Cardiff School of Sport  
**DISSERTATION ASSESSMENT PROFORMA:**  
Empirical  

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**Dissertation title:** Identifying the antecedents of facilitative and debilitative competitive anxiety and coping strategies used to enhance swimming performance.  

**Supervisor:** Declan Connaughton  

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|          | **Results and Analysis (15%)**  
|          | To include: description and justification of data treatment/data analysis procedures; appropriate presentation of analysed data within text and in tables or figures; description of critical findings. |
|          | **Discussion and Conclusions (30%)** |
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|          | **Presentation (10%)** |
|          | To include: academic writing style; depth, scope and accuracy of referencing in the text and final reference list; clarity in organisation, formatting and visual presentation |

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2 There is scope within qualitative dissertations for the RESULTS and DISCUSSION sections to be presented as a combined section followed by an appropriate CONCLUSION. The mark distribution and criteria across these two sections should be aggregated in those circumstances.
IDENTIFYING THE ANTECEDENTS OF FACILITATIVE AND DEBILITATIVE COMPETITIVE ANXIETY AND COPING STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE SWIMMING PERFORMANCE

(Dissertation submitted under the discipline of Psychology)

REBECCA ELAINE LAMBE

ST20001395
IDENTIFYING THE ANTECEDENTS OF FACILITATIVE AND DEBILITATIVE COMPETITIVE ANXIETY AND COPING STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE SWIMMING PERFORMANCE
Cardiff Metropolitan University
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Date: 21st March 2014

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Date: 21st March 2014

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my dissertation tutor Declan Connaughton for his support and guidance throughout the dissertation process; it has been greatly appreciated. Secondly, I would like to thank my participants for agreeing to take part in the study for which I am very grateful. Finally I would like to thank my family for giving me the desire and determination to succeed in University; without them I would not be where I am today.
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the antecedents of facilitative and debilitative competitive anxiety and coping strategies used to enhance swimming performance. Six non-elite mixed gender university swimmers participated in the study, aged between 18 and 24. A qualitative research design was used to address the purpose of the study in the form of interviews. Firstly, the data collected from the interviews was analysed inductively to highlight the key antecedents and coping strategies reported by each participant. Secondly, the data was analysed deductively to identify the most common antecedents experienced by the participants. The results showed that readiness for competition was the most frequently reported antecedent that triggered both cognitive and somatic anxiety. These were interpreted to facilitate and debilitate performance depending on how ‘ready’ performers perceived themselves to be. Further to this, the study revealed that the use of psychological skills and the initiation coping strategies successfully controlled the intensity of debilitating symptoms and in some cases changed their direction on performance. They also helped to heighten the effect of facilitating symptoms, all of which had a positive impact on performance. The results of this present study will be beneficial for performers in the competitive environment, especially those who tend to perceive anxiety as negative. The study provides useful information about how psychological skills can better prepare athletes to cope with competitive anxiety and perceive it as something which can facilitate performance.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
1.1 Introduction to the Research Question

Mellalieu, Hanton and Fletcher (2006) recognised that competitive anxiety was the largest and most common researched topic area in the discipline of sports psychology. However, an area within the competitive anxiety literature that has had limited consideration is the antecedents of competitive anxiety. This is interesting considering how detrimental some performers perceive anxiety to be (Jones, 1991). Therefore it would be of significance to performers, coaches and sports psychologists to understand what causes anxiety to occur and to have knowledge of the importance coping strategies and psychological skills have in reducing and overcoming competitive anxiety.

1.2 Personal Experience of Anxiety

The author personally interprets anxiety as a debilitating factor to performance. She experienced high levels of anxiety as a competitive swimmer to the extent that she would be physically sick as a result of working herself up about the performance. This was mainly due to significant other competitors who made her lack in self-confidence and doubt her own ability. The author finds it of interest that some performers use their anxiety to thrive in the competitive environment when it causes others to completely break down.

1.3 General Aims and Purpose of the Study

The general aims and purpose of the present study was to identify the antecedents of competitive anxiety and coping strategies used to enhance swimming performance. In particular, cognitive and somatic anxiety symptoms were examined, in relation to whether these facilitated or debilitated performance. Further to this, an investigation into coping strategies and psychological skills was carried out to see what impact they had on the reported anxiety symptoms and consequently performance.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a critical review of the anxiety and coping literature that is relevant to the present study. Anxiety has been a focal point of interest in sport psychology, receiving far more research attention than any other emotion in the psychological domain (Mellalieu et al, 2006). Much research has been undertaken on the anxiety-performance relationship with numerous studies exploring competitive anxiety, resulting in considerable advances concerning the nature and the role of competitive anxiety in sport. (Dias, Cruz and Fonseca, 2012). Overcoming the pressure of sport competition has been identified as an integral part of performance for athletes.

2.2 Uni-Dimensional and Multi-Dimensional Anxiety

Anxiety has conventionally been regarded as a uni-dimensional concept, however Naylor, Burton and Crocker (2002) acknowledged that it was more multi-dimensional in nature, comprising of both mental and physical components separated into cognitive and somatic anxiety. Jones, Swain and Cale (1991) proposed that cognitive anxiety was categorised by negative expectations whereas somatic anxiety relates to physical symptoms. Recent research developments in multidimensional competitive anxiety have challenged the traditional assumption that anxiety is always negative and detrimental towards performance (Jones and Hanton, 2001). Hence the importance of exploring both the intensity and direction of competitive anxiety. Measuring the intensity of anxiety can be difficult. The typical approach to measuring anxiety with the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory (CSAI-2; Martens, Burton, Vealey, Bump and Smith, 1990) has its flaws as it only measures the level of pre competition cognitive anxiety and somatic symptoms and does not take into account whether the individual interprets these symptoms as positive or negative towards performance. This is why Jones (1991, 1995) introduced the notion of ‘directional perceptions,’ which relates to how individuals assess the extent to which their anxiety facilitates or debilitates their performance. These observations led to the modified version of the CSAI-2, measuring intensity of symptoms and their direction on a bipolar scale ranging from debilitative to facilitative (Fletcher and Hanton, 2001). Jones and Hanton (2001) study used this notion of directional perceptions to assess the differences in facilitative and debilitative feeling states before competition and found that ‘facilitators’ had more positive feelings and ‘debilitators’ reported more negative feelings, with the ‘confident’ feeling state label being most frequently identified by the ‘facilitators’ and the
‘anxious’ feeling state label being most frequently mentioned by those with negative feelings.

2.3 Antecedents of Anxiety

The findings of Hanton and Connaughton (2002) is particularly relevant in the context of this present study. In this study swimmers believed there was a rational reason why their thoughts and feelings could improve their performance if they associated the symptoms with previous sporting success. As a result of these symptoms an increase was seen in positive thoughts, focus and motivation, raising confidence levels and increasing performance. However anxiety symptoms outside the performers’ control led to debilitative interpretations and lower self-confidence having a negative effect on performance. These findings provide a rationale to investigate the antecedents of both facilitative and debilitating anxiety symptoms and how these, along with coping strategies can be used to enhance sporting performance. Further to this Hanton and Jones (1999 a, b) extended previous findings that elite performers, compared to non-elite performers, interpret their pre-performance cognitive and somatic anxiety symptoms as more facilitative than debilitating to performance. After conducting in-depth interviews to find out the cognitive skills and strategies behind elite swimmers’ interpretations of their thoughts and feelings it was found that their skills and strategies were acquired via natural learning experiences and various educational methods. Such results promoted the extension of research literature on facilitative anxiety to find out the mechanisms behind the phenomenon. The existence of facilitating and debilitating anxiety responses is something that has circulated the test anxiety literature over the years and support for the distinction between ‘intensity’ and ‘direction’ of competitive anxiety symptoms has also been provided in the growing sport psychology literature (Jones and Hanton, 1996.)

Jones, Swain and Hardy (1993) conducted a study examining the relationship between ‘intensity’ and ‘direction’ of competitive anxiety in relation to performance. Their study on female gymnasts competing in a beam competition reported that cognitive anxiety intensity was more facilitating and less debilitating to performance in the good performance group when compared to the poor performance group, despite there being no difference in levels of anxiety intensity. In addition to this was the presence of higher self-confidence in the good performance group. There has been consistent patterns of findings in the literature which report comparisons between elite and non-elite performers on both state and trait
responses. Similarly in good and poor performers, high and low competitive individuals and positive and negative goal expectancy groups (Jones and Hanton, 2001.)

Despite there being vast amounts of research in the anxiety literature it is still important to consider why anxiety affects performance in a certain direction (Hanton and Connaughton, 2002). Eysenck and Calvo’s (1992) processing efficiency theory suggested that motivation and effort were important in compensating for high cognitive anxiety in order to improve performance when performers perceived some form of possible success. Mellalieu, Neil and Hanton (2013) also conducted a study related to anxiety direction and intensity. They examined the effect self-confidence had on the relationship between competitive anxiety intensity and direction. The findings of this study suggested that high levels of self-confidence could change the symptom intensity in some way. In elite performers it was revealed that self-confidence predicted somatic direction, so in other words the more confident athletes were in succeeding the more facilitative the anxiety symptom would be towards the performance. However the intensity of these feelings stayed the same. For the non elite the conclusion was drawn that high levels of self confidence and low symptom intensity were needed in order for them to experience a less debilitative perception, in other words self-confidence controlled both the direction and intensity of their anxiety symptoms.

2.4 Coping Literature

It has been suggested that coping with competition demands effectively can facilitate motivation and enable athletes to reach their standards of performance; excellence in coping leads to excellence in performance. Hence studying coping strategies has attracted remarkable research attention over the years. (Hatzigeorgiadis and Chroni, 2007.) It is important to examine the psychological skills that influence the intensity and direction of pre-competition anxiety symptoms (Fletcher and Hanton, 2001.) Mayard, Smith and Warwick-Evans (1995) examined soccer players’ anxiety reduction techniques when they experienced anxiety symptoms that debilitate performance. The study found that relaxation techniques as means of reducing anxiety intensity levels were linked with facilitative interpretations of pre-competition anxiety symptoms and consequently associated with higher self-confidence. Adding to this topic of research, Hanton and Jones (1999a) used interviews to examine how elite swimmers’ learning of cognitive skills and strategies were used to perceive pre-competition symptoms as facilitative. Results from this study showed
that as swimmers improved in standard they followed a strict pre-competition routine that involved the use of mental imagery, goal setting and the rationalisation of thoughts and feelings to ensure that symptoms were still perceived as facilitative. Hanton and Jones (1999b) followed up their initial study by examining swimmers who were debilitated by their cognitive and somatic symptoms. An intervention design was produced using the data collected from the interviews and included goal setting, imagery and self-talk. When the swimmers used these intervention strategies they found that they had more facilitative interpretations of their symptoms boosting their self-confidence leading to improvements in performance.

The relationship between psychological skill usage and competitive anxiety responses was heightened in Fletcher and Hanton’s (2002) study which investigated how psychological skills influenced competitive anxiety responses. This study specifically looked at differences in intensity and direction of competitive state anxiety and self-confidence levels in ‘high’ and ‘low’ usage groups of the psychological skills. The findings revealed that performers who displayed higher psychological skill usage, specifically using relaxation, self-talk and imagery, perceived pre competition anxiety as facilitative and had more self-confidence. Prior to this study there was limited research on how different psychological skills contributed to the anxiety response. Therefore Fletcher and Hanton (2002) added to the literature by identifying that high usage of relaxation skills pre competition had the greatest impact on lowering anxiety intensity and boosting self-confidence levels. This seems to be of relevance in both the elite and non-elite but whether or not lower intensity facilitates performance is something which is a direction for future research. This because as observed by Hardy et al. (1996), after considering the results from relaxation interventions, he commented ‘Whilst the findings have generally shown reductions in state anxiety, the findings relating to performance have not always shown improvements’ (p.15). Hanton and Jones (1999) made an interesting assumption regarding this issue on whether intensity and direction of anxiety can affect performance. They said ‘If individuals can learn to direct their thoughts and feelings towards focusing on what they must do to improve sporting performance, pre-competition nervousness and anxiety may not decrease their performance’ (p.1). In support of this assumption was Jackson’s (1992) study on flow experiences in elite figure skaters. This study revealed that skaters were able to control their nervousness by turning the symptom into energy, meaning they perceived this pre-competition symptom as facilitative as they directed its focus onto something that would aid the success of the performance. In this case the performers employed an approach
coping strategy as they were able to interpret the anxiety as facilitative. Numerous articles have addressed this approach and avoidance coping literature specifically in the Hatigeor Giadis and Chroni (2007) study which examined the relationship between pre-competition anxiety and in-competition approach and avoidance coping strategies in swimmers. The findings of which revealed that swimmers who perceived their pre-competition anxiety states as facilitative reported to use more approach coping and less avoidance coping than those swimmers who interpreted anxiety states as debilitating. Similar to what was reported by Carver, Scheier and Weintraub (1989) the implication for athletes was that when they perceived to have no control over the situation more avoidance coping strategies seemed to be adopted. Therefore the literature shows that directional interpretations of anxiety are linked to the adoption of approach and avoidance coping.

As well as the use of psychological skills, experience can also have an effect on the direction and intensity of anxiety symptoms. This is something Hanton, Cropley and Lee (2009) examined by considering how athletes learn to perceive their anxiety symptoms as facilitative to performance using their sporting experience. Specifically they focused on reflection and learning and how these could be used to change athletes preparations and interpretations to cope more effectively with anxiety symptoms before competition. The findings of this study highlighted the advantages of engaging in the reflection process. It was suggested that athletes need to use the reflective practice process to learn from their past knowledge and understanding of competitive experiences to better prepare them to cope and rationalise with their anxiety symptoms in the hope that they will interpret these symptoms as more facilitative. This study’s findings were in line with those of Ghaye and Lillyman (2004) who revealed that pre-competition thoughts and actions should not always be attributed to negative situations. It is reflective practice that assists athletes with making sense of their thoughts and feelings and rationalising them to think about how and why they could perceive them as facilitative in future performances.

2.5 Purpose of the Study

In summary, the assumption cannot always be drawn that anxiety symptoms and responses are always detrimental towards performance. This is why the research literature has accepted that a performer can experience positive anxiety states that do in fact exhibit performance. The aim of this study was to shed further light on this topic by identifying the
antecedents of performers’ anxiety symptoms before competition and to identify whether these cognitive or somatic anxiety states were facilitating or debilitating towards performance. Specifically, the identification of the performers’ pre-competition anxiety states were examined in relation to whether the performers’ ‘direction’ of cognitive and somatic anxiety symptoms were facilitative or debilitating towards performance. In accordance with Jones and Hanton (2001) this study hypothesised that those performers who interpreted their anxiety symptoms as facilitative would experience positive pre-competition feeling states compared to those who interpreted their anxiety symptoms as debilitating towards performance. Hence the reason for this study examining performers’ in-competition coping strategies to consider how these debilitating anxiety symptoms were coped with during performance and to see if these coping strategies helped enhance performance. For the purpose of this study a sample of swimmers from a university swimming team were interviewed post competition and asked to participate in the interview retrospectively.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD
3.1 Introduction

A qualitative research design was used to address the purpose of the study. This chapter contains information about the participants who took part in the interviews, the instrumentation used, the data collection process and how the data was analysed.

3.2 Participant Criteria

Competitive swimmers had to meet certain criteria for inclusion in the study. Competitive university swimmers were invited to take part after being informed of the nature of the study. All participants were required to be swimming as part of the university team and consider themselves non-elite. Non-elite being categorised as any swimmer who has not Competed at commonwealth or Olympic level but may have competed at National level. Participants were required to be fairly experienced competitive swimmers having competed from a young age and could be either male or female aged between 18 and 25. They must have reported to experience anxiety in some form prior to competition.

3.3 Participants

Participants who met the selection criteria were six mixed gender university swimmers, aged between 18-24 (M age = 22. SD = 2). The standard of swimming ranged from those who had represented their region to those who had competed in the British Championships, all of whom were categorised as non-elite. All participants were currently competitive swimmers and had been from a young age. All participants were sent the participant information sheet and gave written informed consent prior to participation in the study.

3.4 Instrumentation

3.4.1 Participant Consent Form

A participant consent form was assembled for the purpose of participant rights. Participants were informed in writing that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time. The consent form also informed
participants that any information they provide in the interviews would be used to generate results but would be kept anonymous. Participants were required to give their consent to all of the above by placing their initials in the box next to each statement.

3.4.2 Interview Guide

An interview guide was developed for the study following procedures successfully adopted by Hanton and Connaughton (2002). A semi-structured interview guide was developed that included both open-ended and closed questions relating to swimming, anxiety and performance. This semi-structured format allowed participants to expand their answers accordingly to address the aims of the study. The full interview comprised of three sections. The first section included an introduction to the study, confidentiality, participant rights and instructions on how the procedure will run. Section two of the interview guide started by asking questions related to the participants’ experience as a swimmer and their understanding of anxiety. At the start of this section a working definition of anxiety was provided so that all participants had the same understanding of the topic. The main part of section two comprised of general and specific questions related to the swimmer’s thoughts and feelings in the lead up to competition and the effects these symptoms had on performance. Here, participants were asked to identify, describe and explain their cognitive and somatic symptoms prior to competition and consider the perceived direction of these symptoms on performance (facilitative or debilitative.) Further to this the participants were asked to try and identify the antecedents of each symptom and how these consequently affected performance (positive or negative). The final section discussed the interview procedure and gave an opportunity to add anything that may have been missed. A copy of the original interview guide can be found in Appendix C.

3.5 Procedure

Prior to participant selection, coaches from the University swimming team were approached to ask for permission to contact the swimmers. Once permission was guaranteed the author contacted participants via the University swim team social network page. The participant selection criteria was noted on this page and then swimmers who fitted the criteria were asked to voluntarily put themselves forward to participate in the research project. A copy of the participant information sheet and interview guide was sent to each participant approximately one week before the interview took place, and
participants were asked to study the questions and make notes in preparation for the interview. The interviews were conducted within three months of the British University Championships (BUCS 2014,) which ensured the interview did not have any bearing on performance. A semi-structured format was used for the interview guide that ensured each participant was asked the same questions in the same way as well as allowing participants to expand their responses to the questions if they felt it necessary. The same interviewer carried out all interviews. Each interview was conducted face to face in a mutual environment, away from competition in a private study room in the university library to prevent situational influences like competition environment and other people. The participants were asked to reflect retrospectively on an event of their choice that would give an accurate insight into their true thoughts and feelings prior to competition. The interviews were recorded using an iPhone and were transcribed verbatim. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and yielded roughly 20 pages of text.

3.6 Data Analysis

The swimmers' thoughts and feelings about the anxiety-performance relationship were displayed using explanatory tables developed around themes based on anxiety antecedents, associated text and supporting quotations.

The tables contain links between the antecedents, the anxiety symptoms they cause, the perceived direction of the symptoms, the symptoms potential effect on performance, the initiation of coping strategies and their effect on the symptom and performance.

The data analysis procedure for this study commenced firstly with the transcripts being read and re-read by the author to ensure familiarity with the content. Secondly, transcripts were studied using case-by-case analysis to identify key anxiety antecedents for each individual using raw quotes from the transcripts. Thirdly, inductive analysis was conducted to look for themes emerging from the data for pre-competition preparation to develop individual tables. Fourthly, these individual tables were grouped together using cross case analysis. Fifthly, deductive analysis was conducted for validity reasons to check that all themes included in the grouped tables were present in each individual transcript. Finally, the tables were sent to participants and each confirmed that the results accurately reflected their pre-competition experiences.
3.7 Reliability and Validity

It is of paramount importance that the interview designed and conducted gives reliable and valid results. To ensure that this was the case throughout the research process a number of precautions were taken:

- The same interviewer carried out all six interviews and ensured that they did not influence the participants’ response in any way. To ensure that this was the case the question ‘did I lead or influence your response in anyway?’ was asked in the concluding section of the interview guide. All participants confirmed that they did not feel led by the interviewer.

- A semi-structured interview guide was developed and included interview techniques such as building rapport with the participants to ensure that they gave honest answers to the questions and felt comfortable in doing so. The interview guide was structured in a way that all participants fully understood what was being asked of them. This was made apparent in section one of the interview guide under participant rights; ‘please feel free to ask your own questions as we go along or if you do not understand what I am asking you please make this apparent.’ To further ensure participant understanding the interviewer asked at the end of each question ‘do you know what I mean by this?’

- The interview was conducted in a mutual environment were the participant felt comfortable that there were no distractions that would influence their participation in the study. The date, time and length of the interview were all down to the participants’ convenience.

- Participants were sent a copy of their interview transcripts to confirm that they were a true reflection of what they said in the interview. Further to this participants were sent copies of the researcher’s interpretations of the transcripts to verify that they were accurate reflections of their perceptions. All participants confirmed that the transcripts and results were accurate reflections of their pre-competition experience.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS
4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this present study was to identify the antecedents of facilitative and debilitating competitive anxiety symptoms and their effect on performance. Further to this, the coping strategies performers use to deal with these symptoms and their impact on the symptom and overall swimming performance. This chapter presents the cross-case analysis of six non-elite swimmers and their perceptions of how identified antecedents impacted symptoms, coping strategies and performance. In total six antecedents were identified and are presented separately using explanatory tables, associated text and supporting quotations.
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<th>Direction</th>
<th>Potential Effect on Performance</th>
<th>Coping strategy</th>
<th>Impact of Coping Strategy on Symptom</th>
<th>Impact on Performance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Importance of Competition</td>
<td>Self-doubt</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>Hinders focus on his own race due to thinking about others times on the competition programme.</td>
<td>Positive self-talk</td>
<td>Decreases the intensity of self-doubt and increases focus on his own performance by using key words to reassure himself that he is as good as others in the competition.</td>
<td>Focus is given to his technique during the performance ensuring he performs to his best ability despite initial worry about others times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>Nerves</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>Triggers worry about not swimming a personal best.</td>
<td>Positive self-talk</td>
<td>Reduces the nerves to a more controllable level by reassuring herself that she has done it before so she knows how to pace the race, decreasing the intensity of worry.</td>
<td>Once she gets into the pool her swimming performance becomes natural because she has told herself that she knows what she is doing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Self-doubt</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>Decreases her confidence about performance because others look better due to the standard of competition.</td>
<td>Rationalisation of Thoughts</td>
<td>Decreases self-doubt and removes the direction of this symptom because she reassures herself that she can do it. Just because they have the gear it doesn’t mean they are better performers.</td>
<td>Levels of confidence about her own performance are increased allowing her to naturally perform her 50m at the right pace.</td>
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4.2 Antecedents of Anxiety

4.2.1 Importance of Competition

The swimmers identified numerous antecedents during the interviews that triggered both cognitive and somatic anxiety symptoms. These were perceived to have both positive and negative effects on performance. One antecedent identified from the interviews was the importance of competition. Three of the six interviewees reported this as an antecedent. Two of the participants reported this to have triggered self-doubt that they interpreted as debilitative towards their performance. Participant one perceived this cognitive symptom to hinder focus on the importance of his own race because he was too concerned with other competitors’ times on the competition programme because the British Nationals was the biggest gala he had competed at. Further to this the cognitive anxiety symptom self-doubt triggered the cognitive anxiety symptom worry. Participant one illustrates this after being asked what thoughts were going through his head in the hour leading up to competition:

Negative in way that you kind of have self-doubt because obviously you’ve got these top people and you’ve heard their names and you’ve seen like the times they can do … looking at the programme … um it makes you worry kind of about your performance.

This participant initiated the coping strategy positive self-talk which successfully reduced the intensity of the cognitive anxiety symptom self-doubt. This allowed him to switch focus back to his own race and concentrate on key performance techniques such as streamline that reassured him he had the ability to be as good as the other competitors. This had a positive impact on his performance as he swam demonstrating a good technique. Participant one confirms this after being asked if there were any specific coping strategies he uses to help control the direction of the symptom self-doubt:

Yeah it was almost like kind of self-talk … because you have to talk about your own self so like streamline are kind of words we have to kind of like talk about … streamlining.
Participant four, again being triggered by this antecedent, also experienced self-doubt. Confidence was thought to be affected by what others were wearing due to the standard of competition. The participant illustrated this when she said:

I wasn’t sure how I was going to perform um obviously you go to these events and you see people in their skins … so it makes you think that they are going to absolutely destroy you.

This participant used rationalisation of thoughts as a means of coping with the symptom. The realisation that this was a distorted thought helped decrease the intensity of self-doubt and remove the debilitative direction of the symptom from her performance. This had a positive impact on her performance as confidence levels increased allowing her to naturally perform her 50m at the right pace. Participant four said:

Think kind of like sometimes I bring it back to reality like just because they’ve got the equipment doesn’t mean you know they are any better.

Participant two said that the importance of the competition generated the somatic anxiety symptom nerves. This was interpreted as being debilitative, triggering worry about not performing a personal best time in such an important competition. The participant initiated the coping strategy positive self-talk that had a positive impact on the symptom by reducing the nerves to a more controllable level which decreased the intensity of worry. As a result of controlling the perceived debilitating symptom the participant was able to perform naturally because she told herself that she knew what she was capable of doing despite the added pressure of it being an important competition. Participant two highlights this when asked what coping strategies do you use to overcome this thought of self-doubt:

Um kind of a self talk sort of thing I guess um saying that I have done this event before I know how to pace it like although I haven’t done it for a while I do know how to do it so to stop worrying about it … once I get into the pool its going to be natural and I’ll know what to do … so just reassuring and self talk that sort of thing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedents</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Potential Effect on Performance</th>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
<th>Impact of Coping Strategy on Symptom</th>
<th>Impact on Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant Other Competitors (3)</td>
<td>Self-doubt</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>Led to him doubting his own strength in the water because they were bigger and more muscular.</td>
<td>Positive self talk</td>
<td>Reduced the intensity of self-doubt giving him control over the direction of the symptom because he reminded himself of the key performance aspects that he was good at.</td>
<td>Determination to perform well in the water was increased because he knew he could be as good as the others despite muscle size etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-doubt</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>Psyched her out of her performance because they had skins on.</td>
<td>Rationalisation of thoughts</td>
<td>Helped her to control levels of self-doubt by bringing the situation back to reality. Just because they have the equipment doesn’t mean they are better.</td>
<td>Made her stop silly thoughts so her full focus was given to the race.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>Wasn’t sure were she was going to place because she didn’t know their standard of swimming.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>Facilitative</td>
<td>She didn’t have the pressure of having to prove herself to people that she didn’t know.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</table>
4.2.2 Significant Other Competitors

Another antecedent of anxiety identified was significant other competitors. This was reported by three of the six participants with them experiencing both cognitive and somatic anxiety symptoms as a result. Participant one and four reported that this antecedent caused the thought self-doubt that they perceived to have a debilitating effect on performance. The fact other competitors were bigger boned and more muscular led to participant one doubting his own strength in the water. Participant one illustrates this self-doubt in the following quote:

Its’ kind of a weird competition because it’s kind of the best in Britain are there so obviously you’re looking around and you’re looking at people and they’re massive and huge … obviously made me doubt how much training I’ve done and obviously they’re bigger so their muscles have done strength training kind of stuff like that.

To help cope with this symptom the participant used positive self-talk that was successful in reducing the intensity of self-doubt being experienced when looking at other competitors. It also gave him control over the direction of the symptom as he reminded himself that he had the right technique to perform well despite perceiving others body stature as having a positive effect on their performance. This coping strategy had a positive impact on performance increasing his determination to perform well in the water because he knew he had the potential to be as good as the others because he had a good technique.

Participant six illustrated that significant other competitors had both facilitating and debilitating effects on her performance. This was due to the fact she didn’t know any of the competitors, which on one hand triggered worry. Participant six said:

I didn’t know any people from other unis that I was against so I didn’t like know the standard um so that made me worry about whether I was going to be up to their standard or like was I going to be able to beat them or whatever.

This was perceived as a debilitating factor however on the other hand not knowing her fellow competitors removed any pressure of having to prove herself to anyone so the antecedent in this sense actually made her feel relaxed having a facilitating effect on
performance. Participant six did not report of using any specific coping strategies to deal with these particular symptoms.
Table Three: The Progressive Effect of Significant Other Spectators on Performance

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant Other Spectators (2)</td>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>Facilitative</td>
<td>The perceived pressure from his parents gave him an incentive to perform at his optimum.</td>
<td>Mental Imagery</td>
<td>Imagining a fast end time on the board decreases pressure and increases motivation to impress his parents.</td>
<td>He has the motivation to succeed in the race so gets off to an efficient start.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Sick</td>
<td>Facilitative</td>
<td>Pressure to impress the coach makes her feel sick but makes her want to just ‘go for it’ because she can be sick at the end of the race if she needs to be.</td>
<td>Breathing Techniques</td>
<td>Deep breathing helps control the feeling of sickness by distracting her mind on something else.</td>
<td>Deep breathing gives her mind time to focus on the race and to get into the zone for performance.</td>
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4.2.3 Significant Other Spectators

Significant other spectators was another antecedent identified by two of the six interviewees. They reported that this antecedent triggered somatic anxiety symptoms. Participant one experienced the feeling of pressure from spectators in particular from his parents. This was thought to facilitate his performance because having perceived pressure from his parents gave him an incentive to perform at his optimum. Participant one said:

Your parents take you so kind of don't want to let them down you want to perform well.

Participant one used mental imagery as a means of coping with the pressure. Imagining himself looking up at the scoreboard and seeing and personal best helped to decrease this feeling of pressure and increase his motivation to impress his parents having a positive effect on his performance. This is made evident in the following quote from participant one:

You can imagine how they are feeling … I visualise it when I come in and look at the screens … visualise what I achieve so a fast time.

Participant six reporting feeling sick as a result of significant other spectators, in particular due to pressure from her coach. She perceived this anxiety symptom to be facilitative. Participant six said:

I think it could have had a positive effect like your more likely to just like go faster you've got nothing to lose like you can get out at the end and be sick if you need to be.

Participant six used breathing techniques as a coping strategy for the somatic symptom reported. Deep breathing helped the participant control the feeling of sickness by concentrating on slowly inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide, distracting her from feeling sick. This had a positive impact on performance as the deep breathing gave her mind time to focus on the race and to get into the zone for optimum performance. Participant six illustrated this by saying:
I definitely get in the zone but I also like breathe in and out … yeah like deep breathing.
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<tr>
<td>Readiness for Competition (Training) (5)</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Facilitative</td>
<td>Training for the competition had gone well so he should perform a personal best.</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Reflecting on successful training preparation further increases confidence about performance.</td>
<td>Knowing that he has produced good times in training facilitates performance because he knows that he is comfortable with the race pace he needs to swim at to perform a personal best.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nerves</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>She hadn't done the event for a long time so she didn't know how to pace the race.</td>
<td>Positive Self Talk</td>
<td>Reduced the intensity of self-doubt bringing her nerves and worry back to controllable feeling states.</td>
<td>She reassured herself so her race pace became natural once she got into the flow of her stroke.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Facilitative</td>
<td>He was confident because he had trained harder than he ever had before so should be performing a personal best.</td>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
<td>He set personal goals to beat a close friend and to perform a personal best, which increased his excitement and gave more facilitative direction to his confidence.</td>
<td>He didn't beat his close friend but he did go under the time he wanted.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>She hadn’t trained as much as she wanted to which made her nervous which could result in her screwing up the performance.</td>
<td>Mental Imagery</td>
<td>Visualising her starts and turns reduced the intensity of her nerves and gave her more control over the direction of her nerves.</td>
<td>The training she had done was specific to the event so imagery helped confirm that she could perform a personal best with attention being given to her starts and turns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Facilitative</td>
<td></td>
<td>Worry about not having done enough training makes her kick faster and throw her arms back faster.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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4.2.4 Readiness for Competition (Training)

Readiness for competition appeared to be one of the main antecedents of anxiety among the performers. Five out of the six participants reported it to be an antecedent that triggered mainly somatic anxiety symptoms. Participant one felt confident about his readiness for the competition which he perceived as facilitative. This is because his training had gone well so realistically he should be performing a personal best time. Participant one said:

You know you’ve done the training … you can perform rightly.

To enhance the perceived direction of the symptom participant one initiated the coping strategy reflection to increase confidence about performance. This had a positive impact on performance because he knows that he has produced good times in training so he is comfortable with the pace he needs to swim at to perform a personal best. When asked was there anything that he used to further enhance confidence about performance participant one replied:

Reflecting on my training because you got there so you deserve to be there so you think oh I’ve got the times to compete with all these people so that probably gives you confidence.

Participant two also reported that her readiness for competition caused her to experience both cognitive and somatic anxiety symptoms. This participant hadn’t performed the event she was competing in for a number of years, resulting in her experiencing self-doubt because she didn’t know how to pace the race triggering the feeling of nerves and making her worry about the performance. Participant two said:

There was that doubt I hadn’t swam that particular event I was going to be doing for 4/5 years so I didn’t know how to pace it or anything so I was just kind of worried, apprehensive about doing the race … I didn’t know whether I was going to go out too fast or start off too slow … I hadn’t done the training so there was nervousness behind it.
Due to the participants’ debilitative interpretation of these symptoms on her performance she initiated the coping strategy positive self-talk. This was successful in reducing the intensity of her self-doubt bringing her nerves and worry back to controllable feeling states. This had a positive impact on performance resulting in her race pace being swum naturally once she got into the flow of the stroke. The following quote from participant two illustrates the use of self-talk:

I used self-talk sort of thing I guess um saying that I have done this event before I do know how to pace it like although I haven’t done it for a while I do know what to do so to stop worrying about it … once I get into the pool its going to be natural and I’ll know what to do … so just reassuring and self talk that sort of thing.

Readiness for competition stimulated the somatic symptoms excitement and confidence for participant three that he perceived to facilitative his performance. Participant three said:

I’m training harder than I have ever trained before in my life … so realistically I know I should PB … I’m just getting better and faster and I know that.

To enhance the facilitative direction of these somatic symptoms participant three used goal setting. The participant set two goals, one to beat a close friend and the other to perform a personal best. Both goals successfully added to his excitement and confidence having a positive effect on performance because he swam under the time he wanted even though he didn’t beat his friend. The following quote from participant three illustrates the use of goal setting:

There was a particular event I was swimming against someone else that I am quite close to and I had two goals in this event and these were to go under a certain time which I had never done before and to beat the other person … yeah definitely had my goals … it does help you because you really go for it.

The extent to which the performers become anxious in relation to this antecedent was largely reported to be dependent on how much preparation they had done. Participant four said:
I was **really** nervous, unsure about how I was going to perform … I hadn’t done this event for quite a long time and I hadn’t been training as much as I would have liked to so I wasn’t sure how I was going to perform.

Participant four reported to experience a high intensity of nerves due to poor preparation/readiness for the competition which she interpreted as debilitating her performance. This participant used mental imagery to cope with the effects of this somatic symptom. Visualising her starts and turns helped reduce the intensity of her nerves giving her more control over their direction on her performance. This had a positive effect on her performance because the visualisation of the training she had done was specific to the event increasing her confidence about performing a personal best. The following quote from participant four illustrates the use of mental imagery:

> The training I had managed to do had been specifically focused on hundreds so that would make me feel better … I probably do use imagery of the race sort of when I’m in the water I think about my start and sort of distance underwater and breathing as well definitely.

Participant six stated that lack of readiness for competition initiated the cognitive anxiety symptom worry that she actually perceived to have a facilitating effect on performance. Participant six said:

> I didn’t do a lot of training before so I was like oh goodness what if I haven’t trained enough what if I am not going to be fit enough … you’re more likely to try harder because you know you haven’t been training so you are more likely to kick a bit faster or throw your arms back a bit faster so I think it’s positive.

This participant did not report to use any coping strategies to enhance the direction of the symptoms on her performance.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Race Experience (3)</td>
<td>Nerves</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>Nerves about swimming the wrong event could lead to her actually swimming the wrong event.</td>
<td>Mental Imagery</td>
<td>Visualising her first two strokes of the race reduced the intensity of her nerves and gave her more control over their direction.</td>
<td>Once the first two strokes were done she got into the flow of the race.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>Worry about false starts could lead to loss of focus on the race and potentially diving before the gun.</td>
<td>Distraction (listening to music)</td>
<td>Listening to a certain playlist distracts his mind from worrying about a false start and increases his energy for race.</td>
<td>The music pumps him to get off to a fast start.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>Worry about having to stand down could make her have to go through the whole process of hyping herself up again giving her less time to think about the actual race.</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Reflecting on previous times when she has had to stand down but she has still performed well eliminates the worry about this thought.</td>
<td>She had enough time to psych herself back up again and swam a good time.</td>
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4.2.5 The Race Experience

Another frequently reported antecedent was the actual race experience. Three out of the six performers reported this antecedent to trigger somatic and cognitive anxiety symptoms that they all perceived to debilitative their performance. Participant two experienced nerves as a result of the race experience because she said she gets nervous about potentially swimming the wrong event when in the water. This was perceived as debilitative because the nerves could result in her actually swimming the wrong event. Participant two said:

I feel nervous … I am one of those people that don’t want to get in and end up doing the wrong stroke or doing the wrong distance or whatever.

Participant two initiated the use of mental imagery as a means of coping with the symptom. The participant visualising the first two strokes of her race helped her successfully reduce the intensity of her nerves and gave her control over the direction of them on her performance. This had a positive impact on her performance because once she pulled her first two strokes she got into the flow of the race. The following quote from participant two demonstrates the use of mental imagery:

I kind of use imagery like the start of the race so like visualising myself on the blocks and then like diving in and sort of like the first breaking up to the water and the first two strokes or whatever then I’ll be like oh yeah that’s the stroke I’m doing.

Participant three and four experienced the cognitive symptom of worry that was triggered by the race experience. Participant three worried about false starts that he perceived to debilitate his performance because he could lose focus on the race and potentially dive before the gun. In the following quote participant three talks about a bad race experience he previously had relating to this:

I always worry about a false start purely because of a bad experience I had when I was younger where there was a false start but I didn’t hear that it was a false start and I did the whole race because it was only 50m.

As a result of this experience participant three used the coping strategy distraction to focus his mind on more relevant queues. Listening to fast music distracted him from worrying
about a false start and increased his energy for the race. This had a positive impact on performance because the intensity of his worry was controlled by the music pumping him to get off to a fast start. Participant three said:

With 20 minutes to go that’s when the headphones go in … and there is a playlist I listen to um the music gets more intense and more pumped … yeah building me up.

Participant four had a similar race experience that also caused worry about doing a false start. Participant three explained that:

It was not a good experience standing on the blocks because we got up and the officials made us stand down again … so I got all hyped up and ready to go and I had to get back down and go through the whole process again standing their worrying building myself back up.

Due to the debilitative interpretation of this symptom the participant used reflection to cope with its effects. Reflecting on past experiences of having to stand down and its positive outcomes helped to eliminate the worry about this thought. This had a positive effect on performance because she had enough time to psych herself back up enabling her to swim a good time.
Table Six: The Progressive Effect of an Unfamiliar Competition Environment on Performance

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unfamiliar Competition Environment (2)</td>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>It was a new and different environment so uncertainty about the environment gave uncertainty to the performance.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry Nerves</td>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Debilitative</td>
<td>The pool felt strange so she didn't feel comfortable swimming in it which made her worry about her backstroke turns.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</table>
4.2.6 Unfamiliar Competition Environment

The final antecedent identified was unfamiliar competition environment although it was not notably reported to have any significant effect on performance. A new pool environment triggered the cognitive anxiety symptom worry for participant four and participant six causing them to feel uncertain about their upcoming performances. When talking about her experiences prior to competition participant six said:

Uh during warm up it was like a different pool so it was a bit strange like a strange experience being in a different pool and like I didn’t like the pool either when I was in there … so I was a bit worried about what if it was going to muck up my race my turns or whatever because like the boom was a bit high so it looked further away than it was and it just kind of like hit you so I was a bit nervous on my backstroke turn.

Neither participant four or six reported the use of any coping strategies to help with the debilitative effect of this symptom on their performance.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION
5.1 Introduction

The aim of this present study was to identify the antecedents of competitive anxiety among mixed gender university swimmers and to establish if there were any coping strategies they use to enhance swimming performance. Additionally, the reasons why performers perceive their cognitive and somatic anxiety symptoms to either facilitate or debilitate their performance and what impact the coping strategies had on the symptom and performance were investigated. The structure of this chapter will take the following format: the findings of the study will be discussed and compared to previous research. Practical implications from the findings for performers will be deliberated, followed by the strengths and limitations of the study. Finally, this chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research directions.

5.2 Antecedents of Anxiety

Findings from this present study revealed that performers predominately reported competitive anxiety to be caused by antecedents such as: importance of competition, significant other competitors, significant other spectators, readiness for competition (training), the race experience and unfamiliar competition environment. The present study's identification of the antecedent 'readiness for competition' supports the findings of Jones, Swain and Cale (1990) and Lane, Terry and Karageorghis (1995). These studies identified that perceived 'readiness for competition' was a significant antecedent of cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and self-confidence. Jones et al. (1990) and Lane et al. (1995) revealed that the more physically and mentally prepared the performers perceived themselves to be, the higher their self-confidence and the more control they had over their anxiety. These findings were highlighted in the present study. The participants in this study revealed that their competitive anxiety was related to how much training they had done, how specific their training was to the event and their recent form in training.

Participants in this present study identified that 'significant other spectators' was another antecedent of their competitive anxiety. This was similar to the findings of Lane et al. (1995) who established that the influence of the coach had an impact on competitive anxiety. It was revealed that encouragement from the coach resulted in performers perceiving their cognitive anxiety to facilitate their performance. The present study offered similar findings however somatic anxiety symptoms were reported to be experienced as
opposed to cognitive anxiety symptoms. It was stated under the antecedent significant other spectators that pressure from the coach from previous experience triggered the somatic anxiety symptom feeling sick, that similar to the findings mentioned above, facilitated the swimmers’ performance.

These consistent findings suggest that readiness for competition and significant other spectators are common antecedents that trigger both cognitive and somatic anxiety in performers before competition. It is important to mention that these antecedents trigger anxiety symptoms that can facilitate and debilitate performance.

Although the results from the present study supports previous research, it has revealed new antecedents that have not been directly reported in previous studies. Specifically, these included antecedents relating to the importance of competition, the race experience and unfamiliar competition environment. Participants in this study experienced debilitating anxiety symptoms due to perceiving things like other competitors wearing skins as having a negative impact on their performance. They also interpreted other competitors’ swim times to have a negative impact on performance. The study illustrated that when other competitors had faster times on the competition programme and supposedly looked better than them it contributed to performers experiencing self-doubt. Self-doubt seemed to emerge as the most commonly reported symptom as a result of the identified antecedents. These new findings could have been reported due to the unique nature of the study; it was the first research paper to look at the complete link between anxiety antecedents, symptoms, direction, coping and impact on performance. The participants were able to consider their competitive anxiety as a whole, in terms of what caused it and how they coped with it, therefore it may have led them to identify specific causes of their anxiety by reflecting on the complete competitive anxiety process.

It has been widely reported in this study that the use of psychological skills and the initiation of coping strategies help performers to control the intensity of their competitive anxiety and change its direction.

5.3 Coping Strategies

Common coping strategies reported by performers in this study included: positive self-talk, mental imagery, rationalisation of thoughts, distraction, breathing techniques, reflection
and goal setting. In particular, the most common finding from this study highlighted that the cognitive anxiety symptom self-doubt required the use of the coping strategies positive self-talk and rationalisation of thoughts because of its perceived debilitating effect on performance. In all the reported uses of these coping strategies it was revealed that they were successful in changing the debilitating direction of the symptom to facilitating having a positive impact on performance. This supports the findings of Hanton, Cropley, Neil, Mellalieu and Miles (2011) who revealed that athletes were able to rationalise their thoughts and feelings in order to cope more positively by controlling the effects of the direction of their symptoms. Hanton et al. (2011) used the example of an athlete who experienced high levels of cognitive and somatic anxiety which were perceived to debilitate performance. Despite this the athlete performed well and produced good results. Therefore the athlete would be able to reflect on this and rationalise that the symptoms experienced could have been necessary for a good performance despite in the initial debilitating interpretation.

Another reported coping strategy was the use of reflection. This present study identified that when performers engage in the process of reflection it enables them to control the intensity and direction of their anxiety symptoms on their performance. For example a participant in this study worried about having to stand down from the blocks and have to psych herself back up again. To cope with this the participant reflected on a past experience when she had to stand down and still performed well. By engaging in this reflective process it enabled her to control the intensity of the symptom and gave her the confidence to control its direction if this situation was to occur. These findings support those of Hanton et al. (2009) who suggested that athletes who engage in the reflective practice process learn from their past knowledge and understanding of competitive experiences that better prepare them to rationalise their anxiety symptoms and interpret them as more facilitative.

Relaxation was another identified emotion focused coping strategy. It was used by participants in this study in the form of breathing techniques. It was reported that this avoidance coping, deep and controlled breathing helped to distract the participant from the intensity of the symptom and get them into the ‘zone’ ready for optimum performance. This is similar to the findings of Maynard et al. (1995) who found that relaxation techniques helped reduce anxiety intensity levels and had links to facilitative interpretations of pre-competition anxiety symptoms for performers.
Further reported psychological skills included mental imagery and goal setting. These psychological skills were used by participants in this present study to heighten the perceived facilitating direction symptoms such as nerves, pressure and excitement had on performance. This supports the findings of Hanton and Jones (1999b) who found that the initiation of goals setting and mental imagery as a means of coping led to more facilitative interpretations of anxiety symptoms boosting self-confidence and improving performance.

5.4 Practical Implications

It is of paramount importance that the findings of this study are discussed in terms of the practical implications they have for performers in the sporting environment.

5.4.1 Practical Implications to Performers

An important implication taken from this study for performers to use in the practical sporting environment is that the initiation of certain coping strategies for certain anxiety symptoms have the ability to change any negative perceptions of the symptom on performance into positive ones. This is especially important for those performers who tend to perceive their anxiety symptoms as negative; they need to focus on adopting coping strategies such as positive self-talk and imagery to increase their self-confidence which will have a more positive impact on their performance. This is similar to the practical implications identified by Hanton and Jones (1999a) with regard to cognitive restructuring for performers with negative perceptions of their anxiety symptoms. In this study, athletes who followed strict pre-competition routines, involving the use of mental imagery, goal setting and rationalisation of thoughts giving performers the ability to interpret any anxiety symptoms experienced as facilitative.

5.4.2 Practical Implications to Coaches and Sports Psychologists

These findings are not only of interest to performers but also coaches and sport psychologists. It was revealed in the present study that when performers re-appraise their anxiety symptoms and change their thoughts and feelings to be positive it has a beneficial effect on performance. This provides a logic for coaches and sports psychologists to work with those performers who view their anxiety as debilitating in order to help these athletes
initiate coping strategies and use psychological skills for when they become anxious prior to competition.

5.5. Strengths and Limitations

There are a number of both strengths and limitations to this present study that need to be discussed. To start with, this study is the first of its kind to recognise performers’ perceptions of how identified antecedents impacted symptoms, coping strategies and performance. These links between the symptom and coping are of great practical importance to the performer as discussed in the practical implications section of this chapter. A further strength of the study was that all participants were non-elite athletes. This was significant because as identified by Hanton and Jones (1999, b) non-elite athletes tend to be debilitated by their anxiety. Therefore the present study wanted to determine whether non-elite athletes could re-appraise their anxiety and as a result perceive it as facilitative. Another strength from the study was that all participants received a copy of the interview guide one week prior to the interviews being conducted. This gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and provide in depth answers to the questions posed to them in the interview, maximising the collection of data for the study. A further strength to the study was that a working definition of anxiety was provided in the introduction section of the interview guide. Due to the holistic nature of anxiety the study needed to ensure that all participants had the same understanding of anxiety in terms of what information the interviewer needed from the participants.

Although the findings from this study raised a number of practical implications there are also limitations and potential areas for improvement. Firstly, the study only interviewed six participants so this small sample size perhaps limited the range of antecedents reported by performers to trigger their anxiety symptoms. Another possible limiting factor to this study was that all participants were sports students at varying stages of their degree. As a result of this their knowledge about anxiety and coping under the discipline of psychology varied tremendously; from first year students to PHD students. The effect being that the post-graduate students could have brought more knowledge and information to the study compared to what knowledge and information the first year students provided. A further limitation to the study was that a mixed gender sample was used in the collection of data. Therefore it did not consider gender differences in the results. The study wanted to get an
overview of common antecedents causing pre-competition anxiety therefore when selecting participants' gender was not an important factor.

5.6 Future Research Directions

As a result of identifying possible areas for improvement, future research recommendations could include extending the sample size to look for a wider range of reported antecedents. This would give a more accurate interpretation of what performers perceive their competitive anxiety antecedents to be caused by. Another recommendation would be to repeat the study but across sports to see if there were any differences in pre-competition anxiety and in-competition coping between individual and team sports. Gender differences relating to anxiety and coping could also be explored because as reported by Jones et al. (1991) differences do exist in antecedents between male and females. Further to this comparisons could be made between the elite and non-elite in relation to pre-competition anxiety and in-competition coping, this would heighten the findings of Hanton and Jones (1997) who found that differences exist when reporting antecedents of anxiety between different skill levels.

5.7 Conclusion

To conclude, the study investigated the antecedents of competitive anxiety in non-elite swimmers and examined the coping strategies they used to enhance swimming performance. Results from the study support previous research, however new findings have been revealed due to the unique nature of the study. The findings highlight that this line of research needs to be carried out on other sports because the results presented for those performers involved in swimming cannot be universal for all sports.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION
To conclude, the aim of the present study was to determine the antecedents of non-elite swimmers’ competitive anxiety and whether the use of psychological skills and coping strategies had an effect on how these symptoms impacted performance. The study identified numerous antecedents that were reported to trigger both cognitive and somatic anxiety symptoms. It was revealed that competitive anxiety does have negative implications for performers but it can also impact performance in a facilitative manner. This was especially illustrated by the use of psychological skills and the initiation of coping strategies. These findings could be used to help performers and coaches create a competitive environment in which they feel they can cope with the demands of their antecedents.


APPENDIX A
ETHICS STATUS
When undertaking a research or enterprise project, Cardiff Met staff and students are obliged to complete this form in order that the ethics implications of that project may be considered. **If the project requires ethics approval from an external agency such as the NHS or MoD**, you will not need to seek additional ethics approval from Cardiff Met. You should however complete Part One of this form and attach a copy of your NHS application in order that your School is aware of the project. The document *Guidelines for obtaining ethics approval* will help you complete this form. It is available from the School.

Once you have completed the form, sign the declaration and forward to your School Research Ethics Committee.

**PLEASE NOTE:**
**Participant recruitment or data collection must not commence until ethics approval has been obtained.**

**PART ONE**

| Name of applicant: | Rebecca Lambe |
| Supervisor (if student project): | Declan Connaughton |
| School: | School of Sport |
| Student number (if applicable): | st20001395 |
| Programme enrolled on (if applicable): | BSc (hons) Sport and Exercise Science |
| Project Title: | Identifying antecedents of facilitative and debilitative anxiety symptoms in swimmers and the effectiveness of coping strategies used in the lead up to competition. |
| Expected Start Date: | 01/09/2013 |
| Approximate Duration: | 6 months |
| Funding Body (if applicable): | N/A |
| Other researcher(s) working on the project: | N/A |
| Will the study involve NHS patients or staff? | No |
| Will the study involve taking samples of human origin from participants? | No |

In no more than 150 words, give a non technical summary of the project

The project aims to explore the antecedents of swimmers’ anxiety in the lead up to an important competition, and to investigate whether they have a facilitative or debilitative effect on their performance. Furthermore this project will explore the coping strategies used to control their anxiety symptoms if perceived as negative. Approximately eight swimmers will take part in an interview, post competition, about how they felt in the lead up to competition. This information will then be used for the results to see where the anxiety is routed from and if negative the mechanisms used to cope.

| Does your project fall entirely within one of the following categories: |
| Paper based, involving only documents in the public domain | No |
| Laboratory based, not involving human participants or human tissue samples | No |
| Practice based not involving human participants (eg curatorial, practice audit) | No |
| Compulsory projects in professional practice (eg Initial Teacher Education) | No |

If you have answered YES to any of these questions, no further information regarding your project is required.
If you have answered NO to all of these questions, you must complete Part 2 of this form.

**DECLARATION:**
I confirm that this project conforms with the Cardiff Met Research Governance Framework

Signature of the applicant: R.Lambe
Date: 1st November 2013

**FOR STUDENT PROJECTS ONLY**

Name of supervisor: Declan Connaughton
Date: 1st November 2013

Signature of supervisor:

**Research Ethics Committee use only**

Decision reached:
- Project approved [ ]
- Project approved in principle [ ]
- Decision deferred [ ]
- Project not approved [ ]
- Project rejected [ ]

Project reference number: Click here to enter text.

Name: Click here to enter text.
Date: Click here to enter a date.

Signature:

Details of any conditions upon which approval is dependant:
Click here to enter text.
### PART TWO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A RESEARCH DESIGN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1 Will you be using an approved protocol in your project?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 If yes, please state the name and code of the approved protocol to be used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3 Describe the research design to be used in your project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The project will require participants to take part in an interview post competition all of which will be transcribed. The data collected will be presented in the form a descriptive results sections using inductive and deductive analysis.

| A4 Will the project involve deceptive or covert research? | No |
| A5 If yes, give a rationale for the use of deceptive or covert research |

### B PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B1 What previous experience of research involving human participants relevant to this project do you have?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Looking at anxiety reviews relating to the topic and also being a participant for a previous dissertation interview.</td>
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</table>

**Student project only**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B2 What previous experience of research involving human participants relevant to this project does your supervisor have?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has written journal articles related to the topic and carried out research using the proposed methodology.</td>
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### C POTENTIAL RISKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C1 What potential risks do you foresee?</th>
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<tr>
<td>I see no major risks as the interviews are being carried out retrospectively</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>C2 How will you deal with the potential risks?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot study to test interview process</td>
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</table>

When submitting your application you **MUST** attach a copy of the following:

- All information sheets
- Consent/assent form(s)

Refer to the document *Guidelines for obtaining ethics approval* for further details on what format these documents should take.

---

3 An Approved Protocol is one which has been approved by Cardiff Met to be used under supervision of designated members of staff; a list of approved protocols can be found on the Cardiff Met website here
APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
Participant Consent Form

Title of the project – Identifying the antecedents of facilitative and debilitative anxiety symptoms and coping strategies used to enhance swimming performance.
Name of Researcher – Rebecca Lambe

Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and have asked any questions about what I am not sure about.

2. I understand that my participation in the project is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at anytime.

3. I also understand that if this happens your legal rights, will not be affected.

4. I understand that information from the study will be used to generate results but the data collected will be kept anonymous.

5. I confirm that I am willing to commence in the collection of data needed for this study.

Date

Name of person taking consent

Signature of person taking consent

* When completed, one copy for participant and one copy for researcher’s files.
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE
Interview Guide

Identifying the antecedents of facilitative and debilitating anxiety symptoms and coping strategies used to enhance swimming performance

Name: .................................................................

Age: .................................................................

Event: .................................................................

Best Achievement: ..............................................

Contact Address or Phone Number: ........................

................................................................................

................................................................................

Interview Date: ....................................................

Start Time: ................. Finish Time: ......................
Section One:

**INTRODUCTION** (not recorded)
Hello, my name is Rebecca Lambe and I am currently studying a BSc in Sport and Exercise Science at Cardiff Metropolitan University. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study by taking part in this interview. In this project I am talking to university swimmers about what causes their anxiety symptoms in the lead up to competition and whether these symptoms facilitate or debilitate performance. Furthermore if any swimmers experience negative anxiety symptoms, how best do they cope with these and how effective are these coping strategies in helping them to be able to perform?

**CONFIDENTIALITY**
I would like to make it clear that your identity will be protected in the interview transcripts and any personal information about you will remain confidential according to the guidelines of the Data Protection Act (1998). I am using audio recording equipment that will allow me to devise a typed transcript which will be used in my results section. Direct quotes will be taken from the transcript.

**PARTICIPANTS’ RIGHTS**
You as a voluntary participant have the right to withdraw from the project at anytime you feel necessary. All information collected from the study will be kept anonymous. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions that I will be asking. I want to learn and benefit from your experience and expertise so that I can better understand where anxiety is routed from and what effects this anxiety has for you as a performer. Therefore I hope that you will provide honest answers to my questions. If there are any questions you are not comfortable answering then feel free to decline, by simply stating ‘no comment’ and no further questions related to that topic will be asked. Please feel free to ask your own questions as we go along or if you do not understand what I am asking you please make this apparent.
ORIENTING INSTRUCTIONS
I will start the interview by getting you to talk about your experience as a swimmer and what you have achieved. It will then follow by asking you what you think anxiety is and how it personally affects you, be it positive or negative. I will then need you to list all your anxiety symptoms and afterwards go through each one and state whether it facilitates or debilitates your performance and why. The latter part of the interview will talk about your negative anxiety symptoms and how you cope with them.

At the end of the interview there will be an opportunity for you to add anything that you felt was important but not covered in the interview.
Section Two:
Get participant to talk about their experience as a swimmer and what they have achieved

Get participant to talk about anxiety (general, initial thoughts)
‘anxiety is a negative response to a stimulus with stressor(s) as the stimulus’ (Jones & Hanton, 2001; Jones, 1995; Lazarus, 1996)

Define the difference between a thought and a feeling
(cognitive and somatic)

Talk to me about your thoughts and feelings in the lead up to your competition

Talk to me about where you think these thoughts and feelings came from

Can you list all the thoughts you experienced
(concerns about the competition, self doubt, worried about performing poorly, worried about reaching your goal, concerned about losing)

Can you list all the feelings you experienced
(relaxed body, nerves, butterflies in stomach, increased heart rate, jittery legs, sickness, pins and needles, body feeling tense and tight)

I am now going to go through each thought you experienced and each feeling you experienced and ask you to tell me whether the thought or feeling facilitated or debilitated your performance and why
I am now going to go through all the debilitating factors you have mentioned and ask you what coping strategies you used to enable you to perform

Are there any facilitating factors that you needed to use coping strategies for in order for them to enhance your performance

(pre-competition routine; mental imagery, goal setting. Self talk, reflection, relaxation strategies, rationalisation of thoughts and feelings)

Conclusion:

That just about raps up the interview /profile. However, before we finish, let me ask you some final questions.

1 How did you think the procedure went?

2 Did you feel that you could tell your story fully and in your own words?

3 Did I lead you or influence your response in any way?

4 Do you think we failed to discuss any important factors?

5 Have you any comments or suggestions about the session today?

Once again thank you for helping out with this interview
APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
Interview Three

Interviewer: ok so first of all I would just like to thank you for participating in my dissertation study um we are just going to start by getting you to talk about your experience as a swimmer and what you have achieved so far

Participant: um ok so I started swimming probably when I was about 7 years old um 7 to about the age of 11 I was swimming for a club and reached county level uh at the age of 11 though I stopped

I: ok

P: and I actually stopped till I was 16 and gained quite a lot of weight when I went back at 16 I found that I wasn't as good as I use to be

I: yeah

P: uh so it took me a while to build it back up when I came to university then I joined the swim team here uh and this year I became the swim team captain and the assistant head coach so iv been doing a lot more coaching than competing

I: ok so would you consider yourself a competitive swimmer at the moment?

P: yes yes I still am

I: so you're still a competitive swimmer

P: yeah still a competitive swimmer

I: as well as sort of the coaching side of things

P: yeah
I: ok cool, um so obviously from reading my um participant information sheet you’ll know that this interview is going to be about um pre-competition anxiety and specifically in swimming um sort of seen a quote from Jones and Hanton 2001 who said that anxiety was a negative response to a stimulus with stressors as the stimulus so obviously by this they mean that they think anxiety is negative and is caused by a certain environment or in this case we are going to be talking about competition um so for you what do you know about anxiety and how does it sort of affect you not just in swimming but in life in general

P: uh well what I know of anxiety its based around worry you always worry I think it links to stress under my understanding um in terms of sport its nerves you that you always nervous before a race or whatever so um that m understanding of anxiety

I: ok um yeah and do you sort of experience anxiety in other aspects of life not just competition

P: um

I: so in like day to day things

P: probably yeah I'm a bit of a stressor so

I: yeah so you would call yourself a bit of a like stressor

P: yeah yeah worry about things all the time

I: yeah so you would consider yourself a bit quite an anxious person?

P: um yeah yeah but I don’t think that’s a bad thing

I: no not at all yeah, ok cool so just for the purpose of this interview um I’m just going to give you some definitions, we are going to be talking about
cognitive and somatic anxiety so cognitive anxiety is to do with the thoughts that you experience and somatic anxiety is to do with any feelings you experience. Um so I want you to uh think back to a particular competition that you competed in and think back to sort of the hour before or the morning before and just talk to me a little bit about your thoughts and feelings in the lead up to your competition and event so perhaps the journey up with your team mates or when you get there just a little background to …

P: um if I think back to one of the university races we had this year in Sheffield

I: ok

P: on the way up I'm always excited really excited for the race the morning h because we stay up there the night before the race and then the next morning that's when it starts to hit me

I: ok

P: and especially with the build up I do feel quite nervous and feel the empty feeling inside but I'm always to scared to eat I never eat before my race

I: yeah ok

P: whether its in the afternoon which is probably a bad thing its just something I do

I: ok

P: uh I always um do I kind of have to go into my own little shell

I: ok

P: a good 20 minutes before my race and I have a ritual that I keep to before my race
I: yeah ok cool, um so these sort of thoughts and feelings that you experience you said you sort of had an empty feeling in your stomach you have to go into your own shell … where do you think this comes from? Is it from perhaps past experience, is it from others, is it … where do you think its routed from …

P: I don’t know I mean the way I deal with it is a listen to music I have to listen to music

I: ok

P: and I think in swimming especially you always see them listening to music whether I've seem them do that and I think yeah I'll do that

I: yeah

P: so you know its worked

I: so like following suite you find that works for you

P: yeah its works for me so I don’t want to change it I don’t want to risk changing it

I: yeah

P: but I think the reason I did it was because when I was younger I use to watch the Olympics and you always see them coming out with headphones

I: yeah so perhaps they were role models

P: yeah it is its probably that when I have seen people

I: so when they were successful
P: yeah exactly, I think its seeing other people do that then I'll do that kind of thing but the empty feeling is probably related to not eating to start off with

I: yeah

P: but that's just the butterflies in the stomach that everybody gets so …

I: yeah ok cool, so we've talked in general about your sort of thoughts and feelings before competition so now I just want you specifically to think about that morning before that competition and actually identify all the thoughts that are in your head that you experience whether they be positive or negative thoughts so for example did you have concerns about the competition, self doubt where you worried about performing or on the positive side did you know someone you were competing against that you've beat before, did you have goals that you knew you needed to reach

P: yeah pretty much all of those

I: (laughs)

P: so I always worry about a false start purely because of a bad experience I had when I was younger where there was a false start but I didn't hear that it was a false start and I did the whole race because it was only 50m

I: yeah

P: full on full out and I had to do it again

I: ok

P: so I always worry about false starts, not me doing a false start but someone else doing it

I: ok so you have that thought in your head of worrying
P: yeah the thought of that also the thought of and it actually happened in this particular race that I did um that I’m planning this round where its stand down so you’re up on the block ready to go and something happens and they make you stand down

I: ok so that adds to …

P: that ruins everything because your in your zone there and then they tell you to stand down and for this particular one I had to stand down for 5 minutes so I really just you know you lose your focus then

I: yeah

P: you try and maintain it but you can’t

I: ok are there any other thoughts that go through your head anything positive?

P: um definitely positive um the way I see it is I’m training harder than I have ever trained before in my life

I: yeah

P: so realistically I know that I should PB

I: ok

P: because I’m just getting better and faster and I know that

I: and you’ve got the you know in your head that you’ve worked hard enough

P: yeah I mean I know I race not to win because I’m not in the fastest heats
I: yeah

P: uh but I race to beat myself and get a PB um there was in this particular event I was swimming against someone else that I am quite close to

I: yeah

P: and I had a little goal I had two goals in this event and that was to go uh under a certain time which I had never done before and also to beat the other person uh I didn’t beat the other person (laughs) but uh I wasn't to disheartened about it

I: ok

P: but I did go under the time

I: so you had your goals and these were positive thoughts in your head

P: yeah I had my goals definitely

I: you thought I've got these goals and I'm going to reach them because I have trained hard

P: yeah yeah

I: ok cool uh so you’ve talked a little bit about the thoughts you experienced can you now go through feelings that you experienced for the competition so if I just give you a few examples so in a positive light did you have a relaxed body or perhaps were you feeling nervous did you have butterflies in your stomach was your heart rate increasing like what sort of feelings did you experience?

P: uh yeah I definitely had butterflies uh I was quite fidgety my heart rate was uh probably increased quite a bit
I: yeah

P: but that’s not necessarily a bad thing

I: no

P: because I am a sprinter so

I: perhaps you used the adrenaline …

P: yeah there was definitely adrenaline in there definitely and um but

I: are there any particular feelings that stand out for you so like do you feel sick do you get nervous like that?

P: I don't feel sick but I fee empty

I: you feel empty ok

P: that is the big thing for me I feel as though there is nothing inside me

I: yeah

P: and if for example or I didn’t feel empty that makes me anxious as to will I perform as well because uh purely because I think that the emptiness feeling is a positive thing

I: yeah so you can see it as sort of facilitative as well

P: yeah

I: so are there any other feelings you would like a talk about before we move on?
I: ok cool so what I am going to do now is I am going to go through um some of the thoughts and feelings that you have mentioned you experience before competition and I am going to ask you to tell me whether you think they facilitated your performance so did they enhance your performance or whether they had a debilitating effect on your performance so did they have a negative effect and why was this

P: yeah

I: so if we go through your thoughts first of all you said that you had this thought that you were going to do a false start and this was because of a bad experience I think you said

P: yeah yeah

I: so what uh how do you sort of perceive that towards your performance?

P: in some ways it’s negative because it takes my mind off the race which is not what I want

I: yeah

P: but at the same time I am on edge so I like react faster to that to the sound

I: yeah

P: um I’m always constantly … if that sound doesn’t come and they say stand down
I: yeah so because you're worrying about it your thinking about it so maybe making you more aware

P: I mean my reaction time is faster but its negative in the whole race situation

I: yeah so you can sort of see it in both lights

P: yeah definitely

I: ok so just briefly mentioned it then you said about the stand down when they make you stand down and you said one time they made you do it for 5 minutes you mentioned it ruins everything you're out of your zone

P: yeah

I: you lose focus so how would you perceive this towards your performance?

P: um again if that's similar to the last one on the block its very similar so its good in your reaction times but when it does happen and you do stand down that's a major negativity

I: yeah

P: because

I: yeah taking you out of your zone like you said

P: yeah exactly and one of things I say I listen to music so um one of the races last year I was listening to a really kind of heavy metal music getting me energetic they said stand down and because it was so long they started playing music on the tanoey which was not my kind of music and it really mellowed out the situation

I: yeah
P: so what wasn’t great and I think that’s just a negative effect thinking about that really

I: yeah ok cool so on to some of the more positive thoughts you mentioned you said that you had in your mind that you trained hard so that you should be able to perform a personal best again how did you perceive this towards your performance?

P: well yeah you said it there that was positive thing like everybody said I’d go faster than I had ever done before everyone was saying it, you kind of want to believe them but at the same time you don’t want to jinx yourself

I: yeah so you had it in your mind that you needed to reach these goals because you had trained hard

P: yeah it was a personal goal to reach and I think … it does help you because you really go for it

I: yeah ok so some of the feelings that you experienced then you said that you had butterflies you were a bit fidgety how would you perceive this towards your performance do you think it sort of um debilitated it or do you think it perhaps helped the performance or

P: I think it does help because the fidgeting is the adrenaline

I: yeah

P: that’s you wanting to get in the water

I: so yeah you’re getting your energy

P: yeah you want to get going, the butterflies it’s a horrible feeling but as soon as that race starts that butterflies disappear and your adrenaline takes over
I: yeah so its just before the competition

P: so and I think if you went into a race and you didn’t have butterflies you wouldn’t really be focused on that race

I: yeah

P: so I think it is a positive thing the butterflies

I: so you think its something most people experience

P: yeah I think …

I: its like part of the competition/ event

P: yeah I think it is definitely not just in swimming in all sports if you're not having those butterflies or anything like that your not trying hard enough

I: ok cool there was one interesting point his feeling of feeling empty, nothing inside you how do you perceive that towards your performance?

P: it makes me feel lighter

I: yeah

P: because I know it’s not actually when I say I’m empty I'm not saying it’s cause I haven’t eaten yeah it’s just that empty feeling

I: yeah that inner feeling

P: um it makes me feel a lot lighter and like I said if I didn’t have that feeling I would perceive myself not to be ready for it

I: yeah so its perhaps something that you have always experienced?
P: yeah actually part of my ritual which sounds really weird, part of my ritual is to go to the toilet before the race

I: yeah

P: and for some reason if I would need or get a chance to go to the toilet or whatever I would feel ‘not empty’ and I would feel sluggish and slow

I: yeah ok so it’s sort of part of you facilitating your performance by doing that

P: yeah definitely again not a negative thing

I: yeah

P: um but its just a funny feeling you sort of got going on

I: ok yeah ok cool so what I am going to do now is I am just going to go through some of both facilitating and debilitating factors you have mentioned and ask you are there any coping strategies that you use to enable these to enhance your performance … so do you know what I mean by that so for example you've already mentioned some so if you could go into more detail that would be great so like so you said you had like a pre-competition routine you know do you use any imagery, goal setting, self talk are there any specific coping strategies you use like for example you talked about um this worry of a false start this thought because you had a bad experience before are there anyways you deal with that through a coping strategy?

P: um not really dealing with that that’s just being on edge and getting ready for it being prepared that it could happen

I: yeah so do you kind of talk yourself through it or do you visualise anything do you do anything like that?
P: not really no, not for that particular one no

I: ok

P: for the race as a whole I wouldn’t say that I visualise um it at all really I think you can over think a race

I: yeah so perhaps that’s something that wouldn’t work for you

P: so being sprinter for me that is something that wouldn’t work visualising that but um I suppose the rituals is a big thing for me

I: so you’ve got this pre-competition routine that you need this empty stomach

P: yeah

I: you said about your music does that help you coming down to some of the feelings you said you felt fidgety your heart rates increasing does your music sort of make you focus

P: yeah definitely it gets you pumped ready

I: yeah

P: so um my routine is the warm up so once you finish your warm up your race is whenever it is you’d go and get changed into your racing costume / racing suite

I: yeah

P: um you’d then think down I think you I don’t go straight into that bubble I talk to people almost take my mind off the race

I: yeah
P: this is about 40 minutes before the race we'll say this is um with 20 minutes to go that's when the headphones go in

I: yeah

P: and there is a playlist I listen to um the music gets more intense and more pumped

I: yeah building you up like

P: yeah building me up then 10 minutes before the race I go down and I start skipping

I: ok

P: to get the heart rate up

I: to get the heart rate up increase adrenaline yeah

P: yeah then I go back up and there is one song and it's the same song all the time that I listen to

I: just before the race then …

P: just before it's got to be that song soon as that's done headphone off I walk off I don't tell anyone I'm going then I go down I always go down earlier then most people would

I: yeah

P: I go down with …

I: is there a reason for that?
P: probably just because I'm paranoid about being late (laughs)

I: paranoid at being late (laughs) yeah

P: yeah so like just like making sure I'm in the right place I've got to double check triple check to make sure

I: ok

P: that I am in the right heat the right lane everything like that

I: so you've got a definite pre-competition routine …

P: yeah

I: that you stick to that's quite strict

P: yeah yeah

I: so if you were perhaps not to do something in your routine do you think that would debilitate your performance?

P: it would throw you it would throw you, it happened two years ago I think where I asked someone what heat I was in and what lane and they gave me they mixed up the lane and the heat so they said I was in heat 4 lane 3 but I was in heat 3 lane 4 and that really threw me

I: yeah

P: because I wasn’t ready

I: yeah
P: um so that was a bit like …

I: so do you think about that, does that negative experience stay in your mind?

P: not really its just that’s why I triple check it

I: so that’s perhaps why you’ve got such a strict routine?

P: yeah … kind of off the subject I’m dyslexic so I do routines everyday

I: yeah

P: when I wake up there is a routine and when that routine doesn’t happen much like in the pre swimming routine it does throw you it does it can throw you I mean I still performed well in that race that was messed up

I: yeah

P: so I don’t know if it actually affects the race but … mentally

I: in your mind yeah so perhaps you as a person on the whole have got quite a structured routine yeah

P: oh yeah

I: so that affects the way you perform then?

P: yeah

I: ok brilliant I think we’ve covered quite a lot there so I think from what you’ve said there if you want to categorise them into coping strategies it was definitely sort of distraction like listening to your music talking to other people and sort of this pre-competition routine then
P: yeah

I: ok do you think there is anything else you would like to talk about then any thoughts, feelings, coping strategies, anything to do with your performance that we haven’t covered?

P: no I think you’ve covered everything there um as long as that routine happens for me I kind of feel that I am going to have an ok race no matter …

I: what thoughts and feelings you experience?

P: yeah exactly

I: this routine helps you combat them

P: yes yes this routine will do that yeah

I: ok cool so that just about sums up the interview but I’ve just got a few questions to ask before we finish um how do you think the procedure went so the actual interview?

P: yeah it was good yeah

I: yeah did you feel that you could tell your story fully and in your own words?

P: yeah

I: um did I lead or influence your response in anyway?

P: um no I don’t think so no

I: ok do you think we failed to discuss any important factors?

P: no I don’t think so no
I: um and have you any comments or suggestions about the interview today?

P: no

I: no ok thank you once again for taking part in this interview