

Potter and Hepburn give us something psychologists seldom actually provide: investigations of people's actual behavior, in the settings that matter to them, and where the stakes are live and real. They do this through specifying, both theoretically and empirically, how emotion unfolds and matters moment-to-moment, in social interactions, and in its outcomes. *Emotionography* is essential reading for all those who study, research, and experience emotion.

—**Elizabeth Stokoe, PhD**, Professor in Psychological and Behavioural Science, The London School of Economics and Political Science, London, United Kingdom

This trailblazing work opens an entirely new landscape of understanding and inquiry into the emotions. Potter and Hepburn move emotional study out of the laboratory and into real-life settings, where one can now begin to understand emotion's interdependent functioning in ongoing relationships. They also invite the reader's company, as they provide the necessary instruction for joining them in this distinctive form of research. An innovative and important book indeed.

—**Kenneth J. Gergen, PhD**, Senior Research Professor, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, United States

70 years ago, C. Wright Mills showed that the ascription of motives was an interactional process. Now Potter and Hepburn have done the same for emotions. This groundbreaking book makes visible the intricate practical life of emotion in our interactions.

—**David Silverman, PhD**, Visiting Professor, Business School, Leeds University, Leeds, United Kingdom

In *Emotionography*, the authors hand us a magnifying glass through which to see, in breathtaking detail, the expression of emotion as it occurs in situations both alarming and real. For professional and general readers alike, the book attunes us to emotion as a language through which we know what's going on, and through which we unwittingly speak. A very exciting contribution.

—**Arlie Russell Hochschild, PhD**, author of *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*

A tour de force in persuasion. Potter and Hepburn had me at Chapter 1—with quotable gems that kept me smiling and my highlighter running. You will never experience, study, and conceptualize emotions the same way again.

—**Hansun Zhang Waring, EdD**, Columbia University, New York, NY,
United States

Potter and Hepburn's groundbreaking book on emotionography provides a vivid and engaging account of how emotions are displayed and managed in everyday life using the most powerful interactional methods currently available: conversation analysis and discursive psychology. It will become essential reading for psychologists and social scientists who are seeking a fresh, innovative, and vital alternative to orthodox emotion research. This fascinating study of "emotions in the wild" is sure to be a game changer!

—**Peter Muntigl, PhD**, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium

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Preface

A New Beginning for Emotion Research

Emotionography: Theory, Research, and Practice is not a book about emotion as traditionally conceptualized in psychology or the social sciences. Instead, it invites readers to set aside preconceived notions and embrace a fresh approach we call emotionography, grounded in the study of actual records of action and interaction in human life. We chose the term *emotionography* deliberately, drawing on the suffix -graphy to evoke forms of mapping such as topography or oceanography. This signals our analytic commitment to charting emotion in its full interactional relief—not as a set of internal states, but as features of action, turn-taking, and sequence that vary across settings and institutions. We consider emotion as it appears, as it is managed, and as it becomes consequential in natural settings, presenting emotion in the wild rather than domesticated and corralled into scales, experiments, and interviews. We will say more about the reasons for this focus throughout the book. For now, let us simply assert that there is an important role for a rigorous, empirical study of emotion as it unfolds in natural settings. That is what this book is about.

KEY FEATURES OF EMOTIONOGRAPHY

The research literature on emotion spans thousands of articles and books and spreads across disciplines such as sociology, history, and anthropology, but with its center of gravity in psychology. Emotionography contributes

something distinctive: a comprehensive metatheoretical, theoretical, and methodological approach grounded in rigorous analysis of records of actual interaction. Its core features include the following:

- a focus on how emotion is displayed, attributed, and avowed, drawing on interaction analysis to elucidate its role in action;
- a comparative perspective on how emotion displays and uptake vary in different sequences, across diverse interactions, and in varying contexts;
- an approach that is grounded in participants' perspectives as publicly displayed in real-time talk; and
- uses recorded and transcribed materials to capture the granular detail consequential for the interactants.

We will elaborate on each of these features throughout this book.

Our aim is to bring emotionography to life as a distinct analytic approach, building on cumulative studies, offering new theoretical insights, and providing a basis for new forms of applied impact. This is neither a dry literature review nor a self-help manual. We define emotionography by contrast, showing how it captures phenomena that orthodox methods overlook. Think of it as a blend of essay and manifesto, illustrated by a rich set of examples.

We introduce emotionography through a close engagement with unfolding emotional episodes, adopting a close-up, slow-motion study of emotion as it happens. The slow-motion approach facilitates a careful study of how emotion unfolds in sequences of actions, embedded in broader projects related to settings such as relationship disputes, family mealtimes, or political interviews. Audio and video files allow us to slow down, to stop and start, and to replay emotional episodes. Transcripts crystallize important interactional features, allowing us to hold them up to the light, compare them, and look at them in different ways. Audiovisual records combined with sufficiently accurate and detailed transcripts allow for a kind of empirical study of human conduct that was previously very hard to achieve. Emotionography allows us to explicate what is happening emotionally as an episode unfolds, turn by turn, silence by silence, sob by sob. If you want to do emotionography, you must work at this level of granularity because this is the level that humans attend to when interacting with one another.

We hope you will be fascinated to ride with us alongside these developing episodes, watching us explore the way they play out for the different parties.

THE EMOTIONOGRAPHIC SHIFT

Emotionography's approach may be unfamiliar or even unsettling. That is because it challenges a deeply entrenched commonsense view: that emotions are inner states we express outwardly. This is not just a psychological theory; it is built into everyday language, thought, and culture. Most people believe they already know what emotion is and where it lives.

Psychology has largely absorbed this everyday model, treating emotion as private feelings revealed through visible signs. But emotionography offers a different lens. We treat emotion as part of unfolding interaction: something displayed, responded to, managed, and made consequential in real time. That shift—from what emotion is to what emotion does—is central to this book. It moves the focus from the individual to the interaction.

As you move through this book, you will encounter a lot of examples. The level of transcription will be unfamiliar at first, but our experience is that it soon becomes easy to tune into and brings alive the cases that we are looking at. To help this process, we have annotated a number of extracts, particularly in the earlier chapters. Our argument will be built through a careful consideration of each case and what it shows; however, we should note that these cases are mostly selected from broader collections that are the basis for full empirical studies. Our goal here is a broad sweep to illustrate the perspective.

Emotionography works exclusively with *naturalistic data*, emphasizing that emotion and action are largely inseparable. When liberated from laboratory settings or from behind the paper fortification of scales, interviews, and questionnaires, emotions are often mixed in a wide range of action-relevant ways. What we repeatedly show is that emotion and action are more or less indivisible: For example, stories reporting abuse can unfold through features of crying and anger. A complaint can be angrily delivered using raised voice and accompanying expletives, but also laughter particles. We do not expect this perspective to be persuasive stated baldly like this; our aim is to bring it to life with a rich set of examples and, hopefully, show how fascinating this alternative is.

THE DISTINCTIVE LANGUAGE OF EMOTIONOGRAPHY

Emotionography draws on a discursive approach to psychological matters, which has built on the methodological and theoretical success of conversation analysis. A key theoretical resource is Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1953)

critique, emphasizing that psychological terms such as *emotion* derive their meaning from public, social practices rather than private, internal states. Emotionography builds on this by focusing on how emotions are expressed and understood in actual conversational interactions, grounded in analysis of empirical data. To navigate language saturated with cognitivist and psychologically referential terms, emotionography employs particular forms of language as follows:

- *Displaying* refers to how emotion is made evident in interaction through tone of voice, speaking pace, facial expressions, and gestures. Our understanding of another's feelings is based on their observable conduct, not internal states.
- *Recipient design* highlights that emotional displays are specifically devised for, and directed at, the recipient of the talk.
- *Orienting* describes how recipients publicly show their understanding or receipt of displayed features.

We hope you will tune into this language as we go along. We have elsewhere published a compact guide to conversation analysis, including its methods and technical terms, directly and specifically for psychologists (Hepburn & Potter, 2021).

There is another language issue that needs highlighting. We will regularly write about the very many psychological studies of emotion. Many of these studies are based on experiments and different kinds of surveys or questionnaires. Since the 1990s, qualitative studies using open-ended interviews have become common. Emotionography stands in contrast to both traditions of work. Sometimes we will refer to them as the *orthodox* or *traditional psychology* of emotion. It is hard to escape from the pejorative overtones of these terms; however, we are more focused on fleshing out an alternative than criticizing the, err, orthodoxy. There is plenty of existing work that is valuable and interesting.

Although this book primarily centers on the study of unfolding conversational interactions in both everyday and institutional settings, we also regularly consider textual materials, including social media posts and news reports. Importantly, we approach these materials using the same emotionographic perspective, focusing on how they form and manage actions. Our understanding of how emotion operates in conversational contexts provides valuable insights into this more textual material. In turn, analyzing textual content can reveal the flexibility and optionality that may become evident in conversational settings. We are certainly not advocating for a wholesale shift to studying Instagram posts and neglecting the challenges and excitement

of more discursive materials. We do aim to illustrate a different approach to social media analysis, one that contrasts with more prevalent methods such as sentiment analysis (discussed in Box 7.1 in Chapter 7, this volume).

WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK?

Chapter 1 introduces key features of emotionography, starting with an example and building a contrast in how emotion is dealt with in orthodox psychological work. We provide an overview of conversation analysis and discursive psychology in Chapter 2, and we return to these approaches to cover specifically methodological issues in Chapter 6. The centerpiece of the book will be three chapters on core emotions: Chapter 3 focuses on crying and upset, Chapter 4 focuses on laughter and its role in interaction, and Chapter 5 is occupied with anger.

We focus on crying, laughter, and anger not because they represent the entirety of emotion; rather, they offer particularly rich and recognizable cases through which to examine the complexities of emotion in interaction. Each of these emotions is central to both lay and academic conceptions of what counts as emotion and is bound up with social expectations and moral considerations. Crying, for instance, may be seen as a sign of distress, as a way of eliciting help or sympathy, or as an act that interrupts the flow of talk—sometimes all three. Laughter might signal shared enjoyment, smooth over awkwardness, resist complaint, or undermine seriousness. Anger can challenge, correct, or disrupt, but it can also expose vulnerabilities or invite resistance. These phenomena are not reducible to simple expressions of internal states, but they are part of the fabric of action—produced, recognized, responded to, and oriented to in ways that contribute to and shape the interactional and social projects underway.

By focusing on the three areas of crying, laughter, and anger, we aim to show how emotion is woven into the organization of everyday life—not as something separate from it, but as a resource and challenge within it. We explore how crying, laughter, and anger emerge, are made sense of, and are consequential within the complex and evolving fabric of social interaction.

Chapter 6 provides a concise summary of how to do emotionographic analysis, providing a pathway for readers who wish to conduct their own research in this way. It builds on methodological thinking in conversation analysis and discursive psychology. Chapter 7 returns to the relationship between emotionography and the orthodox psychology of emotion. Chapter 7 describes how emotionography can support effective application in real-world settings, and it speculates as to where this might all lead in the future.

We will give particular attention to the methodological instruments and techniques used in mainstream psychology to access and measure emotion, because these are the foundation that sustains contemporary emotion research. Chapters 3 through 5 evaluate the quantitative and qualitative research instruments on which current research findings are based, guided by our interaction-focused perspective and our understanding of the language of emotion. We raise questions about the assumptions built into those instruments and the methods and manipulations they are used with, and we ask questions about their implications for the nature of emotion and their understanding of the competence of research participants. We have points to make (a) about the discourse used in questionnaires, experimental protocols, and open-ended interview questions; (b) about the factors-and-variables models (i.e., the statistical abstractions and constructs these instruments are designed to isolate and test); and (c) about the perceptual cognitivist metatheory that is pervasive in psychology and the social sciences more broadly. These discussions will sharpen the contrast between our approach to emotion and more mainstream work, and they highlight the distinctive analytic rigor that underpins emotionography.

This book supplements core material with boxes exploring specific questions or concepts, an appendix reviewing the transcription notation needed to capture emotion, and a glossary of technical terms. We do not provide an exhaustive review of existing psychological or social scientific literature on emotion, because ample summaries are available elsewhere. Instead, our book offers a distinct approach, addressing different questions and phenomena and providing a basis for different kinds of applied interventions. We believe that studying how people display and respond to emotion, use emotion categories in forming actions, and ascribe emotion to others in interaction deserves a mainstream home in academic psychology and speaks to profound issues across the social sciences.

OUR BACKGROUND

After training in psychology, philosophy, and sociology, we have both studied and written about interaction for more than 30 years, developing and working within discursive psychology and conversation analysis, and engaging with broader debates about psychological method and theory. We are not qualitative researchers as such; both of us taught multiple courses in statistics to psychology students. More recently, we published research on emotion in interaction, focusing on studies of child protection helplines, family mealtimes, emotion-focused therapy, and more everyday talk in phone calls and

other environments. We focused particularly on crying and upset, and then laughter; that experience led us to focus on those two topics for this book. We have also written much on transcription as reflects our belief that the proper study of emotion must go beyond the words to the many features of delivery characteristic of emotional talk in interaction—prosody, volume, overlaps and delays, speed of delivery, sniffs, and laugh particles interpolated into words. The world of emotion is imbued with features of delivery that are nowhere captured in orthodox work. This book brings much of this together into a single vision that is a new way of studying emotion and, more broadly, a vision for doing psychology.