FQS FORUM: QUALITATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH SOZIALFORSCHUNG

Volume 4, No. 1, Art. 6
January 2003

Exploring the Benefits of a Broader Approach to Qualitative Research in Sport Psychology: A Tale of Two, or Three, James

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Key words: sport psychology, emotions, optimal states, elite athletes, social construction, qualitative research, longitudinal research, coded interviews

Abstract: A longitudinal case-study of emotion and sport performance is used to illustrate findings of a larger interview study conducted with 12 elite (World top ten) individual sport athletes. Although athletes' experiences were partially supportive of current theoretical standpoints, optimal states proved dynamic and related to personal, situational and social variables. Further information, gathered using more ethnographic approaches, will then be considered. The limitations of a reliance on coded interview data as a meaningful tool with which to explore athletes' experiences will be discussed in relation to the featured athlete. The existence of multiple interpretations of the athlete's story, problematises the assumption that rigorous methods, as conventionally defined, can guarantee objectivity and discover a single truth. Questions are asked of the reader regarding: the veracity of accepted approaches to the collection and presentation of data; the benefits of a broader vision for qualitative research; and the possible contribution of more interpretive approaches to the work of both practitioners and academics in sport psychology.

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This paper outlines a study of emotion and sport performance that initially used the approaches to qualitative research commonly seen in sport psychology publications. In the early stages coded interview data highlighted many constructions of emotional states and examined athletes' perceptions of any influences on performance. Various relationships between social factors and affective states apparent in athletes' accounts were also uncovered. However, on reflection, the more interpretivist stance assumed in later stages appeared to more adequately represent the situations described. The research itself was a personal journey for the first two authors, who were aided in their discoveries by the third author. In this paper we seek to problematise the assumption that rigorous methods, as conventionally defined, can guarantee objectivity and discover a single truth. In addition, we aim to actively instigate a reflective process on the part of practitioners regarding both the limitations to qualitative research as currently practised and the benefits of a broader vision of qualitative research in sport psychology. [1]

1. Background

1.1 Emotion research in sport psychology

Although some recent work displays a broader trend, emotion research in sport psychology has traditionally focused on a limited number of emotions, mainly the effects of negative mood states on performance. In this respect, the measurement of emotional states has generally been limited to forced-choice rating scales. For example, the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory [STAI] (SPIELBERGER, GORSUCH & LUSHENE, 1970), the Sport Competition Anxiety Test [SCAT] (MARTENS, 1977) and the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 [CSAI-2] (MARTENS, BURTON, VEALEY, BUMP & SMITH, 1990). The effects of anxiety on performance, participation, adherence and attrition (e.g., BURTON, 1988; GOULD, FELTZ, HORN & WEISS, 1982; JONES, HANTON & SWAIN, 1994) have been studied in a variety of sport and exercise contexts. Although initial orientations regarded anxiety as largely negative in effect, current conceptualisations recognise that anxiety may have a positive effect on performance and focus on the athlete's directional interpretations of this emotion (JONES et al., 1994; JONES & SWAIN, 1995). Yet, others have challenged the

validity of anxiety in this context, suggesting that reports of a facilitative state may involve a confusion with other emotions (BURTON & NAYLOR, 1997). Thus, in this study our focus became one of investigating which emotions were experienced by elite athletes, and athletes' perceptions of any effects on competitive performances. [2]

On the positive side, the emotional construct of flow has been seen as crucial to performance level and motivation to participate. Flow (CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, 1975; 1990) is a state that can be experienced during performance when a balance between challenge and skill exists at a level above a personal average. Flow contains a positive affective dimension that has been labelled enjoyment (CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, 1975; JACKSON, 1996), or fun (CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, 1990; PRIVETTE & BUNDRICK, 1991). Flow has received a considerable amount of research interest and represents a positive performance state that shares many of the characteristics associated with an athlete's peak performance (see MCINMAN & GROVE, 1991 for review). In contrast, anxiety has generally been seen as the emotion which most usually acts to prevent, or at least inhibit, peak performance. These times of "superior functioning" (PRIVETTE, 1983, p.1361) form the predominant focus of applied sport psychology. Indeed, much recent research has been undertaken from the viewpoint that increasing our understanding of flow and other positive affective states would benefit the practitioner seeking to facilitate the enhancement of performance (GOULD & UDRY, 1994; HANIN, 1997; JACKSON & MARSH, 1996). However, although enjoyment has been studied in performance contexts, there has been a notable lack of research regarding other positive affective states. [3]

1.2 More inclusive frameworks for the study of emotions and performance

LAZARUS (1991) wrote at length on philosophical and theoretical perspectives regarding the study of emotion and argued that the individual interpretation of thoughts and emotions are the only true reality for the performer. Additionally, he proposed that both the quality and the intensity of an emotion can tell us much about the ongoing relationships between the person and their environment. A complex evaluation prior to a stress response is recognised (LAZARUS, 1991; LAZARUS & FOLKMAN, 1984), in which emotional responses are seen as resulting from meanings generated during an adaptional encounter. Positive emotions are associated with goal relevance and congruence, and negative states with goal relevance and incongruence. In this way, a confounding of anxiety with other emotional states is avoided. Anxiety is seen as resulting from negative expectations of goal attainment and coping. In contrast, positive expectations were proposed to lead to positive emotional states such as challenge and excitement. [4]

Inevitably, social factors are believed to influence the appraisal process. LAZARUS (1991) argues that social structure of the situation leads to immediate demands, constraints and resource implications affecting emotional experience and expression. The display of emotions (even when they are not what is felt) is influenced by social pressures, internalised class and cultural differences, and

economic rewards or punishments. However, the fact that there is "an inevitable gap between social system variables and their psychological effects" is a challenging problem which for LAZARUS, requires the exploration of "common rules about the development of our distinctive personalities" (p.353). [5]

In their critique of anxiety research in sport, BURTON and NAYLOR (1997) use the work of LAZARUS (1991) to argue that if the athlete has time and resources to organise an effective coping response to competition concerns, the response to cognitive concerns should be a positive emotional state. In contrast, the CSAI-2 views the presence of cognitive concerns as indicative of an anxiety response. BURTON and NAYLOR (1997) summarise the central measurement dilemma as an issue pertaining to the athlete's interpretation of symptoms as listed on the CSAI-2:

> "today the challenge confronting anxiety researchers is to develop a conceptually more explicit definition of anxiety that separates negative affective states (e.g., anxiety) that have debilitating effects on performance from positive affective states (e.g., challenge, excitement or self-confidence) that facilitate performance". (BURTON & NAYLOR, 1997, p.299) [6]

In this respect, individual zone of optimal functioning [IZOF] research (HANIN, 1989; 2000) provides a framework for a more inclusive look at emotions and sport performance. IZOF allows each athlete to determine which types of positive and negative affect he or she experiences when performing dysfunctionally and optimally, enabling the standard of performance to be predicted. Thus, IZOF research has recently received renewed attention in sport psychology. However, the reduction to "a limited number of emotions, such as precompetition anxiety" (HANIN, 1989, p.169) which underpinned the more recent work of ANNESI (1997) and WOODMAN, ALBINSON and HARDY (1997) stands in conflict with the intention of IZOF research which was "to identify subjective emotional experiences related to each player's successful and unsuccessful game performance" (HANIN, 1989, p.169). Mechanistically, IZOF provides some support for the proposal of a directionality component of anxiety (JONES & SWAIN, 1992; 1995) as positive, neutral and negative affect are seen to have debilitating, facilitating, or even both effects on performance. However, unlike the anxiety research that became the focus of HANIN's critique, in IZOF research, the subjectivity of affective meaning, intensity and function is recognised. [7]

HANIN's work can be seen as an important contribution to the discussion of emotion in sport representing a philosophical stance which advocates the consideration of individual interpretations of emotion and preferences for arousal. Thus, IZOF research has facilitated an increasing emphasis on subjective interpretations of emotional responses and individual patterns of optimal performance affect. However, HANIN believes that "skilled athletes are aware of and able to report their subjective emotional experiences related to performance" (HANIN, 2000, p.161). For this reason, IZOF assessment uses a variety of self-report scales with the aim of identifying "the emotional processes responsible for optimal performance" (p.32). [8]

1.3 Methods of emotion research in sport psychology

The changing face of research design in sport psychology (from between-subject, to more idiographic approaches) is evident from the increasing number of qualitative studies which seek to explore performance states from the individual's perspective (for example, EKLUND, 1996; GOULD, EKLUND & JACKSON, 1992; GOULD, JACKSON & FINCH, 1993; JACKSON, DOVER & MAYOCCHI, 1998). Drawing on consensual notions of validity, the perceived benefits of qualitative research are multiple, as evidenced by their mention in such articles. DALE (1996) regards the subjective experiences of athletes as valuable and viable sources of research information. Interviews allow subjects to identify salient variables not appearing on forced-choice inventories (GOULD et al., 1992). All papers reviewed are concordant that qualitative methods give rich or in-depth information allowing readers to learn how experiences were constituted for the individual athlete and of the issues this reflects. With an emphasis on understanding rather than quantification and prediction, qualitative methods provide a more appropriate way of examining the complexities of subjective experiential states. In addition, an important attribute for several researchers is the possibility of highlighting the social context in which athletes train and compete (e.g., KRANE, GREENLEAF & SNOW, 1997; SCANLAN, RAVIZZA & STEIN, 1989). [9]

However, *acceptable* qualitative research in sport psychology (operationally defined as that which is reported in published articles) is evident as a single method approach. DALE (1996) states that although qualitative research is slowly becoming more accepted as a form of inquiry, most research is conducted using various interview methods. In addition, a reliance on procedures seen as enhancing validity has predominated—strongly influenced by the detailed procedural work of MILES and HUBERMAN (1984; 1994) and the criteria of LINCOLN and GUBA (1985). Rigorous application of these criteria is often described in acceptable publications. Criteria such as member checking, audit trails, and consensus validation (where multiple researchers reach coding agreement) are commonly reported in publications. With few exceptions (e.g., KRANE et al., 1997; GOULD, TUFFEY, UDRY & LOEHR, 1996b) results have been considered on a group basis, thus possibly obscuring the individual's true perspective. [10]

The use of more idiographic approaches in both research and application has been recommended by many sport psychologists (e.g., GOULD et al., 1992; HARDY, JONES & GOULD, 1996; STREAN, 1998). However, although widely recognised, the influence of social and personality variables on emotional inter-pretations has been researched in a segmented fashion which has not allowed an integrated, more holistic appreciation of emotions affecting, and affected by, competitive performance. In line with recent recommendations (GOULD, TUFFEY, UDRY & LOEHR, 1996a), this study sought to identify the role ascribed by participants to a whole gamut of emotions, and to explore the determinants of individual differences and their perceived effects on performance. [11]

2. The Study

2.1 Initial data collection and analysis

A longitudinal case-study of emotion and sport performance has been chosen to illustrate findings of a larger interview study conducted with 12 elite (World top ten) athletes from a range of individual sports. Initial interviews explored the emotions individual athletes associated with three different types of subjectively defined performance: a peak performance, an average performance, and a worst performance. Recognising that the affective states associated with competition are the result of situational factors inherent in the competitive process, discussions were structured to allow opportunities to articulate emotions experienced before, during, and after an event; their perceived precursors; and presumed effects, if any, on subsequent performance. Having attempted to elicit independent descriptions of the emotional experiences, two emotion word lists compiled from the work of LAZARUS (1991) were used in the latter stages of initial interviews in order to access any experiences not reported spontaneously. [12]

Recently, there have been calls for more longitudinal case study work with elite athletes in order to identify the factors which determine individual differences in zones of optimal functioning and the ways in which these differences effect athletic performance (GOULD et al., 1992; GOULD & TUFFEY, 1996; HARDY et al., 1996; STREAN, 1998). Thus, to more adequately reflect a contextual and biographical view of underlying causes, participants were interviewed following competitions with varying outcomes throughout the course of a competitive season. Follow-up interviews were conducted as soon as possible after each competition using either discussion immediately post event, or stimulated recall based on videotape of their performance. [13]

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed, using a constant comparative process, within the context of the study emphasis on emotions and performance. The initial coding closely followed the detailed procedures recommended by MILES and HUBERMAN (1994) for the categorisation of data using "descriptive codes" (p.57). Sentences were coded using key words and phrases that adequately captured the various experiences described. A detailed labelling procedure was employed so that any particular context (e.g., subjective definition of performance under discussion or other codes applied to the data segment) was easily accessible for consideration once the initial analysis was completed. However, at this stage we had some concerns with the way qualitative research appeared to be used in sport psychology i.e., there was limited evidence of linkages between coding categories, and rarely any ill-fitting data or social context. In fact, data often appeared decontextualised. To address these concerns, personal case studies were compiled across athlete-defined good, bad, and average performances from coded interview data, enabling participants' cause and effect linkages to be explored. Categorisation of data also allowed assessment of the salience of particular emotional responses and effects across differing competitive situations. Data analysis revealed that the most vividly reported events during in-depth interviews were peak and worst performances. Athletes offered what were often

highly rationalised accounts for performance outcomes. This contrasted with follow-up interviews where, excepting instances of outstanding performances, athletes reported average performances, always perceiving that they could have done better. [14]

2.2 Summary of results

Accounts given by the 12 elite participants revealed various constructions of emotion. However, athletes' perceptions of peak performance appeared to relate primarily to optimal levels of arousal rather than any specific or consistent emotional state. For most participants, a certain level of arousal, or energy, was seen as necessary to facilitate a peak performance. This could be achieved in a variety of ways and could incorporate different types of emotions. A mixture of emotions could precede a peak performance that might include an amount of worry and sometimes anger, but which were more often articulated as positive emotional states. Debilitative states were likewise a mixture of emotions. However, in this case, either a low level of energy, or one which was perceived as excessively high could result. [15]

Anxiety itself figured mainly as a result of direct questioning by the interviewer, or in passing comments during the discussion of other emotional states. Participants' experiences with anxiety were only partially supportive of current theoretical standpoints. In particular, anxiety was not seen by most elite participants as facilitative. Most participants did interpret their competitive emotions in a way that at times included characteristics associated with existing psychological theories. Cognitive and somatic anxiety were often expressed in terms of nerves and worries. However, athletes appeared to focus their accounts on either an interpretation based on physical effects or on recurrent precompetition thoughts. Nerves or worries were perceived as contributing factors to their state of arousal. In peak performances and those categorised as average, this was most often interpreted as a preparatory mental state of "*looking forward*", or competitive excitement. [16]

Despite constructing emotions differently, a shared meaning perspective existed among elite participants. In-event emotional arousal was prevalent amongst responses of all participants and was perceived as performance linked. Directional interpretations of these arousal levels were frequently discussed, yet although descriptions at first appeared to be closely linked to what is known as facilitative anxiety (JONES & SWAIN, 1995), meaning perspectives consistently showed constructions which involved excitement, other positive emotional states, or arousal states void of any emotional interpretation. Additionally, the differing and dynamic nature of emotional perspectives held by these athletes was found to be influenced by a variety of social and situational factors. Interestingly, athletes who had received psychological support were able to articulate emotional experiences more aligned to existing theoretical positions. Thus, data raise questions about the role of the sport psychologist in the construction of emotional experiences for elite athletes. [17]

In summary, there were a diversity of equally plausible accounts illustrating the different ways in which elite athletes make sense of feelings experienced in competition. An optimal arousal level was a perspective that was prevalent across elite participants in this study. Through case studies compiled from coded interview data the differing and dynamic nature of emotional perspectives held by these athletes was highlighted, along with the variety of social and situational factors that influenced athlete's tales of emotions. [18]

2.3 Introducing James

To illustrate some of these findings, a tale has been constructed using coded data from initial interviews with "James". James is of interest as he consistently denied any emotive content to performance situations. We have chosen to present our interpretations of James because they provide a striking example of the benefits that can be gained from the adoption of broader approaches to qualitative research in sport psychology. [19]

James did not see a problem with the identification of his sport in the context of this article, but he insisted that we make it clear that qualitative data is located in a specific historical context: "*What I said is what I felt at the time*". We were left with the dilemma of wanting to maintain the integrity of the narrative whilst also ensuring the confidentiality of participants. Our decision was influenced by James' frequent referral to friends, family and other parties involved in his sport e.g., coaches, National Governing Body [NGB] and sport science. Thus, a decision was made to remove the sporting context to protect the rights of all concerned. [20]

James held a World top 10 ranking in his sport when he became involved in this study. He now holds a prominent coaching role. James had started competing at the age of nine in two related events and had become junior World champion at the age of sixteen in his second sport. His choice to focus on just one event was influenced by his perceptions of support available at an elite level within each sport and "*me ambition was always to become Olympic champion*".

> *I always felt I was different to everyone else and I think they* [coaches] *realised. They always knew I was different. I got results from an early age—from 14, 15, I was winning at a senior level....As soon as I went into the seniors, I beat the current World champion. I won a bronze in* [event], *I won silver in the Europeans—just lost that year. I was winning everything. So, quickly I was very, very highly ranked in Europe. And already beaten the current World champion. So people were saying, 'Oh James' gonna win the Olympics'*. [21]

James had a run of success as a competitor at a European level, yet throughout his career he failed to perform at Olympic or World level. However, his claim that he had beaten "every single top [athlete] in the world" was supported by other British team members, who considered him to possess at least the technical ability to out perform other competitors at the World level. [22]

3. The First Tale: James as Unemotional

3.1 James and anxiety

To James, few emotions were seen as concomitant with sport performance. However, when asked about anxiety, he mentioned nerves: "*nerves are all about them feelings that you get because your body's preparing itself to perform. When you get anxious, you tense up. But I'm not, I stay relaxed*". Although denying personal experience of anxiety, both this and nerves are interpreted in a somatic sense:

> *Once I'm* [in the event], *I'm all right. The nerves are all part of* [competing] ... *It's all part of producing adrenaline in your body, isn't it. Getting your adrenaline going, stretch your response system. The nerves are all part of that and that helps you to* [perform]. [23]

The multidimensional theory of anxiety (MARTENS, VEALEY & BURTON, 1990) predicted that cognitive and somatic anxiety had different antecedents and affected performance in differing ways. Study participants did not readily respond with descriptions reflecting this theory. Rather than being constructed with multiple dimensions, the descriptions from certain athletes indicated that they constructed anxiety in either a somatic, or a cognitive manner. [24]

3.2 An unemotional James

James perceived himself as unemotional, even "*cold*" which he attributed mainly to his upbringing. He equated this unemotional feeling with the process of withdrawal that characterised his precompetition preparatory period: "*The last few weeks before an event I'm like a different person. I'm just totally cold and oblivious to everything. I just completely switch off*". The level of focus achieved during such periods was seen as very positive for his subsequent competitive performance. A characteristic antecedent to James' precompetition withdrawal was the experience of being "*written off*" by squad selectors:

> *I think emotionally I get very cold, very withdrawn. Don't participate in anything at all, I just do me training and come away. Just sort of like withdraw from life around me. In me own little world, totally focused and just doing your training and that's it*. [25]

Feeling comfortable with his perceptions of self as an organised, prepared athlete, James was unable to interpret arousal states as anxiety: "*Anxiety, no, I don't get anxious*", and preferred to present his competitive states in unemotional terms:

> *It's like when I'm competing I won't give anything away. If I'm tired, I won't show it. I won't show it to* [other competitors], *When I do win, I don't give it all that, I don't go crazy, I just ... walk away*. [26]

Findings of other qualitative studies have identified perceptions of heightened arousal in peak performances (e.g., GOULD et al., 1992; EKLUND, 1996) and arousal figured prominently in James' discussions. To James, feeling "*flat*" was often associated with bad performances. Typically, his sentiments lacked emotional content: "*There were no emotions related to me feeling flat at all. It was purely to do with physically*". Although, once again, James was comfortable with the expression of nervousness (as a somatic state) contributing to his arousal state: "*When I've* [competed] *and not been nervous, then I'm very flat and I've got nothing*". [27]

For James, issues of self-presentation (LEARY, 1992) appeared to be closely related to his unemotional narrative. This was evidenced in his descriptions relating to all stages of a competition. For example, James eloquently described the negative effects of an opponent's impression management during an event. These negative experiences had led to a strategy of "*giving nothing away*". For James, this self-presentation continued after the event:

> *I'm giving the impression that I expected to win so there's no need to give it all this excitement because I expected to win. So, because next time I might have to* [compete with them] *again, I'm making* [them] *feel like I don't make a big fuss of it—it's just a normal thing and it's just something that I expect*. [28]

3.3 Reflections: Looking beyond coded data

In this first tale, constructed using only coded interview data, James was depicted as an unemotional competitor. Using data which had been sorted into labelled categories, we were able to pick out his comments relating to anxiety, nerves and arousal. In addition, various social and cultural influences were highlighted that were perceived as having influenced these (non)emotional constructions (e.g., other competitors, competition environment, & coaches). We were not being deliberately misleading. In coding the interviews we had employed recognised strategies for sorting data. We believed that *James as unemotional* (his verbally presented sense of self) could be used to account for his actions in a rational and consistent way. Yet, this construction of competitive emotional experience appeared to be closely linked to issues of self-presentation. So what was the truth about James? Why the niggling thoughts that perhaps we were not describing James as he was, or even as he would wish, to be portrayed—that there was something else that couldn't be accessed with coded interview data? Could the data be reinterpreted? Could we tell a tale of two James'? And, perhaps more interestingly, what would James make of these tales—which would he prefer, and would the light he shed on these issues help us to resolve some of the points raised in the two accounts? [29]

4. A Second Tale: James as Emotional

Multiple interviews were conducted with each athlete in order to explore any changes that occurred over the course of a competitive season. Yet, there were no role models in sport psychology literature for how to use the insights gained from spending time with these athletes. In this second tale, we will present a different tale of James. One that arises from the use of data that does not normally appear in sport psychology publications. This second tale is an account of both James and of the principle author as a qualitative researcher, struggling with the knowledge that acceptable evidence comprised verbatim interview quotes. It is a personal tale of an attempt to create a space for intuitive insight among perceived disciplinary constraints. [30]

4.1 Observing James

My first meeting with James was at his girlfriend's house where I was to conduct the initial interview regarding his emotional experiences in competition. The interview schedule was immediately set to one side as I listened for almost an hour to an emotional torrent about his recent deselection for the World Championship. Although not explicit at that point about the nature of emotions accompanying this devastating blow, everything was poured out with much emotional fervour. He seemed to want to prove to me that he was fit and prepared for what he had perceived to be a forthcoming elite level competition. I was shown all of his files—sport science information, training programmes for the last two years, his goals, and measurement of his progress towards these targets. Throughout this period his vocal characteristics and substantive emphasis suggested an emotive response to an unexpected decision that was outside of his abilities to control. [31]

Throughout the initial interview period, my observations of James showed interactions with friends and family, his tone of voice, and physical expressions used to aid his portrayal of competition experiences, that could be interpreted as very emotional responses. Admittedly, James was the only participant to state emphatically on numerous occasions, "*I'm not an emotional person*", but equally, he told many tales with such emotional fervour that I began to suspect that he was, in fact, very emotional. Although the meanings attributed to vocal expression (e.g., pitch, intensity) are reliant on researcher intuition, the research of BEZOOYEN (1984) found people to be relatively accurate in decoding emotional meaning from vocal cues, obtaining high accuracy scores when asked to identify particular emotions. However, in relation to transcribed interview data, examples of emotional expression were few and far between. [32]

4.2 Data that didn't quite fit

Although in initial interviews James portrayed himself as an unemotional—focused, organised, professional—athlete, there were a couple of striking examples of specific performances that I was unable to fit with James' attempts to articulate an unemotional competitive identity:

1. At the European Championships, 12 months after his father's death he describes, what to him, was the worst performance:

   > *Inside, I was like crying inside and very upset inside. Um, just, I was in me own little world by myself. I just didn't want to be there and I was just thinking about me dad. I just didn't want to be there. I was very, very flat. I was very emotional. Nothing, externally you know I was just the same but internally I was just like breaking down totally internally. But externally I just, I gave nothing away*. [33]

2. Following on from the Europeans was the Olympics—another stated worst performance:

   > *I just wanted to pull out. But they wouldn't listen to me, they wouldn't take any notice of me. Anything like that, I thought the coaches weren't being sympathetic to me, how I felt and things like that. Maybe they did, and also they knew me dad had died and things like that and they just weren't, probably they weren't trained in that. They didn't understand emotions or how people would feel, you know, psychologically and things like that*. [34]

3. With reference to a particular peak performance, James attributes his level of focus to a recent break up with a girlfriend:

   > *I just won it and walked off ... Because I was very emotional that day—inside I was still thinking about this particular girl who split up with me. I cared for her very much and the way she treated me*. [Pause] *She never even saw me. She never even saw me* [competing]. *Sometimes I have good performances when I've got something else on my mind, a tragedy or something like that, or something that's upset me*. [35]

   This latter segment of James' narrative is perhaps indicative of emotions associated with family and friends and their effect on performance. In contrast, at the time of the initial interview, James denies a central role for his girlfriend Sarah: "*I mean I'm living here with Sarah but I'm not like, it's not permanent*". By the end of the initial interview period, rather than forming a quickly dismissed part of his life, Sarah felt able to join our discussions of James' emotional experiences at various points. She played the role of a partner who knew, sometimes more than James did, about his affective responses—a synthesis to which James often deferred. [36]

4. Finally, rejection was a theme that surfaced several times in initial interviews:

   > *I think sometimes, I feel like when you've lost you're gonna think people are not gonna love you any more. You feel unloved or it's part of rejection. Or some people want to do well and win is because they want to feel loved as well. They feel like when they win, everybody will love them and want to be with them sort of thing. I'm not particularly bothered people liking me or loving me, sort of thing. Um, I don't like feeling rejected where they look at me and walk away. I don't want it to be, "oh James"* [said in dismal way]. *I don't want that. It's just the rejection*. [37]

These segments of data illustrate the intensity of James' competitive emotions in certain situations, their social influences, and the ways in which he could either positively channel, or hide these feelings with perceived negative effects on performance. [38]

4.3 Reactions of others close to James

His stories of family and other relationships were integral to his descriptions of competition. His passionate commitment to his sport was very evident to other athletes, to his partner Sarah, and to me, the principle researcher, in the emotive timbre which characterised his accounts of perceived injustices in the organisation of the sport. [39]

During the later interviews with Tanya (another study participant competing in the same sport as James), I tried out my earlier interpretation of James as unemotional. She looked surprised, and then, exhaling sharply, she responded: "*He pretends he's not emotional—especially when training's not going well! He's deep...delicat*e. [What do you mean exactly?] *Well you have to be careful with him—he can go one way or the other*". She described him as the most emotional of the athletes on the National squad. Tanya's perceptions of James as an emotional character were clearly evident in her tales of his responses to behaviours of coaches and other competitors. [40]

On the other hand, Sarah, now James' wife disagreed: "*No. James is not emotional. He's different to all the rest of his family*". But she also conceded that: "*He is emotional about his sport. He's passionate about it. It's his life. He loves his sport. He can get emotional when he's not achieving what he expects of himself*". Her concerns about his obsession with, and his passion for, the sport and about his negative emotions after losing were apparent in the stories she told. [41]

As for James, he agreed with my assessment that he was unhappy with my portrayal of him as emotional. He said that he did not recognise it:

> *I don't really say I've trained myself to be unemotional. From being a really young age, I've always felt, not like a loner, but I've always done me own thing...At school I was happy, I was left alone to do me own thing. So, it's just the way I've always been. My mum said I was very...I've got children now, and* [Aaron], *he's always on the go—I was very much like him. But when I started [his sport], I settled down a lot. I became very quiet—and maybe that's something I needed as a child—to channel my aggression, or all me energy. Ever since I've been doing* [his sport], *I've always been like I described, I've always been withdrawn*. [42]

Still, it was harder to make a case for James as an emotional competitor than we had at first presumed. In the words of James, tunnel vision, emotional withdrawal and unemotional are perhaps more characteristic of his competitive mood states. DELAMONT's (2000) criticism of interview data as "take-away chow mein" (p.35) —available quickly, tasting wonderful, yet perhaps not the most nutritious of meals—is potentially relevant here. She justifies her dismissal of a role for interview data in feminist research on the grounds of the many discrepancies between what people say and do. Indeed, James did not mention specific emotions with enough regularity in his accounts to render "James as the most emotional study participant" an acceptable interpretation. Yet, in this second tale,

insights and observations gained during this initial interview period suggest that James' words are somehow insufficient to describe his emotional experiences in sport. [43]

4.4 Reflections: Interview data as an exclusive means of constructing reality?

Qualitative research is an umbrella term, yet in sport psychology, it has become synonymous with conducting a series of in-depth, but often highly structured interviews. Participant observation and other fieldwork techniques have tended to be ignored. In the initial interview period I had followed systematic procedures to analyse interview data. However, at this point I began to question whether this mechanical process was actually beneficial to my understanding of the data. My co-authors encouraged me to reflect on my adherence to a method-based means of analysis to allow comparison of data both within and between athletes given that it could be criticised as a cataloguing of similarities and differences, rather than an uncovering of systematic relationships. These concerns with "breadth as tradeoff for depth" (WOLCOTT, 1995, p.73) were not making analysis more powerful. Rather, data became fragmented from both the athlete as an individual within the larger group, and also from the athlete as a whole person. Reflection and re-appraisal of these limitations led to a realisation that a different approach to the collection and presentation of data was necessary to explore, in a more effective manner, the emotional complexities evident from this initial work with elite athletes. [44]

However, even in later interviews with James I hoped that he would acknowledge verbally the influence of emotions on his competitive performance. I discussed my concerns with a colleague who had a wealth of experience in the provision of psychological support for elite athletes and who had worked closely with James. He described James as a passionate individual, but someone able to exert control over his emotions—something he saw as a functional coping strategy for an elite athlete. My colleague asked me why I was looking for evidence when my own hunches, and both his and Tanya's interpretation of James as emotional, were themselves providing evidence. A realisation suddenly dawned that I was relying too heavily on the power of a transcribed sentence to describe something which, for James, could not be talked about. [45]

It was at this point in the investigation that one of my co-authors directed me to the work of John SMITH (1989; 1993) and Harry WOLCOTT (1994; 1995). Although my philosophical stance was fortified, I still struggled to relinquish the primacy I had attributed to tangible data in the form of verbatim transcripts from planned in-depth interviews. I realised, however, that my personal interpretations based on the accounts provided, coupled with understandings based on observation and intuition, had an important role to play. By recognising, and capitalising on, the subjectivities inherent in an individual account of James, I was confident that different insights could be provided into the life history complexities of elite athletes' emotional experiences. [46]

It is recognised that the descriptions provided by James' accounts are representations through which he sought to make sense of, and to impose meaning upon, his life experiences (BRITTON & BAXTER, 1999). As such, narrative accounts are both socially and historically located. Thus, this final tale will focus on the storied structure of James' life and the ways in which he used these representations to construct a sense of self. It demonstrates the worth of extended researcher involvement, this enabling both a more informed explication of context and additional evidence on which to base interpretations. However, decisions as to the efficacy of this approach are left to you, the reader. Through the consideration of earlier representations of James our aim is to provoke a reflective appraisal of your own experiences (in both research & applied contexts), and consideration of the value of more constructivist approaches in sport psychology. [47]

5. A Third Tale: James as a Repressor

The final interviews took place some 18 months after the initial interview period and sought to explore the development of James' emotional interpretations. It was recognised that these emotional constructions could be tacit and internalised, rendering retrieval for participants, and de-construction for the researcher a difficult, sometimes impossible task. Thus, in order to facilitate an informed insight into any pertinent social and cultural influences a more ethnographic approach to data collection was used, involving time spent with James in sport settings, at social events and at home with his family. During the final interviews, the interpretation of James as an unemotional athlete was presented alongside the contrasting tale: James as highly emotional. As expected, James did not like this latter interpretation. He had striven hard to ensure that he was presented as a unemotional competitor. [48]

In this final tale, James' words are juxtaposed with observational data, professional expertise, intuitive insight and contributions from sociological and psychological literature in an attempt to integrate all relevant information about James. This resolution is not presented as the reality of James, but as an account that incorporates and coheres both previous tales whilst going beyond both. The life history account presented in the following section considers rationalisation and repression as active coping strategies used by James to construct a *functional* meaning perspective on emotion. [49]

5.1 Professionalism, perfectionism and control

Being professional is something that punctuated James' account: "*I always think I'm very professional. I've always been like that. Whatever I do, I do it as best as I can*". So HH asked James about the development of his particular work ethic:

> *Me dad was a perfectionist at whatever he did, especially his job as a* [job title]. *He wasn't just a* [job title]—*he had knowledge about everything. When I first started working, it used to amaze me, I thought, 'I'll never be as good as him'. Because he seemed to know everything. Me dad was very professional. He was a perfectionist*. [50]

To James, perfectionism and professionalism seemed inextricably linked to a central theme of control which was highlighted throughout his account of his family background: "*Me dad wanted to do it and he wanted to do it his way. He wouldn't let me join in 'cos he was professional—he didn't want me to be involved*", and frequently, in relation to his competitive career:

> *When I was competing on the team, all the coaches throughout me career left me to do me own thing because that let me be in control—they were never in control of my training....They've always known I've been very well-prepared, they've always known how professional I am, and they've just left me and I've always got the results*. [51]

Since the initial interview period, James had retired from competition and taken up a position as a National coach. In relation to this job he talked frequently about all three factors:

> *I'm very much a control freak. I have to have things done a certain way. Even with me job now, I like* [things] *done in a certain way. The warm ups have to be done in a certain way. And I have to control. And even when I'm in sessions and there's other coaches taking the sessions, I cringe when they're taking it 'cos it's not the way I would have liked to have done that. I like to be in control*. [52]

His obsessive style of coping with job demands appeared to have been a contentious issue for his family. His descriptions were replete with emotions—guilt, fear of failure and stress. Yet, the rationalisation and presentation of an unemotional stance continued, even with evidence of stress-related health problems and marital conflict:

> *Sarah said I've become obsessed with the job—'that's all you ever think about, that's all you ever talk about'. It's just the way that I am. It's like my hair started falling out—with the stress....It's started to grow back....But I was getting like I couldn't sleep at night. But now I'm on top of things, I've got everything in place that I wanted to have in place, everything's up and running*. [53]

Interestingly, James' obsessive approach to his work had engendered an extreme reliance on his family for emotional support. Although these emotional needs were rarely expressed, the following statement offers us a rare glimpse of the isolation James experienced as a professional, and the role of his family in mediating this experience:

> *I've got friends in the* [sport], *but I keep that purely professional. The people I work with, I train with them, but that's it. I can't still socialise with the coaches*. [He talks of possible selection decision problems if close to a coach of one particular athlete.] *All the people I see, I keep everything distant. I come home, I've got the family—that's my outlet*. [54]

5.2 Feeling let down

James told many tales of people failing to live up to his behavioural expectations. Although no specific emotive content was described, his intonation and rate of speech implied a considerable amount of emotion behind his words:

> By coaches. *I've had a lot of coaches* [who've made empty promises] *John never contacted me once, to see how the training was going and that. Philip said 'I'm going to come up and see you every month'—he never came up once! And over time, you start to lose respect for them because they say things and you just know they don't mean it*.
>
> By sport science. *Sport science support in* [his sport's] *been hit and miss. They bring somebody in, they do something—very rarely do we get feedback on it and then we don't see this person ever again—maybe six months, or one, two years down the line*.
>
> By sport psychology. *We had a sport psychologist before* [Olympics]. *And I felt like he'd messed me up. I think he was a bit of show-off* [gives example]. *I didn't think he was very helpful. That was the only sport psychology I've had*. [Although he later admits] *I think I was messed up anyway, before* [Olympics] *because I had a lot of injury, and pressure from the National coaches who thought I was going to win the Olympics—they just kept pushing me and pushing me. And I picked up more and more injuries*. [55]

His high self-expectations as a coach appeared to stand directly in relation to the unfulfilled expectations he possessed as a developing athlete:

> *In me* [sport] *career, I always feel I underachieved. I know people would say I achieved a lot. I was one of the best in the World ... and one of the best we've produced in Great Britain, but I don't see it like that. I don't see that I failed because I got some good results, but I always feel I underachieved. I think I could have done more*. [56]

Frustration, disappointment, bitterness and sometimes anger—James voice resonated with emotion—yet, only frustration was labelled in his account. Critical reflection on feeling let down by coaches, the NGB, sport science, and specifically, sport psychology support, had resulted in a determination to not make the same mistakes. With reference to coaching he received, he stated:

> *I don't want to be like that to these players. I don't want to say, 'I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that' and then never do it. You can talk a good training programme—but rather than just talk about it, I'd rather just do it ... .they weren't very professional in their approach to the sport—not as professional as I want to be*. [57]

5.3 An attempt at resolution

On reflection, James' behavioural responses, and even his verbal accounts, bear more relation to someone who has experienced high levels of emotional arousal, rather than the unemotional stance presented in his reports: someone who has

perhaps learnt, or seeks, to control the emotional responses which are vividly portrayed in other aspects of his discussions. In this respect, he could be viewed as a repressor—someone who, often with negative outcomes, holds threats at a distance (DAVIS & SCHWARTZ, 1987), gives impoverished descriptions of emotional experiences (CARROLL, 1972), recalls fewer emotion memories from childhood (DAVIS & SCHWARTZ, 1987)—linked to a general inaccessibility of emotions and lack of awareness of physiologic states (WEINBERGER, SCHWARTZ & DAVIDSON, 1979). Repressors are highly defensive individuals (WEINBERGER, 1990), who rationalise unflattering information about themselves, or engage in refutational thinking (BAUMEISTER & CAIRNS, 1992). [58]

There is no doubt that competing at an elite level does not favour a person who experiences compassion for their opponents. Regarding his relationships with rival athletes, James revealed himself to be uncomfortable with the experience of negative emotions, preferring to attribute his unsociability to his easy-going nature:

> *I don't hate anybody. If we fell out, that's it, over and done with and I don't bear a grudge. I would say I get on with everybody, me. I'm a very easy-going person*. [59]

This "easy-going" nature and behavioural decisions made regarding social interactions, point once more to repressive tendencies, which are further exemplified in his tales of his return after two worst performances:

> *When I came back...Sarah will tell you, I mean, I wouldn't even talk to Sarah, wanted nothing to do with Sarah at all. I was like, 'just stay away from me'*. [60]

In James' narrative the concealing of emotional experiences appeared to have been learnt at an early stage and then reinforced through developmental and competitive experiences. [61]

James' perceptions of the relationship between and the necessity for, professionalism, perfectionism and control were indicative of his repressive tendencies. This repression of emotive content was functional in some competitive situations. However, it was also shown to possess dysfunctional qualities in relation to his personal work orientation and, more recently, to his family life. [62]

6. Discussion

6.1 The veracity of accepted approaches to the collection and presentation of data

The major purpose of this article has been to highlight the influence of method on research findings. Other studies of emotion in sport psychology (for example, the work of HANIN, 1989; JONES & HANTON, 1996; JONES et al., 1994) have demonstrated that by using an empiricist-reductionist research model, emotions can be measured. Emotions can even be treated using psychological

interventions. Yet, as this study demonstrates, this approach does not always work. In initial data collection and analysis, the ingrained positivism which characterises research in sport psychology (SPARKES, 1998) will be very evident to readers who operate within paradigms more commonly associated with qualitative research. These initial stages revealed a plethora of social factors that provided much of the context for athletes' emotional interpretations. However, the third tale of James showed the partial and often inadequate view gained from using accepted methods to look at emotional complexities. If considered in isolation from the influence of the social sphere, these findings are not without value, but reductionist and incomplete. [63]

The use of self-report measures have received longstanding critique (e.g., BURTON & NAYLOR, 1997; GOULD et al., 1992; SCANLAN et al., 1989) and most researchers appreciate their fallibilities. However, the limitations of emotion measurement using self-report measures are especially applicable to athletes with repressive tendencies. BONANNO and SINGER (1990) argue that repressors may need to present themselves in a favourable manner. Yet, these criticisms may also apply to the traditional qualitative research approaches endorsed by the sport psychology research community where the spoken word of the participant is viewed as the cornerstone of knowledge gained through this type of inquiry. In this respect, James responded to a question about self-presentation by stating: "*I have been honest. I've not told you any lies. I mean I'm one of them people—I just say things as it is sort of thing, I don't make things up. I just say it as it is, at the time*". Thus, although my acquaintance with James was longitudinal over the course of three years, his statement provides a timely reminder that qualitative data describe situations that occurred in a particular social and historical context. As researchers and practitioners, we need to be aware of the danger of ignoring contextual influences. In so doing, we create a meaning perspective that can be falsely generalised across times, settings and individuals—an interpretation that still leaves the individual athlete without effective strategies for dealing with these life history complexities. [64]

Conventional methods used in sport psychology research were valuable in highlighting the multiple factors that influence performance, but were not adequate for a more in-depth examination of the emotions of elite athletes. We are not seeking to condemn previous research endeavours, but to create space for other forms of work and for approaches to research that are perhaps more in synch with our practices as providers of support to individual athletes. As sport psychologists we listen to athletes and interpret these words in the light of our observations. So, in terms of research that looks to inform our understanding and practices: are words sufficient? [65]

6.2 The benefits of a broader vision for qualitative research

We would argue that further research from a constructivist perspective is warranted on at least two counts. Firstly, consideration of social and cultural influences on the athlete's interpretations has potential to both clarify and enhance the theoretical basis of emotion and its effects on performance.

Secondly, the dynamic nature of emotional constructions need to be considered, along with the processes of social change which are seen as mediators of these interpretations. [66]

To date, discussions of the physiological and psychological components of emotional experience have dominated the sport psychology research literature. The three tales of James reveal emotions as multifaceted. James reported both physiological and psychological factors, yet, there was evidence of social dimensions that often influenced emotional constructions. The social culture of emotional experiences relates to the "persisting patterns of social relations that establish situational contingencies and constraints, motivating behaviour and instigating emotion" (GORDON, 1990, p.146). Examples of influential social factors can be found in the work of EKLUND (1996) and GOULD et al. (1992; 1996a & b), however, as with tales one and two in this paper, these figure as an endpoint of the accepted approach to data analysis and presentation. In order to understand the influence of social factors on these multifaceted, dynamic experiences, we need more than a catalogue of mediating factors. Social factors play an important role in shaping the athlete's emotional responses and are thus a very necessary consideration if we seek to better understand the life history complexities of their emotional experiences. In this respect, the adoption of a constructivist approach to emotion research has potential to both clarify and enhance the theoretical basis of emotion and its effects on performance. [67]

At the beginning of the paper we suggested that the existence of multiple interpretations of James' story, problematises the assumption that rigorous methods, as conventionally defined, can guarantee objectivity and discover a single truth. On several occasions we have spoken about the dynamic nature of athletes' constructions of their emotional experiences. In saying this we allude to the complexities of storytelling in relation to truth: how different versions are told by research participants at different points in time; how we construct multiple identities, used as and when appropriate, in our day-to-day living. Method guidelines, no matter how rigorously applied, cannot help account for differences in the judgements of researchers. Indeed, addressing the existence of multiple interpretations by representing the plurality of the whole, rather than a singular core identity, can be further supported when we consider that participants are themselves constructing a life through their tales. Using words, links and causes are created, which for them, provide a rational explanation of their behaviours. For WOLCOTT (2002) a solution to the motivational complexities that underpin human behaviour may be to present multiple or cumulative theories: "Our interpretations should mirror that complexity rather than suggest that we have the omniscience to infer "real" meanings" (WOLCOTT, 2002, p.96). In this respect, life history approaches, where both the psychology and sociology of an individual are constructed in relation to each other, can help us bridge dualities, allowing integration of theory with method, and the inner self with the outer world of society (BRADBURY & SCLATER, 2000). [68]

Participant observation represents another vehicle through which what people don't say in interviews can be investigated. The distinction between the life as told

and the life as lived needs other forms of data collection and a focus on interdisciplinary concerns. However, it should be recognised that data collected in different ways are in different forms and thus, the burden of objectivity cannot be placed on the data. Instead, each piece affords only a partial view of the whole picture. Rather than relying on the notion of a fixed point or superior explanation, qualitative research recognises multiple possible interpretations (BARBOUR, 2001) of most complex situations. The nonacceptance and critique of this position is not unique to sport psychology, as evidenced by the catalogue of researcher experiences cited by MILLER, NELSON and MOORE (1998) in their study of education settings. These concerns were also echoed by Janet MORSE, editor of Qualitative Health Research, earlier this year and present a powerful call to action for those working in health-related fields:

> "I am concerned that preponderance of interview methods—in particular in grounded theory—is narrowing the contribution of qualitative inquiry ... .We learn of the emotional responses and their reported behaviours as they are recalled by the participants ... .Observational research, on the other hand, provides us with different information that informs and complements the interview studies ... At the moment—and reflecting trends in all qualitative research—our research efforts are imbalanced, dominated by studies that use some form of interview method". (MORSE, 2002, pp.116-118) [69]

6.3 The contribution of more interpretive approaches to the work of both practitioners and academics in sport psychology

This paper has shown that, in respect of the ethics of our research practices, we must recognise that we cannot predetermine the important questions in the lives of athletes. Thus, questions need to be asked about our responsibilities to the athletes with whom we work as sport psychologists. Many of our professional strategies, for both research and psychological support, make little allowance for social, cultural and developmental influences on the athlete's emotional interpretations. Our coping strategies can be argued as reducing emotional complexities and thus, the individual's defence complexity, thereby increasing reliance on sport psychology to provide the answers in the competitive environment (INGHAM, BLISSMER & DAVIDSON, 1999). [70]

BRACKENRIDGE (2001) raised, as a point of concern, that the goal of respect for, and development of, the athlete as a person often gives way under pressure for results. In highlighting a moral as well as a performance vision she spoke of the requirement for standards of professional practice that safeguard the health and welfare of the athlete in both coaching and scientific support of athletes. We estimate that most coaches are aware that broader factors in their athletes' lives may influence emotional states and performance. If sport psychology does not itself acknowledge this truth, it becomes less able to help athletes and coaches improve performance. [71]

We would advocate greater use of counselling skills and interpretive and sociological research to inform our practices. This would allow our work as

psychologists to reflect an insightful analysis of social and cultural influences on the individual's emotional responses and interpretations. As BRODY (1999, p.27) states: "By ignoring the simultaneous expression of feelings in more than one modality, and by ignoring differences in the expression of specific emotions, researchers fail to explore the complexity of how people actually express their emotions in their daily lives". [72]

The use of a broader approach to qualitative research maybe one way of helping us regain a focus on the athlete as a whole person. The third tale presented in this paper may well be of more value to a coach. Knowing of James' repressive tendencies, work could potentially be adapted in the light of that knowledge. Stated more generally, in a particular coaching situation, the idiosyncratic is at least as important as the nomothetic, and sometimes more so. [73]

Practical significance is much emphasised in sport psychology. Indeed, the attempts to predict and generalise in a utilitarian fashion are often products of reasoning based on experience, intuition and insight resulting from interactions of personal subjectivities with athletic clients. Thus, although couched in terms more related to an empiricist tradition, with researcher/practitioner involvement strongly denied, it can be seen that applied sport psychology is really applying a qualitative approach that draws on the strengths of the athlete and situation and where practitioner knowledge is applied in a reflexive manner. Indeed, this adaptive approach has received recognition as an appropriate model of good practice (HARDY et al., 1996). [74]

6.4 Concluding comments

In this paper we have deliberately constructed three differing tales of James and credit STRONACH and MACLURE (1997) as inspiration for this particular approach. In their work they illustrate the different interpretations that two researchers can bring to the same data. In contrast, James' tales highlight different interpretations that can be reached dependent on methods used and their underpinning social theoretical positions. [75]

The initial tale was based on content analysis of interview data. James preferred to present himself as "*unemotional*". This self-concept framed many of his discussions of performance states. Yet, further consideration of initial interview experiences and additional data collection (observations, conversations, & ill-fitting data) exposed a different interpretation. Using these additional insights allowed us to construct James as an emotional competitor. However, although perhaps a more accurate portrayal of James, this interpretation is dissonant with his existing self-concept and offers little useful information on which to base our interventions. In the third and final tale, we acknowledge these perspectives and integrate all of the available data into a more rounded view of James. James as a repressor was used as an explanatory mechanism in the exploration of his obsessive approach to work. James as a repressor is both acceptable to James, and an interpretation that draws on James' experiences, as well as our theoretical and practitioner backgrounds. His repression of emotive content was functional in

some competitive situations. However, it was also shown to possess dysfunctional qualities in relation to his personal work orientation and, more recently, to his family life. For BYBEE, KRAMER and ZIGLER (1997), repression is an adaptive coping strategy in its own right, promoting "a stable and balanced mood state by pushing affect-laden events from consciousness, and holding worries about temporary setbacks at bay" (p.67). This coping strategy can function well in casual acquaintance (& included here are athletic opponents in competition), but may not function adaptively in long-term, intimate relationships. [76]

We have used the term constructivism frequently throughout this paper without really defining it. The reason is that imposing a rigid definition would appear to be the antithesis of constructivism. We have fashioned a place for constructivism in sport psychology akin to the role proposed by GOLDSTEIN (1989): "the concern is not so much with traditional scientific explanation and methodology as with the implicit assumptions and perspectives that guide both scientific and popular discourse about sport" (p.279). We mean something inherently simple—a stance that seeks to consider emotion in a wider sense—attempting to construct explanations but recognising the social influences on these very constructions. In this article, we have attempted to explore some of the complexities of emotions experienced by James. In so doing, we have drawn on both social and psychological theory. Some of the literature reviewed drew on structural explanations of behaviour. For example, the explanations of repression used in Section 5.3 comprise a widely accepted model in psychology and these accounts are used to help the reader relate to information presented, and not necessarily as explanations. Part of a constructivist stance is the recognition that all explanations of the world could be otherwise if social permission was granted i.e., even our in attempts to see the world as more complex we are constrained by the language acceptable to the particular academic community in which we work. [77]

In this article we have sought to describe and understand the perspectives of James, an elite athlete, and to actively instigate a reflective process in terms of the future of qualitative research in sport psychology. Applied sport psychology now forms a major strand of the elite athlete's scientific support. Qualitative methods provide opportunities to explore context in socially constructed and organised environments like sport. In addition to the meaning perspectives of both athlete and coach, we can discover how these interact in given situations by exploring the social and psychological facets of the competitive environment. Indeed, for qualitative research to further our understanding, there is a need for studies based on coded interview data and those using greater levels of participant observation and intuitive insight. [78]

We hope we have been able to demonstrate, even without the later use of more ethnographic approaches to data collection, the futility of attempts to segregate observation from spoken words. Talking with athletes, coaches and others involved in the sport setting is complemented by our observations of interactions and practices and thus, informs our professional decisions. In contrast, qualitative research in sport psychology has evolved to represent a practice where adherence to technical solutions is believed to enable effective segregation of

subjective observation from more *objective* spoken words. For practitioners, this segregation is neither possible, nor desirable. [79]

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the then, Sports Council, UK. Special thanks are due to James, his family and the other athletes—all of whom were involved in this study for an extended period of time. Personal thanks are owed to the colleague whose insight helped HH in her analysis of material gathered from time spent with James.

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Citation

Hooper, Helen; Burwitz, Les & Hodkinson, Phil (2003). Exploring the Benefits of a Broader Approach to Qualitative Research in Sport Psychology: A Tale of Two, or Three, James [79 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *4*(1), Art. 6, http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs030162.