Death and football: An analysis of men's talk about emotions

Chris Walton*, Adrian Coyle and Evanthia Lyons

Social Psychology European Research Institute (SPERI), University of Surrey, UK

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* Correspondence should be addressed to Chris Walton, Social Psychology European Research Institute (SPERI), University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XH, UK (e-mail: C.Walton@surrey.ac.uk)

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Abstract

This study is concerned with men's talk about emotions and with how emotion discourses function in the construction and negotiation of masculine ways of doing emotions and of consonant masculine subject positions. Sixteen men, who were recruited from two social contexts in England, participated in focus groups on 'men and emotions'. Group discussions were transcribed and analysed using discourse analysis. Participants drew upon a range of discursive resources in constructing masculine emotional behaviour and negotiating masculine subject positions. They constructed men as emotional beings but within specific, rule-governed contexts and cited death, a football match and a nightclub scenario as prototypical contexts for the permissible/understandable expression of grief, joy and anger respectively. However, in the nightclub scenario, the men distanced themselves from the expression of anger as violence, whilst maintaining a masculine subject position. These discursive practices are discussed in terms of the possibilities for effecting change in men's emotional lives.

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The topics of gender and emotion have provided psychologists with rich and socially appealing lines of enquiry. Through such research questions as

“‘What are the reasons for the persistence of this dichotomy between emotional women and unemotional men?’”; “‘What are the actual differences between men and women with respect to various specific emotions?’” [] and “‘How can we explain the alleged differences in emotional reactions between men and women?’” (Fischer, 2000, p. ix)

psychologists have sought to explore the common sense ‘knowledge’ that, with regard to emotions, men and women are essentially different. The questions listed above embody dichotomous cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity which map onto dichotomous concepts of ‘emotion’ and ‘reason’ (Lloyd, 1984; Shields, 1984). The extent of this association is reflected in Lutz’s (1990) conclusion that ‘any discourse on emotions is also, at least implicitly, a discourse on gender’ (p. 69).

Much of the research that has attempted to answer these questions has served to reify both constructs. Evidence has been ‘found’ which supports the cultural stereotypes of emotional women and unemotional men. For example, in a cross cultural analysis, Fischer and Manstead (2000) found that, across all countries, women reported experiencing emotions more intensely and for longer and expressing them more

overtly than men. They concluded that these gender differences were directly caused by sex-role socialization. Similar evidence in support of the stereotypically unemotional Western male has been produced by Jansz (2000). Invoking stoicism – said to be a central characteristic of Western masculinity (Brannon, 1976; Pleck, 1981) – as the prime determinant of the emotional lives of Western men, Jansz wrote ‘A man does not share his pain, does not grieve openly and avoids strong, dependent and warm feelings’ (p. 168). In support of this construction, he offered empirical evidence that men report experiencing fewer intro-punitive emotions such as guilt, shame and fear than women (Fischer, 1993). Although men do not report experiencing fear, they are said to report minimizations of fear such as worry and concern (Fischer, 1991); however, they reportedly experience more outwardly-directed ‘negative’ emotions such as disgust, anger and contempt (Averill, 1983; Brody, 1993).

Although such investigations are located within a socio-cultural functionalist framework (Parkinson, 1995), they are typically insensitive to the performative functions of the respondents’ participation in and responses to the research process. Studies such as those discussed above are concerned with the respondents’ reports of emotional experience and assume that such reports are ‘truthful’ or at least reflective of some underlying ontological reality. Social constructionist theories of emotions (Averill, 1980; Harré, 1986; Parkinson, 1995) offer an alternative perspective and contend that emotions are not simply *influenced* by social factors but are socially *constituted* ‘over the course of our on-line interpersonal encounters’ (Parkinson, 1995, p. 170). Within some social constructionist work, discourses (including emotion discourses) are seen as resources by which the ‘positioning’ of an individual, relative

to one or more others, can be achieved. For example, Davies and Harré (1990) have argued that ‘the constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions’ and, more specifically, that ‘a subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire’ (p. 46). In this paper, it is assumed that the subject positions afforded by emotion discourses can be negotiated, accepted or rejected through talk in interaction.

In his social constructionist analysis of the functions performed by the emotion talk of couples undergoing marriage counselling, Edwards (1999) concluded that emotional displays ‘can be treated either as involuntary reactions, or as under agentive control or rational accountability, as internal states or public displays, reactions or dispositions’ (p. 288). As a consequence of this ‘fuzziness’, emotion talk is said to be capable of performing ‘flexible, accountability-oriented, indexically sensitive, rhetorical work’ (*ibid.*). Similar analyses performed by Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault and Benton (1992) on their own recounted narratives of emotional experiences focused on the functions performed by emotion talk in the construction of gendered identities. Their analyses led them to conclude that ‘When we talk of gendered emotion, we are talking about the impact of gendered power relations’ (p. 193). Thus any analysis of men’s constructions of emotions ought to be sensitive to how such constructions interact with and impact upon gendered power relations.

Some commentators have incorporated this dimension within their analyses. Seidler (1991, 1997) has pointed out that, located within the concept of ‘hegemonic’ masculinity – that is, one based on the preservation of heteropatriarchal power and

privilege (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985; for more recent discussions of ‘hegemonic’ masculinity see Speer, 2001, and Wetherell & Edley, 1999) – traditional masculine behaviour is said to involve the concealment of emotions that might imply vulnerability or dependency but it permits the expression of emotions such as anger. These constructions of masculine emotional behaviour provide the rhetorical bases for the positioning of the self and others as emotional or rational, weak or strong, feminine or masculine. Consequently they have been problematized by Seidler (1991, 1997) for the ways in which discourses of emotions and emotionality can negatively position women and also men who inhabit non-traditional masculinities and can therefore adversely shape gendered power relations.

Although relationships between constructions of masculinity and emotions have been identified and although there exist separate discursive analyses of emotion talk and of masculinity, there has not previously been a discursive analysis that has specifically aimed to identify the functions performed by emotion talk in the construction of masculine subject positions. It is this gap which this paper intends to address. The study reported here examines how groups of British men talk about ‘their emotions’ and does so within a social constructionist perspective. In specific terms, the men’s talk is analysed to examine how they construct ‘emotions’ and the rhetorical functions which these constructions perform in their talk. Of primary interest is the relationship between constructions of ‘emotions’ and subject positions – how constructions of emotions make available some positions and close off others.

Method

The texts upon which this analysis is based are the products of four all-male group discussions. The first two groups – which produced transcripts 1 and 2 – each consisted of six men, including the first author (CW). These men were recruited from the workforce of a uPVC window-manufacturing factory in Greater Manchester in the north of England. They ranged in age from 17 to 40 years and all were white. The second two groups – which produced transcripts 3 and 4 – each consisted of four men, including the first author. These men – all of whom were white and ranged in age from 22 to 35 years – were recruited from the postgraduate student population (from various departments) of a university in the south of England. Although participants were not explicitly asked about their sexual orientations, it was apparent that they positioned themselves as heterosexual during the discussions (although see Braun, 2000, on how non-heterosexual sexualities can easily be silenced in focus groups). Due to cultural variance between the north and south of England and the men's possibly differing educational backgrounds, it is reasonable to assume that the men in the two locations may have inhabited different discursive worlds and had access to different discursive resources. However, participants were not asked about their educational attainments.

Before the group discussions began, participants were informed that the study was interested in what men had to say about emotions. The interview guide was brief, relatively unstructured and non-specific: interviews began with questions about the contexts in which men might (or might not) 'express' emotions and proceeded from there according to what the men considered relevant. Participants were not asked

directly to talk about their own emotional ‘experiences’ as it was felt that this might elicit resistance and result in a dearth of data. Instead, it was hoped that the men would elaborate general talk about emotions with accounts of specific personal examples. Group discussions lasted for approximately one hour and were recorded on audiotape.

The data were analysed using the guidelines for discourse analysis outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and adapted by Coyle (2000) and Wetherell (1998). This involved reading and re-reading the transcripts several times, searching for patterns of language use in the men’s constructions of emotions. Throughout this process, we monitored the texts to assess what functions were being fulfilled by the language used. This sometimes involved a micro-level consideration of particular features of language use. The analysis recursively moved between, on the one hand, a global consideration of the constructions that the texts were offering and the rhetorical functions to which the texts were oriented and, on the other hand, a more micro-level focus on textual detail (although not as micro-level as in conversation analysis), with the former being grounded in the latter. Throughout the analysis we were mindful of both the discursive resources that were being drawn upon in the constructions of men and emotions and the subject positions that these discursive practices afforded the participants. The authors are sensitive to the possibility that, whilst data derived from focus group discussions are capable of contributing to our understanding of the range of discursive resources that can be drawn upon in the construction of ‘men’ and ‘emotions’, they are limited in the extent to which they can contribute to our understanding of how relationships between ‘doing being masculine’ and ‘doing emotions’ might operate *in vivo*. However, owing to the context and content of the

group discussion – men talking about men and emotions – we contend that the men’s constructions of the relationship between men and emotions are necessarily entwined with the negotiation of their own subject positions as ‘masculine’ and as ‘emotional’ beings.

The analysis that we offer is the result of our readings of the transcripts followed by discussion about which interpretations were most persuasive. Reflecting upon the ideological frameworks which we brought to bear on the analysis – what might be termed our ‘speaking position’ (Burman, 1994) – we drew upon our familiarity with mainstream and critical European social psychology, although we routinely adopt different positions in relation to this body of work. Our different gender positions also meant that we positioned ourselves differently in relation to the text and the speakers along an ‘us-other’ dimension. However, this did not take the form of simple same-gender alliances for the male analysts, as we (CW and AC) became aware of the plurality of masculinities represented by how we and (to a lesser extent) the participants positioned ourselves in gendered terms.

Given the inescapable role played by our speaking positions in the analysis, analysts with different speaking positions would undoubtedly have arrived at different readings of the transcripts. However, as we have provided quotations to illustrate our interpretations, readers can judge the transparency and persuasiveness of our analyses for themselves. Additionally, the research could be evaluated using criteria such as commitment, rigour, coherence and sensitivity to context (Yardley, 2000). In the data excerpts that follow, all names given to participants are pseudonyms; the researcher is

referred to as 'Chris'. The line numbers in these excerpts refer to their location within the transcript of the relevant group discussion.

The excerpts included in the analysis were selected because they were representative of the overriding themes of the data set as a whole, with specific regard to the contexts that were recurrently constructed as appropriate for male displays of emotion. Also the excerpts provided data upon which an analysis and discussion of simultaneously negotiated masculine and emotional subject positions could be based.

Analysis

Emotions and emotional expression for men: a football focus

The following excerpt, taken from one of the window manufacturers' groups, is presented here because, within relatively few lines, it features the greatest variety of constructions about what constitutes and evokes (appropriate and inappropriate) emotions (for men) in any of the transcripts:

Excerpt 1 (Transcript 2)¹

325 Craig: = not all men are though I mean you get foreigners they're
326 very emotional aren't they? like your French and your Spanish
327 they're always hugging and kissing each other aren't they?
328 [the English are very
329 Tom: the English are very stiff upper lip [you don't show much
330 Craig: they are yeah
331: Tom: sort of thing (.)

332 Craig : so maybe it's not such a [male thing (.) yeah
333 Tom: but it depends what the
334 emotion's about though (.) 'cause if it's a football match =
335 Craig: = that's true yeah (.) I was hugging complete strangers
336 in Barcelona if truth be known (.) I was yeah over two seats
337 ((*group laughs*)) two I everybody was all over the place (.)
338 Andrew: so it's alright to show your emotions at a football
339 match (.) I don't get that with Bury [you don't get to do that
340 Craig: I think the emotion of joy is
341 Andrew: [with Bury
342 Craig: different (.) I think the
343 emotion of happiness is easy to show innit it's the when you're
344 upset that's the ones that you don't show innit =
345 Tom: = yeah =
346 Craig: = even at a football match that's when it turns to
347 violence innit then that's =
348 Tom: = suppressing your feeling it just comes out as anger then
349 (.)
350 Craig: tears is no =
351 Tom: = it's just not seen as done is it sort of thing? (.)

The above excerpt followed a discussion of both the representation of men as unemotional and the current social expectations that men should change. Over the course of this excerpt, the men co-operate in constructing accounts of men and emotions and negotiate their subject positions relative to these constructions. This is

accomplished first through the construction of cultural differences within the generic category of men and then by emphasising the importance of contextual determinants of emotional displays within discrete cultural categories of men.

Craig begins the excerpt with the explicit construction of variability within the generic category of men. He develops this construction through the evocation of the category 'foreigners' (line 325) and the construction of the members of this category as 'very emotional' (line 326). Both these features are developed further by Craig. 'Your French' and 'your Spanish' (line 326) are advanced as exemplars of such 'foreigners'. Their characterization as 'very emotional' is then warranted by their reported propensity for 'always hugging and kissing each other' (line 327). These constructed 'foreigners' and their 'very emotional' behaviour are set up in contrast with the category of 'the English' (lines 328 and 329). Begun by Craig but completed by Tom, 'the English' are constructed as comparatively stoic – 'very stiff upper lip you don't show much sort of thing' (lines 329-331).

The opening lines of this excerpt demonstrate the privileging of discourses of social or cultural determinism over discourses of essential or biological determinism with regard to constructions of men's emotional behaviour, an interpretation that is reflected in Craig's tentative conclusion in line 332. They also create the rhetorical opportunity for the construction of alternative determinants of men's emotional behaviour. This opportunity is taken up by Tom (lines 333-334), who qualifies his previous construction of English male stoicism by pointing to the importance of the object, source or context of the emotion and then cites a context – 'if it's a football match' (line 334) – which is elaborated by other speakers in subsequent turns. Note

that this context is familiar to the speakers, so much so that speakers can use a verbal ‘shorthand’ that is understood by others, emphasising their history as a group with familiar discursive bases. For example, when Craig refers to ‘Barcelona’ in line 336, he does not need to elaborate this signifier and other speakers appear to understand that it refers to Manchester United’s victory over Bayern Munich in the UEFA Champions League final in Barcelona in 1999. The football scenario appeared to serve as a prototypical context for the discussion of male emotional expression and, without prompting, was invoked by other groups.

Craig’s contribution beginning at line 335 can be viewed as performing a number of rhetorical functions. Initially he simply and explicitly confirms Tom’s proposition of a football match as a context in which men express emotions and therefore as an appropriate discursive context for the construction of a narrative concerning male emotional expression. The narrative that Craig constructs as an example of men displaying emotions at football matches is a highly illustrative, personal and, consequently, persuasive one. He reports ‘I was hugging complete strangers’ (line 335), with the report being presented as a form of confession by the words ‘if truth be known’ (line 336), thereby constructing this reported behaviour as something that might not accord with the previous construction of English male stoicism. Through his use of the first person plural in lines 335-337, Craig is positioned as someone – implicitly an English male – who, given an appropriate context, is capable of displaying emotional behaviour in a manner that is more typical of ‘your French’ and ‘your Spanish’. The behavioural expression of the unmentioned emotion here (presumably joy) is then further elaborated in a quantified way in lines 336-337 (‘I was yeah over two seats ((*group laughs*)) two’) which conveys the extent of the

emotion: it was so strong that he (presumably) climbed over two seats in ‘hugging complete strangers’, with the significance of the quantification being stressed by its repetition. However, this extreme display of emotion is normalized and any querying of his reported behaviour is deflected by the phrase ‘everybody was all over the place’ (line 337), with its generalized sense of universal (emotional) disarray.

Craig then extends the construction of determinants of emotional expression to include discrete emotion categories; in doing so, he effectively reproduces discourses of gendered emotions. ‘Joy’ and ‘happiness’, which are constructed as ‘easy to show’, are contrasted with ‘upset’, which is presented as ‘the ones that you don’t show’ (line 344). The repeated ‘innit’ here (lines 343 and 344 – and also line 347) could be read as a mark of tentativeness and an appeal for confirmation when talking about something that might be seen as lying outside the group’s usual discursive repertoire, i.e., talk about emotions or talk about the taboo emotional expression that he and others then develop. As this confirmation is produced by Tom (line 345), Craig returns to his football scenario and starts a process of elaborating ‘being upset’ – something that is constructed as likely to be expressed as ‘violence’ in the football context. Tom takes up this idea about ‘upset’ being transformed into something else when it is experienced by men and contends that it ‘just comes out as anger then’ (line 348). Note how this construction can be interpreted as exemplifying the way in which psychoanalytic notions have become a standard, linguistically taken-for-granted discursive resource within Western culture (Parker, 1997). This emotion of ‘upset’ is located within a hydraulic model (typical of psychoanalytic discourse with its talk of ‘repression’), where suppressing the expression of a negative emotion is said to lead to its amplification (so the relatively innocuous ‘upset’ becomes ‘anger’) or its

expression in destructive action ('violence'). However, Freud and psychoanalysis are not the only possible sources of such a construction: there is another much older tradition of hydraulic metaphors in emotion discourses in the English language (see Lakoff, 1987). What is also noteworthy about the construction of this emotion process is the ease with which the translation is said to occur – 'upset' 'turns to violence' or 'just comes out as anger' (see Excerpt 3 for an elaboration of this process within a specific context).

This discussion of emotional processes and expression is still occurring here within the previously-invoked context of a football match and with regard to the previously constructed category of 'the English' male – here represented only through the second person pronouns 'you' (line 344) and 'your' (line 348) and in 'you're' (line 343). However, even in this context, expressions of 'upset' in the form of anger and violence seem to be constructed as more socially acceptable than expressions of 'upset' as distress in the form of 'tears'. This is presented as 'just not seen as done' (line 351): the incongruity between the expected emotional behaviour of an English man and the shedding of tears is represented as so obvious that it requires no further explanation.

Throughout this excerpt, the men resist the construction of a male lack of emotion or emotional expression by constructing an account of cultural and contextual determinants of male emotional expression, relative to which they are able to negotiate their own subject positions as appropriately emotionally expressive English men.

Permissible contexts for male distress: death and grief

Although in Excerpt 1 speakers expressed general reservations about the permissibility of men shedding tears, they quickly returned to the notion of male emotional distress, specifically in terms of grief:

Excerpt 2 (Transcript 2)

- 381 Andrew: = maybe talking about a frame is the wrong idea
382 really I think maybe a death in the family or something like that
383 =
384 Chris: = yeah =
385 Andrew: = you know how would you cope then (.) I say you
386 don't know until it's actually happened it's happened to me I
387 know =
388 Craig: = it has to me yeah but there again that's all for me that's
389 all at home I wouldn't dream of doing it in =
390 Andrew: = public (.) controlling it though innit =
391 Craig: = yeah =
392 Andrew: = I got a phone call (got upset but didn't) show
393 emotions till I got outside the building =
394 Craig: = exactly that's how I found out about me mum and me
395 dad (.) both times I was in Germany when I found out about me
396 mum but I had to wait till I got away from the building site and
397 that you know what I mean (before I did aye) (4.8)
398 Tom: it's not the thing to just break down at work though is it =
399 Craig: = quite easy done though that 'cause I was very I was

400 struggling very hard you know what I mean to get off 'cause I
401 was on a building site when I found out and get off was quick
402 exit man =
403 Tom: = it isn't even the thing of what you think people'll think
404 of you 'cause people'll just forget about it won't they you just
405 don't do it yourself [do you it's in yourself innit
406 Craig: that's right yeah

Excerpt 2 represents the development of a discursive strand that originated in Excerpt 1. It follows from a discussion of the permissibility of displays of 'upset' in the workplace, in which difficulty in making a window frame was initially identified as an example of a situation that could cause upset. At the beginning of the excerpt, we see the rejection of this example in favour of a more powerful and emotionally resonant one, i.e., 'a death in the family or something like that' (line 382). In lines 385-387, Andrew takes up this context and creates the rhetorical space within which a discussion of distress in the form of grief and the negotiation of consonant subject positions can take place. He also draws upon a narrative of experience to provide credibility or warrant for his statement on the topic (see Gergen, 1989, on how experiential claims can act as warranting devices). In the next turn (lines 388-389), Craig orients to the need for warranting experience before providing an account of how he received news of his mother's death while working on a building site in Germany (lines 394-402). From line 388 to the end of the excerpt, Craig, Andrew and Tom collaboratively construct and position themselves relative to 'upset' or grief as an emotion that men are expected to express in private (or not in front of an audience of peers) rather than in public. In a statement begun by Craig and completed by

Andrew (lines 389-390), the expression of grief outside the 'home' context is rendered unthinkable. Instead, grief is constructed as needing to be controlled until it can be expressed in an appropriate setting, which for Andrew was 'outside the building [workplace]' and for Craig was 'away from the building site'. Craig returns to the necessity of leaving the building site in lines 400-402, stressing how unthinkable it would have been to have expressed his grief there. The reference to the 'building site' may be understood as invoking a traditionally male environment in which subject positions and expectations about emotional expression similar to those constructed by the participants would prevail. However, no reference is made to these expectations being socially determined; indeed, Tom actively resists this reading in lines 403-404. Instead, he constructs an account within which these expectations are reported as originating internally – an essential part of being male: 'you just don't do it yourself do you it's in yourself innit' (lines 404-405).

Of further interest, at a micro-textual level, is the 4.8 second pause which follows Craig's account of his response to the news of his mother's death (line 397). This could be interpreted as indicative of the men's unfamiliarity with other men sharing experiences of emotional distress. Put simply, nobody knows what to say in response to Craig's disclosure – the discursive resources are lacking. The impasse is resolved by Tom shifting the focus from the specific and personal to the general and abstract in line 398, although Craig returns to his experiential account in line 399.

This second excerpt can be interpreted as a development of Craig's earlier construction of 'upset that's the ones that you don't show' (Excerpt 1: line 344). Specifically, the excerpt is concerned with the construction of one potential

determinant of emotional upset – the death of a parent – as exceptional. Relative to a context of this magnitude, the speakers are able to negotiate their subject positions as men who can manage, and indeed have managed, their expression of upset in accordance with social – but more importantly, personal and essential – expectations of appropriate and acceptable English male emotional behaviour.

Violent expressions of anger

According to the men's hydraulic model of 'emotions' (see Excerpt 1), the suppression of negative emotion may lead to its amplification as anger and its expression as violence. In the entire data set, the only discussion that focused on male displays of anger and the specifically social expectations constructed as governing them occurred in the following excerpt from one of the student groups:

Excerpt 3 (Transcript 4)

189 Josh: I'm one of these people that puts it all inside and think of
190 some way of releasing it erm elsewhere like a game of squash or
191 something I think erm (.) when er guys do bottle it up inside erm
192 they do kind of get (.) aggressive hence erm you need a kind of
193 stress release like playing squash in my case or go down the gym
194 and you see this in nightclubs all the time you know you're out
195 with your girlfriend and she says er 'oh that guy's trying it on
196 with me' what does the guy do? he whacks you know the guy
197 erm (and so alright) it's a sign of emotion erm (.) instead of like
198 talking to the guy (resorts to violence) [] it's not valid but I
199 mean it's what erm what erm seems to (.) (it's most) popular

200 general way of erm emotion displays in the male (.) well that's
201 (what I believe) =

202 Brian: = I I thing is I don't know I just must must be like the
203 erm I'm I'm not ((*laughing*)) it's not that I'm a faff or anything
204 like that but I'm not violent at all you know because it's just not
205 in my nature to be violent [] I think I'm too laid back to get
206 angry I think I don't let things get to me that much to get angry
207 and erm I mean I've never had a fight in my life because I'm not
208 that type of person and I'm not violent and all that so erm I think
209 it's more to do with the expectations of the male (.) you know
210 and erm especially in social situations you can't if you've got if
211 someone's trying to chat up your girlfriend you can't let him
212 embarrass you like that in front of so many people you've got to
213 do something about it and [] so erm I don't know erm yeah I
214 think it's because of the expectations of (.) people of males you
215 know from both men women and you know from whatever age
216 you know old or young erm but erm I'm definitely not like that
217 I'm I'd rather not fight I don't get angry at all so erm I don't
218 know it's weird =

219 Mike: = I think it might be partly 'cause it's one of the few
220 ways that that guys have the opportunity to express anything as
221 well because like if you're in this nightclub like I mean if you
222 switch the situation around so there you are with your girlfriend
223 and some girl is hitting on you (.) and my guess is that she's

224 going to like deal with it like she would perhaps if you're there
225 with a bunch of friends she'd go and talk to her friends and sort
226 of like they would sort of you know support her or whatever and
227 that kind of thing or she may come and talk to you about it and
228 say you know 'I'm a bit worried that you're spending all that
229 time with that girl' or whatever (.) but for guys I think it's like
230 in that situation well (.) erm if you go up to your mates and say
231 'I think that guy's trying to pick up my girlfriend' it I mean
232 there's nothing wrong with doing that but it's just it seems like a
233 really weird thing to do because it's like well so what do you
234 expect them to do about it and they're going to be thinking the
235 same thing as well erm 'why don't you just do something about
236 it?' like go up to her and say erm well 'let's go and get a drink'
237 or or whatever I don't think you necessarily have to smack the
238 guy =

This excerpt follows from a discussion about men displaying emotional distress, which forms the initial part of Josh's opening contribution. He presents alternative and perhaps more appropriate formats and contexts for expressing distress (lines 189-193). Reference to 'releasing' emotion invokes the hydraulic model and allows him to talk generally about how male distress or upset is transformed into aggression when it is not released (lines 191-192 and 194-196).

Of further interest in Josh's opening contribution is the shift in perspective from an initial first person position (lines 189-191) to a generalized second and third person

narrative when he starts to invoke the hydraulic model (lines 191-192). The second person perspective is still apparent at the start of his construction of the nightclub scenario within which the expression of male upset as aggression and physical violence is elaborated, drawing upon themes of ownership and entitlement within discourses of gender and power (lines 194-198). This situation is constructed as a recognizable ('you see this') and familiar ('all the time') context for the discussion of male displays of anger. The shift to the third person in lines 196-198 increases the generality of the narrative, allowing him to construct men and to make generalized statements about their standard (and dispreferred) behaviour in this context (i.e., physical violence as opposed to verbal negotiation). There is no element of doubt or uncertainty in this description; it has the tone of an established script. That the nightclub scenario is subsequently elaborated by both Brian and Mike testifies to its appropriateness as a context for both the discussion of male displays of anger and for the negotiation of masculine subject positions – positions which, if occupied, might allow men (or, given the specifics of the scenario, heterosexual men) to 'do' anger as physical violence.

Despite the construction of this subject position and the violent response as standard for men (see also lines 198-200), the group members work to locate themselves outside it. First, the narrator of the scenario himself declares 'it's not valid' (line 198) and later Brian interprets the scenario in terms of universal social expectations about men (lines 208-209 and 213-216). Earlier in this extract, Brian had engaged in significant rhetorical effort to construct himself as essentially non-violent (lines 204-208). Later he presents himself as not being subject to or governed by these expectations (lines 216-217). However this construction, which positions the speaker

as exempt from powerful social expectations, seems to require an acknowledgment of its non-standard nature. This appears at the start and end of Brian's turn when he says 'it's not that I'm a faff or anything like that' (lines 203-204) (disclaiming unmanly 'softness') and, more generally, 'I don't know it's weird' (lines 217-218).

However, there is an alternative reading available here. Brian's comments can be interpreted as the rhetorical enactment of 'coolness', defined by Majors and Mancini Billson (1992) as 'poise under pressure and the ability to maintain detachment, even during tense encounters' (p. 2). Central to constructions and enactments of 'cool' are the core tenets of masculinity: independence, strength and, above all, control. The exact nature of 'doing cool' is, however, dependent upon the social and cultural context in which the enactment occurs. Consequently, this instantiation contrasts with the 'cool pose' identified by Majors and Mancini Billson (*ibid.*) within which violence is an accepted resource. Similarly whilst both constitute alternative masculine subject positions, the 'cool pose' is enacted because hegemonic forms of 'doing masculinity' are inaccessible to young Black American men, whereas in this instance 'cool' is done in active resistance of the dominant culturally available form. Thus, whilst violence is accepted as a standard masculine response to other men's infringement of entitlements over girlfriends, Brian is able to construct himself as not resorting to violence *and* to position himself as masculine through the invocation of masculine control over emotional expression.

In his turn, Mike highlights the gendered nature of the emotional response to the nightclub scenario. First he represents this situation as one of the few opportunities that men have for emotional expression (lines 219-220), constructing men as

emotionally underprivileged. Then he constructs differences between the courses of action available to a man and a woman in the nightclub situation. He does this by ‘switch[ing] the situation around so there you are with your girlfriend and some girl is hitting on you’ (lines 222-223). In considering how ‘your girlfriend’ would respond, Mike constructs women as being able to access and make effective use of a system of social support (lines 225-226). Such a course of action, whilst being constructed as reasonable, is presented as unavailable to and inappropriate for a man (line 229-236). Mike constructs men as independent and agentic beings who should take action to resolve situations of this nature. Indeed the reported likely response to a man’s request for support from his male friends is ‘why don’t you just *do* something about it?’ (lines 235-236; emphasis added). Whilst Mike does identify one non-violent method of dealing with the original nightclub scenario (line 236), the possibility of conforming to social expectations remains – ‘I don’t think you necessarily have to smack the guy’ (lines 237-238). This statement functions simultaneously as a rejection of the expectation that *all* men will automatically resort to violence and an acceptance that, within certain constructions of appropriate masculine behaviour, such actions are accessible and understandable.

In this excerpt, the hydraulic model of emotion is once more invoked in a loosely psycho-physiological account of male anger but the text shifts to a social analysis when considering a prototypical scenario in which male anger is evinced and expressed as physical violence. Displays of anger and even of violence are constructed as functioning in the maintenance of typical masculine subject positions, particularly in scenarios where the security of those positions is threatened, either in the broad context of social expectations about masculine behaviour or within the more

personal context of heterosexual relationships. Individual responsibility for male displays of anger is mediated and to a certain extent disavowed by the reported scarcity of opportunities for alternative emotional expression. Despite the construction of this scenario as prototypical, the speakers are careful to position themselves outside the 'script', both explicitly – as non-violent in essentialist terms – and implicitly – through the use of a shifting perspective. Either way, they are able to negotiate their positions as non-violent but not as non-masculine.

The excerpt may therefore be seen as highlighting the complexity of the men's relationships with the domain of anger. Whilst the scenario that was presented may be seen as embodying an expected, traditional view of men and anger, the excerpt is suffused with caveat, qualification and exemption. Consequently any simple conclusions about men's ready capacity to 'experience' a 'negative' emotion such as anger (as opposed to emotions connoting connection and vulnerability) are likely to lack the subtlety and sophistication found in the speakers' talk.

Discussion

The constructions of male emotions and emotional expression within the transcripts accord with the findings of previous research presented in the introduction. Emotions and male emotional expression were constructed as being highly dependent on the object, source or context. Further, only those objects, sources or contexts constructed and negotiated as sufficiently masculine were taken up as contexts for the discussion of men and emotions. The men generally constructed themselves as controlling the expression of emotional distress in social contexts to the point of concealment,

echoing the findings of Fischer (1993) and Jansz (2000). Whilst explanations of the exertion of control do not feature explicit constructions of these emotions as connoting weakness or vulnerability, it is apparent that they draw upon a socially shared construction (at least within these contexts) of what constitutes a masculine way of 'doing' emotions (Seidler, 1991). Furthermore, the participants constructed 'anger' – and even its physical expression as violence – as a socially expected form of masculine emotional expression (Averill, 1983; Brody, 1993). It is also apparent, from the care taken by the participants, that there are risks inherent in the construction of exceptions to these normative scripts about masculine emotional expression. Consequently this study could be read as providing qualitative substantiation of findings from previous quantitative studies.

However, the analysis also makes apparent the rhetorical functions performed by constructions of gendered emotions in the negotiation of masculine subject positions (Davies & Harré, 1990), although further research with other groups of men who might have different discursive resources upon which to draw (such as men from ethnic minority contexts and men who lay claim to gay and bisexual identities) is needed to substantiate and extend these preliminary conclusions. Alternatively, group discussions involving male and female speakers would constitute contexts which could promote the performance of gender relative to the topic of emotions. Other possibilities include quasi-experimental designs the implicit purpose of which would be to promote the use of emotion discourses by participants or, most ambitiously, to capture instances of emotion talk by men in 'real life settings'. All of these possible developments would provide data that would contribute to our understanding of the functions served by emotion discourses in the construction and negotiation of

gendered subject positions.

It is worth noting that the process of positioning is not as static as might be suggested by the apparently unitary position adopted by speakers in excerpts 1 and 2: that position only appears so because it is negotiated and occupied by a number of participants and because it goes unchallenged. Excerpt 3, however, provides an example of the dynamic nature of positioning, where positions are constructed and resisted and alternatives are produced and occupied. The authors accept that alternative interpretations of the subject positions apparent within these excerpts are possible. The participants could be interpreted as positioning themselves as ‘good participants in psychological studies’, as ‘liberal and enlightened’ or as just ‘human’. All of these are possible but all rely more heavily upon the analysts’ knowledge of the particular social, cultural and temporal context in which the text is located than upon the content of the text itself. Consequently, for the purposes of this article, bearing in mind the research questions that we aimed to address, we have presented those interpretations that seem closest to the text.

In this study, where emotions are concerned, the negotiation of socially recognizable masculine subject positions was dependent on the deployment of discursive resources relating to stoicism and agency. The participants constructed emotions as naturally and passively experienced by men but emotional expression was identified as necessarily requiring the exertion of active control by the individual. In short, to experience emotions is human, to control their expression is masculine (Seidler, 1991, 1997). However, the simultaneous dual location – internal and essential, external and social – of the requirement to exert agentic control allows for the disavowal or

acceptance of responsibility for emotional behaviour (dependent on the desirability of this behaviour) and allows the maintenance of a subject position that is unquestionably masculine.

The study suggests that these constructions of gendered emotions provide the discursive frameworks by which the legitimacy of alternative ways of ‘doing’ emotions and alternative subject positions can be undermined and ultimately proscribed. Indeed one of the strengths of this study is that it provides evidence in support of the ideas advanced by Speer (2001) and Wetherell and Edley (1999) regarding the amorphous construct of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. The discursive constructions of emotions apparent within these texts can be viewed in Wetherell and Edley’s (1999) terms as an ‘attempt to actually *instantiate* hegemonic masculinity’ (p. 340; emphasis in original). These constructions satisfy the definition of hegemonic ideologies outlined by Wetherell and Edley (based on Gramsci, 1971) as functioning to ‘preserve, legitimate and naturalize the interests of the powerful – marginalizing and subordinating the claims of other groups’ (p. 336).

The constructions of the male relationship with ‘emotion’ as essential, socially agreed and context-specific in this analysis provide the discursive resources for the maintenance of traditional constructions of gender and gendered power relations and for the marginalization of those who would claim the need for or seek to effect change: for example, what is part of a man’s ‘essence’ cannot be changed. However, in Excerpt 3, the analysis of one speaker’s talk suggested that it is possible to challenge (some aspects of) the relationship constructed between men and emotions without threatening the occupancy of a masculine subject position – something that

may need to be attended to when considering strategies for change.

If social change is desirable and if social scientists wish to contribute to the resources and methods that can be brought to bear in efforts to effect social change, then discursive analyses provide avenues by which this can be accomplished. Critical discursive analyses can illuminate the discursive resources and the relationships between them that are drawn upon in day-to-day instantiations of social structures such as in gender power relations. Once this has been accomplished, such discourses become the focus of attempts at social change. As Burr (1995) argued, '[discourses] serve to structure our identity and personal experience. Thus discourse can be seen as a valid focus for forces of social and personal change' (p. 111). With reference to our analysis, the social structure of gender can be undermined through challenges to the constructed 'essential' determinism of 'masculine emotional behaviour'; constructions of emotions as gendered can be opened up to renegotiation and alternative ways of 'doing masculinity' can be identified and disseminated. We are aware that the last point may not go far enough for some readers and that ultimately a desirable goal would be to challenge gender categories and their effects. However, we are also aware of how difficult it can be to effect discursive change in a purposeful way because of the difficulty of embedding and establishing credibility for new discourses and because of institutional investments in dominant discourses and institutional resistance to whatever might undermine these discourses. Yet, we feel that as social (constructionist) scientists, it is important that we neither underestimate the potential utility of our research nor the power of discourse.

Notes

- 1 Transcription notation: the form of notation used is based on a system developed by Jefferson (1985), a complete description of which can be found in Atkinson and Heritage (1984). Some basic features are outlined below:
 - Square brackets mark overlap between utterances – [
 - An equals sign at the end of one speaker's contribution and at the start of another's indicates no discernible pause – =
 - A full stop within round brackets indicates a brief pause in the talk, both within one speaker's utterance and between turns – (.); numbers within round brackets denote the duration of longer pauses in seconds – (4.8)
 - One or more colons indicate the extension of the preceding vowel sound – e::verybody
 - Underlining indicates those words said with particular emphasis, while words in upper case characters were said louder than the surrounding talk – a mean HARD rotten bastard
 - Text within round brackets indicates that the speech was either inaudible or that there is doubt concerning its accuracy – (blibbing)
 - Empty square brackets indicate that some of the transcript has been omitted, whilst material in square brackets is clarificatory information about the talk – [] well (blibbing) [crying]

- Material in italics is additional contextual information about the talk or interaction – *group laughs*

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