

Falsifying Academic Assumptions with Lived Experiences: Coherence Between 'Non-Scientific' Realities & 'Scientific' Theories of Emotion

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Summary Theoretical perspectives of emotion have yet to combine 'scientific' knowledge with the lived realities of 'non-scientific' communities as a method of falsifying theory. Through a series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, experiences and understandings of emotion which occur in the daily lives of non-clinical populations were examined and related to emotion theory. 'Non-scientific' concepts of emotion held that variation as the norm was a core facet of emotion categories. Emotions were not understood as discrete states, but as temporary psychophysiological states with unclear boundaries. Emotions were categorised - informed by internal cues loosely based on valence and arousal - based on the individual's association with prior contexts, future goals, and available linguistic markers. The evidence supports and extends constructionist hypotheses.

Keywords · Phenomenological Methods · Thematic Analysis · Language · Construction of Emotion · Emotion Concepts

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Introduction The debate on how to best explain emotion phenomena has yet to reach a consensus; with researchers primarily drawing on theoretically derived inferences from positivist, empirical work. To date, there has been little research exploring how the non-scientific community make sense of emotions. The separation of 'scientific' and 'non-scientific' epistemology reflects differences in what is considered a valid and reliable approach to knowledge production and has been a key element of recent science-oriented controversies (Mikulak, 2011). Sophisticated empirical theories can be tested and confirmed when auxiliary and supposedly 'common-sense' assumptions made by those in the academy are tested against the realities of the general public.

Aims The current study aims to connect 'scientific' hypotheses from categorical and dimensional theories with 'non-scientific' knowledge in order to falsify current perspectives. This was achieved via exploration of lay individuals first-order experiences of emotion. Due to the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study, no hypotheses or predictions were made.

Methods Thirty-seven participants' (22 female; M age = 24.66, SD = 6.04) data was analysed for a study exploring emotions and emotion regulation in ev-

eryday life. Participants took part in either a semi-structured interview ($N = 19$) or a focus group ($N = 18$). and described in their own words their perceptions, assumptions, opinions, and experiences of emotion and emotion regulation. Participants were asked to describe their perceptions and assumptions of emotion, to outline recent emotional events, the social contexts which elicited or moderated emotions, and their perceptions of causal or underlying mechanisms. The data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results Emotions were described loosely as occurring on intersecting axes of valence and arousal. Embodied aspects of an emotion varied significantly across participants, demonstrating that there was no one reliable method of experiencing or communicating an emotion. The experiential internal signal and embodied aspects were described as not constituting an emotion in itself, rather they were core components of an emotional experience that was used in synchrony with contextual and historical cues to create an emotion. Emotions were not communicated as discrete, categorical states. Rather emotions were identified as having unclear boundaries and being highly variable in nature. The behavioural concomitants of emotion were believed to be socially dictated, in a manner which was beneficial to wider society due to the inherent predictability but detrimental to single members as it can constrain self-regulation. The results support a dimensional, constructionist approach (Barrett, 2017), over discrete approaches (Ekman, 1992).

Conclusions Specific and fundamental aspects of emotion related phenomena achieved coherence across 'scientific' constructs and 'non-scientific' realities. The evidence appeared to support and extend constructionist theories explaining emotion, with assumptions made from this perspective generalising to the lived realities of 'non-scientific' communities.

References

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