



“I control my own emotions for the sake of the team”: Emotional self-regulation and interpersonal emotion regulation among female high-performance curlers[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to examine emotional self-regulation and interpersonal emotion regulation within a team of competitive athletes.

Design: Instrumental case study approach (Stake, 1995).

Method: Data collection involved multiple semi-structured interviews with all four members of a female high-performance curling team, as well as observation of team meetings, practices, and games over the entire season.

Results: Analyses produced the main themes of emotional self regulation (body language and self-censorship) and interpersonal emotional regulation (providing positive and/or technical feedback, humour, cueing teammates about their emotions, prosocial actions and indirect actions). We also identified factors influencing emotional regulation (length of time together, team dynamics/cohesion, context, social norms and team roles, and seeking support outside the team).

Conclusions: Athletes were aware of and took into account social and contextual factors (e.g., social norms and role on team) when regulating emotions in a team context, and they also identified challenges associated with emotional regulation within the team. Findings highlight the complex interplay between athletes' emotions, emotional expression, and self-regulation to achieve multiple goals (e.g., positive performances, positive social relationships), as well as the importance of examining interpersonal processes related to emotion and emotion regulation within team sports.

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Emotions are an important part of athletes' sport experiences and have physiological, motivational, and cognitive consequences for athletes' participation and performance in sport (Babkes Stellino, Partridge, & Moore, 2012; Uphill & Jones, 2012). Emotions can also have interpersonal consequences, in that emotional expressions can serve to communicate how one feels, and athletes' displays of emotion can influence the way others respond to them (Crocker, Kowalski, Graham, & Kowalski, 2002; Jones, 2012). Athletes' emotion regulation is important for sport performance, however emotions and emotion regulation in sport have typically been examined from an individualistic or intrapersonal perspective, focussing on how individuals perceive and regulate emotions such as anxiety before and during performance (e.g., Jones &

Hanton, 2001). There is considerably less research investigating athletes' emotion regulation within teams, and Uphill, McCarthy and Jones (2009) noted that “research on interpersonal aspects of emotion has been less prevalent compared to intrapersonal facets of emotion” (p. 174). Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine emotional self-regulation and interpersonal emotion regulation within a team of competitive athletes.

Emotions and emotion regulation in sport

While there is disagreement regarding the definition of emotions (Izard, 2007), we use the umbrella term ‘emotion’ to refer to basic emotions (e.g., emotions considered fundamental to human nature; Ekman, 1999; Izard, 2007) and emotion schemas (e.g., interactions between emotion feelings and higher order cognitions; Izard, 2011). Emotions may arise when individuals appraise an event as positive or negative in relation to his or her goals (Lazarus, 1999). Much research in sport has focused on the effects of anxiety on athletes' sport performance, although sport psychology

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researchers have argued for the need to study a wide range of emotions in sport (Cerin, 2003; Hanin, 2000). Indeed, athletes report a variety of positive and negative emotions associated with sport; for example, Cerin (2003) provided evidence that emotions such as interest/excitement, enjoyment, sadness, guilt, and self-hostility were significant for athletes' sport performance. Researchers have shown that athletes also report fluctuations in the intensity and frequency of different positive and negative emotions prior to, during, and after competitions (Cerin & Barnett, 2006; Robazza et al., 2012), and there is a large body of literature which considers the antecedents and outcomes of various emotions in sport and athletes' perceptions of the functionality of emotions for performance outcomes (e.g., Martinent, Campo, & Ferrand, 2012; Uphill & Jones, 2007). Lab-based studies have provided additional evidence that emotions such as anger, hope, and happiness are associated with improved performance on physical tasks (e.g., Rathshlag & Memmert, 2013; Woodman et al., 2009). However, one limitation of this body of research is that most studies to date have focused on how individual athletes perceive and regulate their own emotions, and relatively less research has examined social influences on emotion and interpersonal processes of emotion regulation within teams of athletes. This is an important aspect of emotion research, since emotions frequently arise within the context of social relationships and interactions (Lazarus, 2006).

Emotion regulation refers to "processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (Gross, 1998, p. 275). An organizing framework of emotion regulation considers processes aimed at decreasing, maintaining, or increasing one's own emotional experiences. Importantly, emotion regulation also considers how emotions are displayed and the effects of emotional expression on others. We used the term emotional self-regulation to refer to the use of automatic or deliberate strategies to initiate, maintain, modify or display one's own emotions (Gross, 2008; Lane, Beedie, Jones, Uphill, & Devonport, 2012; Niven, Totterdell, Stride, & Holman, 2011), and we used the term interpersonal emotion regulation to refer to athletes' deliberate and non-deliberate verbal and nonverbal actions which influence others' emotions (Niven, Totterdell, & Holman, 2009).

Athletes use a number of strategies to regulate their emotions, including distraction, redirection of attention, cognitive reappraisal, goal setting, self talk, imagery, relaxation, and suppression, and athletes' ability to regulate their emotions is associated with successful performances (see Jones, 2012 for a review). For example, Totterdell and Leach (2001) reported that professional cricketers who had a greater expectancy that they could regulate their own negative moods performed better during matches than athletes who had lower mood regulation expectancies. Similarly, Lane, Beedie, Devonport and Stanley (2011) reported that athletes attempted to increase the intensity of emotions such as anger and anxiety using emotion regulation strategies if they felt those emotions would be facilitative for performance. Intervention research has also provided evidence that individualized emotion self-regulation programmes were effective for improving sport performance among high-level athletes (Robazza, Pellizzari, & Hanin, 2004). Thus, emotional self-regulation is generally viewed as valuable for performance, and many sport performance management strategies (e.g., mental skills) will also act as emotion regulation strategies (Lane et al., 2012). While efforts to regulate emotions can be valuable for performance, it should be noted that individuals' attempts to control or suppress their emotions may also have physical or cognitive consequences (Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000). For example, Bray, Martin Ginis, Hicks, and Woodgate (2008) provided evidence that individuals who engaged in a cognitive self-regulatory activity experienced significant decreases in muscular endurance. However, the interpersonal

consequences of athletes' emotional self-regulation have not been explored in competitive team contexts, and it is unclear how athletes may modify or monitor their own self-regulation within the social context of a team. Furthermore, it is unclear how athletes' emotional self-regulation may impact others members within a team setting. In the current study we sought to address this gap in the sport psychology literature.

Social influences on emotion & interpersonal emotion regulation

Researchers have recognized the importance of social influences on emotions and some studies have begun to explore the social aspects of emotion and emotion regulation in sport. In a recent systematic review of the team contact sport literature (e.g., rugby, football, ice hockey), Campo, Mellalieu, Ferrand, Martinent, and Rosnet (2012) described team sport athletes' emotions, as well as antecedents, coping responses, and moderators of athletes' emotional experiences. Results highlighted the importance of social influences on athletes' emotional experiences, as the influence of others (e.g., negative relationships, criticism, teammates' behaviours) was identified as an antecedent of athletes' negative emotions in over 58% of the studies they reviewed, whereas athletes' own errors (e.g., physical or mental errors) were reported as antecedents of negative emotions in 52.9% of the reviewed studies. There is also evidence that perceived group membership may influence individuals' emotional experiences. For example, Jones, Coffee, Sheffield, Yanguéz, and Barker (2010) reported that soccer fans' perceptions of group membership influenced the emotions they experienced while watching the soccer World Cup, and that soccer fans' positive emotional experiences associated with teams' successes persisted longer than negative emotional experiences associated with teams' failures. Furthermore, spectators' identification with a sports team has been associated with increased self-esteem and having a positive outlook on life, as well as lower depression, lower negative affect, and fewer feelings of alienation (Branscombe & Wann, 1991). Additional research by Uphill and Jones (2007) provided some evidence that athletes' perceptions of belonging to an 'elite' group was associated with athletes' emotional experience of pride. While this research has begun to examine social factors which influence individuals' emotions, Campo et al. noted there is a scarcity of research examining inter-group emotion and emotion regulation among teams of athletes and there remains a need to examine how athletes' emotional expression and emotional self-regulation impacts others and how interpersonal emotion regulation functions within a team context.

Two lines of research have begun to explore interpersonal processes of emotion regulation in sport contexts. First, studies of emotional contagion have examined processes by which individuals influence the emotions or behaviours of others through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotions (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). Totterdell (2000) examined emotional contagion among professional cricket players and reported that athletes' positive, happy moods were linked to the collective happy mood of their teammates, which was also associated with players' subjective performances. Players who were older, more committed to the team, and more susceptible to emotional contagion showed greater associations between their own mood and that of their teammates. Totterdell suggested that associations between individual-team moods may be related to athletes' emotional expressiveness and affective communication via deliberate and non-deliberate facial, verbal, and behavioural expressions. Similarly, Moll, Jordet, and Pepping (2010) examined emotional contagion through video analysis of soccer players' celebratory behaviours following penalty kicks. Athletes' behaviours associated

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