening, constructs it as something that was out of his control, and therefore his accountability, in that he tried to be up or ready for the competition but "somehow" it would not happen. [36]

Ross referred to his "complacency" and "over confidence" from his previous success as a potential link to his lack of nerves and failure in a race. In common sense terms, these emotions are obviously not going to be beneficial to an upcoming performance and rhetorically his use of them here signifies that the upcoming event was going to be problematic. In extracts 4 and 5, an account from Kieran is examined. Kieran is discussing a poor shot-putting performance. Previously in the interview Kieran has constructed the location of the event and its timing as problematic and the questioning now turns to asking him about any feelings or

emotions that he may have had leading up to the performance, using pre-set time phases laid out in the interview schedule.

1	Int:	so how did you <u>feel</u> (0.4) sa:y (.) a month before
2		(0.2) did you have any (0.4) [particular feelings
3	Kieran:	[no (.) no °unfortunately°
4		(0.2)
5	Int:	no (0.2) okay (.) a week before?
6	Kieran:	hardly ↑any
7	Int:	o↑kay heh heh (0.4) um (.) on the <u>day</u>
8	Kieran:	on the day
9		(2.8)
10	Kieran:	I [<u>tried</u>] (0.8)
11	Int:	[[((clears throat))]]
12	Kieran:	I <u>tried</u> to (1.0) <u>perk</u> myself up for it but
13	Int:	mmm=
14	Kieran:	= <u>not</u> as <u>successfully</u> as a lot of <u>other</u> (.) people
15	Int:	so how <u>exactly</u> were you <u>feeling</u> then
16	Kieran:	u:m
17		(2.5)
18	Kieran:	letha:rgic
19	Int:	mm hm
20	Kieran:	↑uh
21		(1.2)
22	Kieran:	just not really that interested
23		(1.0)
24	Kieran:	just thinking "well bugger I'll do it (0.4) and see
25		if I can get a respectable dist↑ance"

Table 4: Lethargy before competition (Extract 4 – I2: Kieran: 8) [37]

The interviewer in lines 1-3 asks for Kieran's feelings one month prior to competition. After she begins to rework the question (line 2), Kieran immediately answers "no (.) no °unfortunately°" (line 4) and the "°unfortunately°" sets up this notion of not experiencing emotion as problematic. The interviewer reiterates Kieran's "no" in line 6 before moving on the next time phase of "a week before?" (line 6) and once more Kieran answers immediately "hardly ↑any" (line 7). [38]

The problematic nature of Kieran's turns is picked up by the interviewer, shown in the emphasis on "o↑kay" (line 8) and her subsequent laughter, attends to the interactional difficulty here of Kieran's negative formulations in view of the interview requirements, i.e. to produce and explore emotion terms. The interviewer continues with asking for Kieran's emotions "on the day" (line 8). Kieran reiterates her request in line 9 and after a near three second pause (line 10), which may signify the problematic nature of the question (JEFFERSON, 1989) begins to formulate his response. He claims that he "tried" (lines 11 & 13) to "perk myself up for it but" (line 13) and the contrastive "but" in relation to his use of "tried" sets up this attempt as not working. He goes further in line 15 that his attempts were not as successful as "a lot of other (.) people", namely his competitors. This serves to lessen his accountability as he attempted to make himself ready, however other athletes were able to do so better than him. This provides another element to his account for not performing well. Athletes' accounts for poor performance tend not to

invoke inability or lack of talent, rather they invoke situational or external reasons for failure. Even non-emotional experience is deemed to be caused or influenced by external factors. [39]

The interviewer's turn in line 16 carries a bite of impatience signified by the emphasis on "exactly" and "feeling" makes clear the sort of answer she requires—an exact *description* of his feelings. Kieran answers with a minimal "u:m" and the interactional difficulty is evident in line 18 with a two and a half second pause. He continues in line 19 that he felt "leth:argic". Note the emphasis and elongation on "leth:argic", he is displaying it as a definitive and not a normal emotion to experience in this situation, and his delivery of it is performative, that is, he says it in a *lethargic* way. In addition, there is a rhetorical contrast here between his claimed experience of *lethargy* with its missing opposite, *nervousness*. [40]

Kieran continues in line 23 that he was "just not really that interested", and he elaborates on this in lines 25-26 through the use of *active voicing* (WOOFFITT, 1992) that he was thinking "well bugger I'll do it (0.4) and see if I can get a respectable dist[↑]ance". This active voicing of Kieran's thoughts serves to construct a vivid and extreme description of the situation. His statement requires some delicate handling from Kieran in that his use of "well bugger" may imply that he is not that bothered about the competition, and his previous turns point to this. Thus, his use of trying to get a "respectable dist[↑]ance" is crucial here in managing his accountability for trying to perform well, as any proper athlete should, even if he failed to do so on *this* occasion. [41]

The account from Kieran is picked up nine lines later in extract 5. In the omitted lines, Kieran has produced an account of his typical performance routine and commented on how it was affected by the poor location and venue of the event.

1	Int:	o [↑] kay s:o (.) how about an ho:ur before you went in
2		(0.2) how were you feeling (0.2) >before your
3		competition started<
4	Kieran:	relaxed but in a <u>negative</u> sense
5	Int:	right o [↑] kay (0.4) <u>why</u>
6	Kieran:	'co:s (.) I wasn't (0.2) <u>focused</u> I wasn't
7		(3.8)
8	Kieran:	<u>well</u> I <u>tried</u> (.) I did a warm-up (.) I tried to do
9		all that- (>including all me<) drills <u>but</u>
10		(2.5)
11	Kieran:	you know (.) the <u>same</u> interest wasn't there

Table 5: Negative relaxation (Extract 5 – I2: Kieran: 8) [42]

The interview schedule is picked up again by the interviewer and she asks Kieran for his feelings "an ho:ur" (line 1) before the competition. Kieran answers that he was "relaxed but in a negative sense" (line 4). The immediate clarification that this was "negative" is important for Kieran, in that for some sports, feeling relaxed may have a positive impact on performance. The interviewer asks Kieran to elaborate further (line 5) and he claims that it was due to him not being "focused" (line 6). After a lengthy pause in line 7, Kieran addresses his possible accountability that he was not "focused" and the other problems he has previously raised, by claiming that he "tried" (line 8) and he did do his "warm-up" (line 8) and "drills" (line 9) and finishes this turn with a contrastive "but" (line 9) which sets up that this was not successful. He continues in line 11 that the "same interest wasn't there", and as previously mentioned he has set this up due to situational factors such as the poor venue, timing and organisation of the event. Emotion as related to the mind and body is once more relevant here. Kieran claims to have attempted to make himself ready for competition by doing his "warm-up" and "drills" and it appears that without the experience of an emotion such as nervousness, his mind and body were not ready to compete. [43]

Kieran's constructions of *non-emotional* experience are used interactionally by him in a number of ways. He is attending to the premise of the interview in that he is using his lack of emotions or nerves to signify that this event is problematic, and has previously given an account of the problematic nature of the event in the interview. Although relaxed could be treated as an emotion term, the extracts presented here have demonstrated that the norm is to feel the right emotions at the right time, not just *emotion* or *no emotion*. The sports culture provides a normative expectation for specific feelings and their control, at specific moments. As with Catherine LUTZ's anthropological study of the Ifaluk (LUTZ, 1988), emotional experience is specified and regulated in orientation to those cultural norms. Kieran's manipulation of what he feels before this specific competition contrasting with these norms of what an athlete normally should feel before competition, is what sets up this performance as problematic or out of the ordinary. It forms one possible account for his poor performance, one of many differing accounts. [44]

5. Concluding Remarks

This paper has examined the interactional currency of emotion terms with respect to their use in how athletes manage accountability. The analysis moved through two main themes. First, it looked at how athletes constructed the experience of specific emotions such as nervousness as normal for sporting performance (and indeed required for successful performance). Secondly, and in direct contrast, it looked at how when accounting for failure, athletes claimed to have not experienced the previously constructed appropriate emotions of nervousness before the competition. [45]

The exploration of these themes has demonstrated how emotion discourse, rather than being measurable on its own, is part of a larger accounting structure and in addition, embedded within narrative structure. The need to experience *good* emotions was prevalent throughout the analysis with the stories of good performance containing claims of nervous experience. In direct contrast, the narratives of failures were marked by the athletes' claims of this crucial lack of nerves. Other differences between accounting for success and failure became apparent through the analysis. When discussing success the athletes' constructions of emotional experience were often depicted in normative or generalisable terms rather than subjective terms. By constructing success accounts as routine and general, it implies or suggests that good performances are the norm and by implication that poor performances or failure are exceptional cases. Thus there appears to be the undercurrent of managing an accountability of being a successful athlete. In contrast, when athletes talked of failure and the absence of appropriate emotions, their accounts were produced as personalised, yet not self-blaming. There was always the notion that they had tried but the performance was out of their control. Lastly, the athletes' accountability of going into competition in the correct *mind-set* to perform well has been highlighted, and this included experiencing "positive" emotions for performance. [46]

When reporting emotional experiences, participants construct and fit them into cultural and normative frames of accountability. In this context there are two broadly relevant frames of reference. The first is of the sports culture, with its normative expectations for the relevance of specific emotions at specific moments (cf. LUTZ, 1988). The second is the interview setting with its range of concepts and questions, and its implicit assumptions about what is reportable in that particular context. In this case, the second frame of reference is clearly tied to the first in that the interviews were set up under the premise that emotions are a crucial aspect of sporting performance and both the interviewer and athletes talked in this way. The analysis here examined the whole notion of mental states as itself a public, culturally provided-for way of talking and this is one of the aims of discursive psychology that it examines how participants talk in such ways and what local interactional business they accomplish through doing so. [47]

The main implications regarding the study of emotion within sports psychology concern its heavy reliance on cognitive conceptualisations and quantitative research methods. As a result

such research has been *analyst* and *conceptually led* rather than *participant led*. Through using a discursive approach it enables the researcher to focus on what the participants construct as important or relevant to them, rather than what the analyst's assumptions are concerning what is important or relevant to the participant. This claim can be demonstrated by focusing once more on the study of emotion in sport. [48]

Previous research into emotion in sports psychology has focused on *anxiety*, and the research tools traditionally used to measure it have taken the form of questionnaires (often administered pre-competition). Unsurprisingly, as such tools often call for anxiety ratings and provide participants with pre-determined responses, in doing so, these tools primarily collect anxiety ratings, serving to bolster the study of anxiety in sport. This paper has demonstrated that athletes talk about a variety of emotions as relevant in competition. On a more pedantic level, in this paper, athletes often talked of nervousness as crucial for good performance, yet rarely mentioned anxiety in the interviews. It is possible that athletes may be using different terms to relate to the same *felt* emotional experience. However, the paper demonstrates the rich emotional vocabulary that is available in the sports culture and which can be drawn upon for accountability purposes in interactions. [49]

As the analysis showed, the athletes' choices of specific emotion terms and the rhetorical contrasts employed by them were dependent on whether they were constructing accounts of success or failure. This illustrated how emotion discourse is a normal part of how social accountability is produced in the sporting culture. Rather than attempting to separate out and measure specific emotions in order to predict their effects on performance, sports psychology should perhaps reconsider its realist assumptions regarding the study of emotion in sport and the traditional quantitative methodology it employs to do so. Instead it should take a more qualitative and constructionist approach: Firstly, to examine what emotion terms athletes cite across performances; secondly, to consider within interactions (e.g. coaching sessions), what the invocation of the emotion terms is accomplishing interactionally for the participants. [50]

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank Derek EDWARDS, Sally WIGGINS, Reinhard STELTER and an anonymous reviewer for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

References

- Atkinson, J. Maxwell, & John Heritage (Eds.) (1984). *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Biddle, Stuart, David Markland, David, Gisbourne, Nikos Chatzisarantis & Andrew Sparkes (2001). Research methods in sport and exercise psychology: Quantitative and qualitative issues. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 19, 777-809.
- Burton, Damon (1988). Do anxious swimmers swim slower? Re-examining the elusive anxiety-performance relationship. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 10, 45-61.
- Buttny, Richard (1993). *Social accountability in communication*. London: Sage.
- Clore, Gerald, Andrew Ortony & Mark Foss (1987). The psychological foundations of the affective lexicon. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 751-766.
- Edwards, Derek (1994). Script formulations. An analysis of event descriptions in conversation. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 13 211-247.
- Edwards, Derek (1997). *Discourse and cognition*. London: Sage.
- Edwards, Derek (1999). Emotion discourse. *Culture & Psychology*, 5, 271-291.
- Edwards, Derek & Jonathan Potter (1992). *Discursive Psychology*. London: Sage.
- Ekman, Paul (1992). Are there basic emotions? *Psychological Review*, 99 (3), 550-553.

- Faulkner, Guy & Sarah-Jane Finlay (2002). It's not what you say, it's the way that you say it! Conversation analysis: A discursive methodology for sport, exercise and physical education. *Quest*, 54, 49-66.
- Frijda, Nico (1986). *The Emotions*. Cambridge University Press: London.
- Harré, Rom (1983). *Personal Being: A theory for individual psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jefferson, Gail (1989). Preliminary notes on a possible metric which provides for a "standard maximum" silence of approximately one second in conversation. In Derek Roger & Peter Bull (Eds.), *Conversation: An interdisciplinary perspective* (pp.166-196). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Jones, J. Graham.(1995). More than just a game: Research developments and issues in competitive state anxiety in sport. *British Journal of Psychology*, 86, 449-478.
- Jones, J. Graham & Lew Hardy, (1989). Stress and cognitive functioning in sport. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 7, 41-63.
- Jones, J. Graham & Austin Swain (1995). Predispositions to experience debilitating and facilitative anxiety in elite and non-elite performers. *The Sport Psychologist*, 9, 201-211.
- Lazarus, Richard (1984). On the primacy of cognition. *American Psychologist*, 37, 124- 139.
- Lazarus, Richard (2000). How emotions influence performance in competitive sports. *The Sport Psychologist*, 14, 229-252.
- Lazarus, Richard & Bernice Lazarus (1994). *Passion and Reason: Making sense of our emotions*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Locke, Abigail (2001). *The mind-field of sport: Emotion, mind and accountability in athletes*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Loughborough University, UK.
- Lutz, Catherine (1988). *Unnatural emotions: Everyday sentiments on a Micronesian atoll and their challenge to Western theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McGannon, Kerry & Michael Moore, (2000). Discursive psychology: An alternative approach for studying adherence to exercise and physical activity. *Quest*, 52, 148-165.
- Mandler, George (1975). *Mind and Emotion*. New York: John Wiley.
- Martens, Rainer, Robin Vealey & Damon Burton (1990) (Eds.) *Competitive Anxiety in Sport*. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics.
- Patmore, Angela (1986). *Sportsmen under Stress*. London: Stanley Paul.
- Potter, Jonathan & Margaret Wetherell (1987). *Discourse and social psychology. Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage.
- Rosaldo, Michelle (1980). *Knowledge and passion: Ilongot notions of self and social life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sacks, Harvey (1992). *Lectures on conversation* (Volumes 1 & 2). Edited by Gail Jefferson. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sarbin, Theodore (1986). Emotion and act: Roles and rhetoric. In Rom Harré (Ed.), *The Social Construction of Emotion*. (pp.84-96). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sarbin, Theodore (1989). Emotions as narrative emplotments. In Martyn Packer & Richard Addison (Eds.) *Entering the circle. Hermeneutic investigation in psychology*. (pp.185-201). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Spielberger, Charles (1966). Theory and research on anxiety. In Charles Spielberger (Ed.), *Anxiety and Behaviour* (pp.3-20). New York: Academic Press.
- Willig, Carla (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology. Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Wooffitt, Robin (1992). *Telling tales of the unexpected: The organisation of factual discourse*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Yerkes, Robert & John Dodson (1908). The relationship of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit formation. *Journal of Comparative Neurology and Psychology*, 18, 459-482.

Author

Abigail LOCKE is a lecturer in psychology at the University of Derby. Her research interests are in the area of discursive psychology where she has looked at the rhetorical uses of emotion discourse. More recently she has looked at how young people construct their experiences of youth. She gained her PhD from Loughborough University where she was a member of the Discourse and Rhetoric Group (DARG). Her doctoral thesis "The mind-field of sport: Emotion, mind and accountability in athletes" looked at the interactional currency of mental states for accounting purposes.

Contact:

Dr. Abigail Locke

Centre for Psychological Research in
Health and Cognition
School of Health and Community Studies
University of Derby
Western Road
Mickleover
Derby, DE3 9GX, UK

E-mail: a.j.locke@derby.ac.uk

URL:

http://ibs.derby.ac.uk/psychology/staff/Abigail_Locke.html

Citation

Please cite this article as follows (and include paragraph numbers if necessary):

Locke, Abigail (2003, January). "If I'm Not Nervous, I'm Worried, Does That Make Sense?": The Use of Emotion Concepts by Athletes in Accounts of Performance [50 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [On-line Journal], 4(1). Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-03/1-03locke-e.htm> [Date of access: Month Day, Year].

Appendix: Transcription notation

These are derived from the system developed mainly by Gail JEFFERSON for conversation analysis (see also ATKINSON & HERITAGE, 1984).

[]	Square brackets mark the start and end of overlapping speech, aligned with the talk immediately above or below.
↑↓	Vertical arrows precede marked pitch movement.
<u>Underlining</u>	Emphasis; the extent of underlining within individual words locates emphasis, but also indicates how heavy it is.
CAPITALS	Speech that is obviously louder than surrounding speech.
o↑I know it, o	Raised circles ("degree" signs) enclose obviously quieter speech.
(0.4)	Numbers in round brackets measure pauses in seconds; in this case, 4 tenths of a second.
(.)	A micropause, hearable but too short to measure.
she wa::nted	Colons show degrees of elongation of the prior sound; the more colons the more elongation, roughly one colon per syllable length.
hhh	Aspiration (out-breaths); proportionally as for colons.
.hhh	Inspiration (in-breaths).
Yeh,	Commas mark weak rising or continuing intonation, as used sometimes in enunciating lists, or in signalling that the speaker may have more to say. Question marks signal stronger, "questioning" intonation, irrespective of grammar.
Yeh.	Periods (stops) mark falling, stopping intonation, irrespective of grammar, and of whether the speaker actually stops talking.
bu-u-	hyphens mark a cut-off of the preceding sound.
>he said<	"greater than" and "lesser than" signs enclose speeded-up talk.
solid.= We had	"Equals" signs mark the immediate "latching" of successive talk, whether of one or more speakers, with no interval.