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# **A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Exploration of Crying and Tearfulness in Young Men**

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Science by Research

The University of Huddersfield

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I would also like to thank my dear parents for all of their love and kindness.

## **Abstract**

Past research has shown that some young westernised men perceive crying to be more acceptable than the older generation of men. The majority of crying literature however has focused on trying to produce an explanation for why men cry less frequently than women. The experience of crying and tearfulness in young men, therefore, has received limited attention. In attempting to understand how crying is made sense of by young men and what meaning it holds to them, the current study adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological methodological approach. Using a purposive sampling technique, nine young men aged eighteen to twenty-four were recruited to take part in semi-structured interviews. The participants were asked to reflect on two contrasting examples of a time they had cried or were tearful, the transcribed data was then analysed using template analysis. Crying was found to be an intense and embodied experience of feeling that was often evoked by an unanticipated and unwanted situation. On some occasions, the young men engaged with their feelings related to the emotional situation, whereas at other times the participants struggled to cry freely and comfortably. In particular, many of the participants identified a sense of discomfort and difficulty in crying in front of men but not women. The perception that crying is unmanly restricted the participants' ability to explore and engage with their feelings. Many of the participants battled between the view that crying in men is a sign of weakness, irrationality and immaturity but at the same time they argued that it is a natural human quality. The overall experience and outcome of crying in young men was thus influenced by the immediate and wider sociocultural context concerning constructions of masculinity.

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# **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Soon after the suicide of Robin Williams, a famous American actor and comedian, was publicised, Bally Singh (2015) writes about his own experience of crying and depression. Singh admits to crying on a regular basis despite his attempt to suppress his tears, though, he only cries in private environments where others cannot witness him being emotional. Singh identifies an immediate sense of release after crying and explains that he felt better because of it. He suggests that crying enables him to let go of unpleasant emotion but accepts that it will not be long before these feelings soon return. Singh seeks support from loved ones but avoids contacting them in the fear of being labelled as weak and unmanly. He believes that he will be mocked for being emotional thus decides to keep his suffering to himself.

Singh (2015) is a supporter of the UK based charity "Campaign Against Living Miserably" (CALM). His account of crying reflects a westernised sociocultural perception that positions crying and acting emotionally as unmanly (Carlson & Hall, 2011). Researchers have suggested that as a result of this gender stereotype some men suppress their need to cry (Bekker & Vingerhoets, 2001; Kottler, 1996). Moreover, existing literature has consistently shown that men cry less frequently compared than women (Becht, Poortinga & Vingerhoets, 2001; Van Hemert, Van de Vijver & Vingerhoets, 2011). Reichbart (2006) has expressed concern over the emotional wellbeing of men and argues that the suppression of tears prevents men from dealing with their emotional difficulties. Alongside this existing literature, Singh's experience therefore demonstrates that the construction of traditional masculinities limits the extent to which men feel able to cry, be emotional and let others know of their suffering. According to Sullivan, Camic & Brown (2015) men who adhere to traditional masculinities are also less inclined to seek professional help and due to this have poorer health outcomes (White, 2001).



I am interested, both academically and personally, in the study of crying and tearfulness in men. As a woman I have generally been able to cry freely with little criticism thus I can never experience first hand what it is like to cry as a man. On a personal level as an individual who lives and interacts in a world with men I therefore want to increase my own understanding and awareness of men's crying. Singh's (2015) account illustrates that the act of crying for some men is still considered a taboo area within westernised society. On the one hand, Singh was able to relieve his painful emotions through crying but on the other hand he was deeply ashamed for behaving emotionally. The experience of crying and tearfulness in men as a result appears conflicted and embedded with multiple layers of meaning. I wish to examine this phenomenon in order to expand on the understanding of crying and explore how it is made sense of by men. Furthermore, by carrying out this research I hope to provide further insight to men's emotional wellbeing, and contribute to addressing the emotional difficulties that some men face in relation to crying.

In the following part of this chapter I have presented a critical review of past literature on crying and tearfulness. The first section of this comprises an overview of research on the nature and function of crying before focusing more specially on crying in men.

## **1.2 Theoretical explanations of the nature and function of crying**

A large proportion of the existing literature on crying and tearfulness has centred on trying to produce an understanding of what crying is and what purpose it has (Vingerhoets, Cornelius, Van Heck & Becht, 2000). As a result, there is an abundance of competing theoretical approaches (including biological, cognitive, developmental and psychoanalytic) that have all attempted to explain crying and establish whether it has any therapeutic significance (Kottler & Montgomery, 2001). Looking at crying from a singular theoretical position has value in that it provides us with a focused and rich understanding of crying from a particular perspective. The biological approach for example, informs us about the physiological experience of crying whereas the cognitive approach provides insight on the processes involved in the triggering of crying. However, crying is a complex

phenomenon that reflects the interaction between an individual's feelings and their environment (Carlson & Hall, 2011; Frijda, 2012). In a review of the crying literature, Kottler & Montgomery (2001) concluded that there are different types of crying, that crying has many contrasting and often contradictory functions and that individuals can cry from emotions both painful and joyous. My argument and that of many others (Cornelius, 1988; Kottler & Montgomery, 2001; Sartre, 1939/1971) therefore is that relying upon a theoretical position that focuses on only one part of a multifaceted and subjective phenomenon is problematic. Focusing on a singular aspect of crying produces a concentrated yet limited understanding of the phenomenon rather than offering a comprehensive and holistic exploration of it. The approach that I strove to adopt stands outside of these theoretical positions and indeed the explanatory focus of the research literature. This literature review begins with a critical overview of crying and tearfulness as explored by each of the theoretical approaches. It goes on to identify the ambiguities and discrepancies between the competing theoretical explanations of crying to show why an alternative approach is needed that does not aim to explain crying but rather understand the lived experience of it.

### 1.2.1 Biological research on crying

From a biochemical point of view, humans have three different types of tears including basal, reflex and emotional (Murube, 2009a). Basal tears function to lubricate the eyes and ensure optimal vision. Reflex tears are released when yawning or laughing but their main purpose is to remove foreign bodies from the eye. Emotional tears differ from basal and reflex because unlike these types of tears, emotional tears do not hold any advantage for protecting the eye or for vision (Murube, 2009b). Instead, emotional tears are released when an individual encounters an emotional situation or experience. Frey (1985) proposed that crying with emotional tears is a uniquely human phenomenon that is thought to start to occur at three to four months of age (Darwin, 1872). Prior to this, infants cry without any tears in the form of wailing or screaming. During his research on crying Frey (1985) further revealed that the biochemical composition of emotional tears differed from that of basal and reflex tears. He found that emotional tears contain increased levels of the hormone prolactin, proteins, and toxins such as manganese. Typically, the hormone prolactin is associated with milk production in

mammals nevertheless research has also shown that it is connected to homeostasis and feelings of calmness and tranquillity (Huron, 2011). Frey therefore argued that emotional tears function to improve an individual's mood and restore the body's physiology via the production of prolactin and removal of toxins. As a result, Frey's findings helped to formulate a biological and evolutionary understanding of the purpose and function of emotional tears.

The biological explanation of crying, however, does not seem to account for contextual factors or those individuals who feel worse after crying (Gross, Fredrickson & Levenson, 1994). Laboratory experiments have found that participants who cried in response to a sad film felt considerably more upset afterwards than those participants who did not cry (Choti, Marston, Holston, & Hart, 1987; Martin & Labott, 1991). This shows that crying does not always result in a positive mood and that other factors such as the antecedent of crying may impact how individuals feel after crying. Furthermore, research demonstrates that the context in which someone cries also influences how they feel after crying (Cornelius & Labott, 2001). Crying in the workplace for example has often been associated with feelings of embarrassment and shame due to the fear that one is being unprofessional (Sung et al, 2009). In comparison, crying at funerals is accepted as the normal and natural response for most cultures (Cornelius & Labott, 2001). Research has also shown that women with high levels of prolactin cried no more than participants with a normal level of prolactin (Vingerhoets, Assies & Poppelaars, 1992). These findings disputed Frey's (1985) proposal that prolactin reduced the threshold for crying and thus there is no empirical confirmation that prolactin is responsible for crying in humans (Eugster, Horsten & Vingerhoets, 2001). Additionally, Miceli & Castelfranchi (2003) illustrate that humans often cry due to something positive. According to the biological explanation the purpose of crying is to stabilize physiological imbalances and improve mood. However, this does not seem to make much sense for those individuals who cry out of joy and happiness. The biological basis of crying is able to provide some insight into the nature and purpose of crying through an understanding of the biochemical composition of emotional tears. However, this theoretical explanation alone ignores the impact of the environment and contextual factors and so does not seem able to produce an understanding of crying that is inclusive of all its complexities.

### 1.2.2 Cognitive and psychoanalytic research on crying

The conceptualisation of crying by competing theoretical positions has led to some confusion in the understanding of what crying actually is. In particular, the cognitive and psychoanalytic perspectives appear to offer contradictory explanations. Researchers such as Ellis (1994) theorized that crying arises from an individual's interpretation and appraisal of a situation. Appraisal is the process by which the antecedent is evaluated and given a particular label describing its nature (Arnold, 1960; Scherer, Schorr & Johnstone, 2001). Attached to this appraisal is a specific set of emotions and programmed within these emotions is a set of responses such as crying (Nesse, 1990). Crying is thus perceived as a response to emotion that manifests from a particular emotional state. Furthermore, as part of the view that crying occurs as a result of cognitive processing, Kottler & Montgomery (2001) also claim that individuals have a degree of choice in their ability to cry. They argue that humans are able to make a judgment as to whether crying in a specific environment is appropriate. As a result, they may choose to reflect on a situation or avoid thinking about it depending on the contextual features. A study by Vingerhoets, Van Geleuken, Van Tilburg & Van Heck (1997) found that participants were able to delay appraisal and thus the action of crying until they were in appropriate setting. Rottenberg & Vingerhoets (2012) also suggest that adults are able to self-regulate crying and can control where they cry and who they cry in front of. However, they acknowledge that individuals usually refer to their experience of crying as involuntary and uncontrollable. In light of this, the cognitive approach seems unable to fully explain the lay perception that crying can be involuntary as it focuses on the notion that humans have choice and control over their appraisal of a situation. In addition, the cognitive perspective indicates that crying is a bi-product of emotion and that it is triggered by an individual's appraisal of the antecedent. The cognitive approach thus focuses on how crying is evoked rather than what impact it has. Existing research however, has shown that crying sometimes has cathartic or therapeutic qualities and that many individuals feel better after having cried (Becht & Vingerhoets, 2002; Frey, Hoffman-Ahern, Johnson, Lykken & Tuason, 1983). Thus, cognitive explanations of crying do not seem able to sufficiently explain or make sense of those studies which suggest

that crying does impact mood or that crying and emotion are interconnected with one another.

In contrast to the cognitive approach, psychoanalytic researchers suggest that crying and emotions are more closely connected (Bindra, 1972). According to Koestler (1989), crying enables individuals to relieve some of their tension and distress that has been caused by the suppression or accumulation of negative emotions. Thus, a notable psychoanalytic theory identifies crying as an emotional outlet and form of release for blocked emotions (Breuer & Freud, 1895/1968). Many psychoanalytic therapists therefore promote crying in therapy as a way to discharge emotion (Nelson, 2005). Moreover, it is argued that the long-term suppression of crying can have negative effects on an individual's physical and mental health (Cornelius, 1986; Sadoff, 1966; Vingerhoets & Schiers, 2001; Wood & Wood, 1984). Repression theory proposes that the refusal to cry or express emotion can lead to physiological difficulties such as the development of respiratory problems (Berry & Pennebaker, 1993; Freud, 1915/1957). Or according to Reichbart (2006) the suppression of crying may result in psychological difficulties as individuals struggle to process, deal and work through their emotions. However, research has also found that those with depression and psychosis have a higher crying frequency than those without these conditions (Davis, Lamberti & Ajans, 1969). For individuals with emotional and psychological difficulties, thus, increased crying does not always seem to have a positive impact on wellbeing. Taking both the cognitive and psychoanalytic explanations of crying into account it is therefore unclear how exactly crying relates to emotions. By considering the relationship between context and appraisal the cognitive approach uncovers the complexity of crying that is ignored by biological research. It demonstrates that crying and tearfulness is evoked by a specific event, experience or context. It also sheds light on the subjective nature of appraisal and the degree of choice individuals have in crying. However, cognitive research appears to focus primarily on the factors that cause crying such as appraisal, and gives little regard to the relationship between crying and wellbeing. On the other hand, the psychoanalytic approach has centred its attention to the consequences of crying or the suppression of crying. By taking a closer look into the competing theoretical explanations of crying and comparing them with one another it illustrates that

each theoretical approach appears to focus on only one aspect of the multidimensional phenomenon that is crying.

### 1.2.3 Developmental research on crying

Similarly to the cognitive approach, developmental psychology has not generally viewed the intrapersonal or emotional experience of crying to be a fundamental part of the phenomenon (Simons, Bruder, Van der Löwe & Parkinson, 2013). Instead, the developmental psychological perspective offers an interpersonal explanation by which crying is seen as communicative tool. Bowlby (1988) argued that infant crying is an innate attachment behaviour that had evolved to signal attention and to evoke emotional support from others. Likewise, many researchers claim that the attachment function of crying develops into adulthood and thus continues to promote caregiving (Bowlby 1988; Hendricks, Nelson, Cornelius & Vingerhoets, 2008). Frijda (1986) proposed that adult crying was a powerful signal of powerlessness, helplessness and a difficulty to cope. Adult crying is therefore seen as a form of communication that displays when an individual is suffering and in need of assistance (Frijda, 1997; Yik & Russel, 1999). Naturalistic and experimental research have found support for the attachment quality of crying in adults (Hendricks, Croon & Vingerhoets, 2008; Wagner, Hexel, Bauer & Kropiunigg, 1997). In an experiment by Hendricks & Vingerhoets (2006) photographs of people crying were perceived by participants to be in greater emotional discomfort and elicit more emotional support than those of any other facial expression including neutral, fear and anger. Developmental psychology therefore positions crying as a behavioural signal of an individual's internal emotions (Hendricks, Nelson, Cornelius & Vingerhoets, 2008). As a result, both the cognitive and developmental approach conceptualise the crying phenomenon in a way that suggests crying occurs as a result of internal emotion. However, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) argued that consciousness is embedded within the body and thus did not distinguish between emotional behaviour and internal emotional states. In this view, crying is perceived as an emotional way of reacting and engaging with the world rather than a behaviour that occurs in response to emotion.

Developmental researchers have also proposed that the emotional support provided by others e.g. parents, is the primary reason why individuals feel better after crying (Hendricks, Nelson, Cornelius & Vingerhoets, 2008; Nelson, 2005). However, research has shown that the majority of individuals cry alone within the home environment (Vingerhoets, Bylsma & Rottenberg, 2009). The developmental perspective of crying therefore is not able to explain or account for those individuals who cry privately and feel better after crying. In addition, as the infant grows into a child and the child grows into an adult the number of antecedents for crying increases including manipulation, feelings of empathy and positive events (Rottenberg & Vingerhoets, 2012). The perception that crying is a sign of distress and elicits emotional support therefore seems of limited usefulness for those individuals who cry in response to positive feelings and situations. As a result, this demonstrates that crying may not always be a signal of suffering or call for help, and reveals that the antecedent of crying may interact with the function and purpose of the crying phenomenon. The research findings show some support for the developmental psychological explanation of crying. However, there appear to be ambiguities in the view that crying is solely a form of communication. The conflicting findings therefore suggest that crying is not simply nor is it solely an interpersonal phenomenon but that neither is it primarily an intrapersonal one. Instead, crying appears to a deeply emotional experience that is influenced by contextual factors such as the presence others.

#### 1.2.4 Crying and wellbeing

The majority of the theoretical approaches explored above assume that crying is beneficial. There is some evidence to support each of these theoretical assumptions since research has shown that the biochemical composition of emotional tears has therapeutic qualities (biological), that crying discharges emotional tension (psychoanalytic) and that crying evokes emotional support (developmental). Due to this, it is unclear which of these mechanisms outlined is responsible for the positive effects of crying. The research findings therefore indicate that a number of different contextual factors can influence how an individual may feel after crying. In an attempt to identify a causal relationship between crying and wellbeing researchers have also more generally investigated the impact of crying. However, these empirical research studies have yielded

inconclusive and inconsistent findings (Rottenberg, Bylsma & Vingerhoets, 2008). Laboratory experiments for example show that crying has no effect on mood or even that those who cried felt considerably worse than those participants who did not (Labott & Martin, 1987; Rottenberg, Gross, Wilhelm, Najmi, & Gotlib, 2002). Alternatively, naturalistic studies have found that crying does have a positive effect on how participants feel (Becht & Vingerhoets, 2002; Vingerhoets & Schiers, 2001).

Rottenberg, Bylsma & Vingerhoets (2008) argue that the consistent difference in research findings between laboratory and naturalistic studies is largely the result of the methodological approach adopted. Laboratory experiments for example typically induce crying through sad films whereas in naturalistic studies crying occurs as the result of real-life events (Rottenberg, Bylsma & Vingerhoets, 2008). The nature of antecedents in laboratory experiments are less personal and therefore may not impact someone in the same way as crying naturally at something in their own life. As a result, this difference in the type of antecedents used by the different methodological approaches is argued to influence whether or not crying was found to have a therapeutic effect (Bylsma, Vingerhoets & Rottenberg, 2008). Furthermore, some research suggests that individuals feel better after crying because of social support (Kottler, 1996) or finding resolution to an issue or problem that may have triggered their crying (Cornelius, 2001). However, emotional support is not readily available in laboratory conditions, in addition the antecedents used to trigger crying are not necessarily something that can be fixed or resolved (Bylsma, Vingerhoets & Rottenberg, 2008). Moreover, there is some evidence to show that there may be a delay in the positive effects of crying and that it can take up to hours or even days before an individual can feel better after crying (Cornelius, 2001). Nonetheless laboratory experiments usually measure the impact of crying immediately (Bylsma, Vingerhoets & Rottenberg, 2008). This research brings awareness to the temporality of the crying phenomenon. It shows the experience of crying is not simply constricted to the present moment that an individual is crying; instead it suggests that it can continue to influence an individual long after crying has taken place.

It would seem therefore that the cathartic effect of crying is complex and cannot be meaningfully understood in artificial and experimental research. Bylsma,



Vingerhoets & Rottenberg (2008) explain that the issue does not simply lie with the methodological approach but in the aim of trying to establish whether or not crying is beneficial. Researching the impact of crying on wellbeing in this way is limiting as it assumes crying can only either be one or the other, good or bad, helpful or harmful when in actual fact crying may have the potential to be both. Bylsma, Vingerhoets & Rottenberg (2008) carried out an international study in the hope of understanding how the social and cultural environment interacts with how individuals feel after crying. They found that participants who received emotional support from others or who were able to find a solution in a problem through crying experienced a sense of catharsis. In comparison, those participants who felt ashamed or embarrassed of crying or who tried to suppress their tears actually felt worse. They concluded that crying can have both a positive and negative affect on how a person feels and revealed that the context plays a crucial role in shaping the crying experience.

From the research above we can see that the different theoretical approaches have not only tried to elucidate what crying is but they have also attempted to explain how it is therapeutic or cathartic. There is research evidence to support each of the competing theoretical perspectives. However, this further emphasises the complexity of the crying phenomenon and reveals that it cannot be completely understood by the biological, psychodynamic, cognitive or developmental approach alone. In awareness of this Vingerhoets, Bylsma & Rottenberg (2009) created a comprehensive biopsychosocial model of adult crying. Their model encompasses a range of possible factors that may trigger crying in an individual and impacts how they feel after crying. As outlined by their model, the subjective appraisal of a situation results in a particular emotional state, which in turn triggers crying. However, moderating this is a range of biological, personality and situational factors such as hormone levels, personality traits, others in the environment and social norms. The model takes into consideration the influence that others can have on the crying experience and also identifies that there are a number of different antecedents that can evoke tears including memories or real-life events. Furthermore, it acknowledges that the outcome of crying or how an individual feels after crying is influenced by the contextual factors mentioned above. Thus, the biopsychosocial model attempts to conceptualise crying in a way that recognises its complexity and multi-layered nature. Though, it appears to

focus predominantly on the factors that may trigger crying or impact the outcome of crying. As a result, very little is known about the actual experience of crying itself. The majority of the researchers have therefore offered a theoretical explanation regarding the cause and effect of crying but have given little attention to how humans experience or make sense of the crying phenomenon.

### **1.3 Sex and gender differences in crying**

In addition to investigating the nature and function of the crying phenomenon, researchers have also examined sex and gender differences within crying behaviour. According to Burr (2002), sex refers to the difference in the biological or genetic makeup of men and women, whereas, the term gender refers to the sociocultural perception of how men and women should typically act, think and look in society in relation to masculinity and femininity constructions. The investigation of sex differences in crying has thus focused on the examination of biological and genetic differences between men and women, whereas, the study of gender differences in crying has given a greater focus to the relationship between sociocultural factors and their impact on crying behaviour in men and women. As previously identified, a consistent finding throughout the literature demonstrates that men cry significantly less frequently than women (Frey, 1985; Van Hemert, Van de Vijver & Vingerhoets, 2011). However, not only do men and women differ in crying frequency, but researchers have also found differences in the duration and intensity of the crying episode. In a review of the literature, Vingerhoets & Schiers (2000) claimed that men cry for a shorter amount of time than women, and are also less likely to shed as many tears or cry as loudly. Despite research showing some differences in the experience of crying, the majority of the literature has focused primarily on identifying a causal explanation for why men cry less frequently compared to women. In order to explore what the experience of crying is like for men and women an alternative qualitative approach that aims to understand rather than explain the phenomenon is therefore needed.

Due to existing literature emphasising the advantages of crying, the fact that men cry less than women, has been of concern for many researchers (Carlson & Hall, 2011; Reichbart, 2006). As a result, there has been debate as to whether a low

crying frequency in men is due to biology and genetics or culture and gender socialisation (Bekker & Vingerhoets, 2001). The research on crying, tearfulness and wellbeing generally suggests that it is specifically the suppression of tears which can negatively affect a person's emotional and physical health (Vingerhoets & Schiers, 2001). If biology and genetics were responsible for the difference in crying frequency between men and women, then it could be argued that a low crying frequency in men does not negatively impact their health. A biological or genetic explanation would reveal that the reason why men have a lower crying frequency compared to women is because they are genetically programmed that way. Whereas, if the research were to show that culture and socialisation shapes crying in men it would indicate that there is a relationship between men's crying and their mental health. This is because, a cultural explanation would show that men do not naturally cry less than women but have instead learnt to suppress their tears as a result of the sociocultural perception that crying is unmanly. Despite there being limitations in carrying out research with a purely explanatory focus, there does appear some value in identifying why men cry less frequently compared to women. In being able to achieve this, it will help to provide insight into the relationship between a low crying frequency in men and their mental health.

It is unclear the exact age at which men begin to cry less often compared to women. It has been postulated that prior to puberty there are no differences in how often boys and girls cry (Frey, 1985). Whilst others (Kohnstamm, 1989; Phillips, King & DuBois, 1978) have found that as infants, boys cry more frequently than girls. Some believe that the change in crying frequency begins at the age of thirteen (Frey, 1985), whereas, Vingerhoets, Unterberg & Tilburg (2002) claim that they are present only before the age of eleven. Identifying the exact age at which differences in crying frequency occur between boys and girls is important in being able to establish whether hormones are responsible for this phenomenon, and if they are which hormones specifically. Prior to puberty the hormone prolactin is of a similar level in boys and girls, however following puberty women have a higher level of prolactin (Frey, 1985). Not only therefore did Frey propose that prolactin was the hormone responsible for evoking tears in humans, but he also suggested that the increase of prolactin in girls during puberty was the reason why women have a higher crying frequency compared to men. However, as mentioned above,

infant boys have been found to cry more often than infant girls despite similar levels of prolactin. This demonstrates that prolactin is unlikely to result in men crying less than women in later life. Thus, it does not seem plausible that the increased level of prolactin in females during puberty can explain differences in crying frequency.

Cross-cultural findings of a difference in crying frequency in men and women however have led to the assumption that biology, hormones or genetics are responsible for this phenomenon (Van Hemert, Van de Vijver & Vingerhoets, 2011). An international study investigated crying frequency in 37 different westernised and non-westernised countries across Europe, Africa, Asia, Middle East, North America, South America and Oceania, and found that in every single country studied men cried less than women (Van Hemert, Van de Vijver & Vingerhoets, 2011). Some researchers have suggested that men may be genetically programmed with a higher crying threshold and as a result cry less often than women (Vingerhoets, Bylsma & Rottenberg, 2009). In a study on lacrimal flow by Delp & Sackeim (1987) they found a greater number of women cried when feeling sad compared to men. Delp & Sackeim explained that men may therefore have a higher crying threshold than women. Vingerhoets, Bylsma & Rottenberg (2009) proposed that a genetic difference in the level of hormones in men and women may be responsible for the difference in crying threshold. Unconvinced that this was the case, Vingerhoets, Unterberg & Tilburg (2002) carried out an investigation to explore the relationship between menstruation and crying in 481 participants (aged 11-16). At the age of eleven, boys were found to cry less frequency than girls, before menarche had even begun. Furthermore, Vingerhoets, Unterberg & Tilburg (2002) found no difference in crying frequency between girls who were menstruating and those who were not. Their findings confirmed that menarche and the hormones related to puberty such as prolactin may not be responsible for the difference in crying frequency or crying threshold. Nonetheless, they did not dispute the role of other hormones such as oestrogen, which has been found to increase in females during late childhood (Buchanan, Eccles & Becker, 1992). They argue that further research needs to be carried out in order to verify the relationship between the hormone oestrogen, crying threshold and crying frequency. However, to date no such research has been conducted. In conclusion, it seems that a change in crying frequency occurs during

middle to late childhood, prior to puberty. However, this is the age most children begin school, as a result, it is difficult to identify whether a change in crying frequency occurs because of biology or also other factors such as increased peer interaction/socialisation (Vingerhoets, Bylsma & Rottenberg, 2009).

In contrast to the biological research discussed above with its focus on hormone levels, there are three alternative cultural explanations as to why men cry less frequently compared to women. These include a difference in the type of stimuli men and women are exposed to, a difference in the appraisal of stimuli and social learning (Bekker & Vingerhoets, 2001). With regards to exposure to stimuli, there is some research to show that men and women are exposed to or seek different stimuli. The two main contexts where women and men are thought to differ in terms of their exposure of stimuli are in the workplace and leisure activities (Bekker & Vingerhoets, 2001). According to Wagner, Hexel, Bauer & Kropiunigg (1997) there is a higher percentage of women in healthcare professions in which the environment can be highly emotional and thus evoke more tears. While others (Van der Bolt & Tellegen, 1996) have proposed that women seek a higher emotional content in the books they read or films they watch in contrast to men who prefer to more emotionally neutral topics (Kottler, 1996). In the day-to-day life of men and women, this would indicate that men are exposed to fewer emotive stimuli. The likelihood of crying therefore appears lower for men than it does women. However, this research that has shown a difference in exposure of stimuli between men and women was mostly carried out over a decade ago. As a result, it is unclear whether in the present day men and women are still exposed to or seek different stimuli in the workplace and during their free time. Due to this, the plausibility of this explanation is of some question. However, it is also important to consider gender inequality as an explanation for why men and women are exposed to different stimuli. Research has shown that women are at a higher risk of poverty than men since they are more likely to work in jobs of a lower status and pay (Reskin & Padavic, 1994). Women may cry more frequently simply because they are more likely to experience hardships thus women may have more reason to cry than men.

There is inconclusive evidence of whether a difference in the appraisal of the same stimuli impacts crying frequency in men and women (Vingerhoets & Schiers,

2000). Appraisal is defined by Scherer, Schorr & Johnstone (2001) as the process where an individual evaluates an event or situation in their environment and as a result this shapes their emotional reaction. Some researchers have found that men appraise characteristics such as emotionally expressiveness and poor intelligence more negatively than women (Eisler & Skidmore, 1987). Gillespie & Eisler's (1992) study additionally showed that women perceived aggressiveness, dispassionate relationships and unattractiveness as producing a greater threat in their lives than did men. Jorgensen & Johnson (1990) investigated the appraisal of gender-neutral life events. Their findings showed that men and women differed in their perception of major life events, with women appraising them to have larger impact on their overall life. However, in Gass's (1988) study, men and women did not differ in their appraisal of major life events. Ptacek, Smith & Dodge (1994) also revealed no difference in the appraisal of stimuli between men and women. Instead, they found a difference in the coping strategy sought by men and women. Ptacek, Smith & Dodge (1994) concluded that men take a problem-focused approach while women adopt an emotion-focused strategy. Women may therefore cry more frequently than men because they are more likely to engage with their emotions when dealing with problems in life. Likewise, research has found that women with depression are more likely to engage in ruminative behaviour compared to men with depression (Butler & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1994). Nonetheless, there appears to be mixed findings for whether men and women appraise the same stimuli differently. Due to this, it is unlikely that a difference appraisal of the same stimuli is able to account fully for a difference in crying frequency between men and women. The notion that men use problem-focused rather than emotion-focused techniques to cope with their stressors correlates to the research that shows that rather than being emotional, men in a westernised culture have been socialised to exercise control and rationality (Bennett, 2007). Thus, the societal expectation for men to be in control and problem solve using rationality may influence their ability to cry and be emotionally expressive.

Brody (2000) recognises the influence that genetics and hormones may have on the emotional development of boys and girls but also argues that the societal and cultural opinion of gender interacts with one's experience and expression of feelings. Many researchers therefore do not dispute the role of biology but believe that crying and emotional expression to be greatly influenced by sociocultural

attitudes towards gender roles. Research has shown that those who adhere to traditional masculine ideologies are less inclined to cry compared to those who adopt a flexible attitude to their gender (Ross & Mirowsky, 1984). Additionally, boys who are perceived as sensitive, weak and emotional have been found to be less popular with their peers whereas those who are more traditionally masculine gain greater popularity (Adler, Kless & Adler, 1992). The family has also been found to play a big role in the extent to which boys and men feel able to be emotionally expressive and cry. A longitudinal study revealed that male adolescents whose families were expressive and accepting of their emotions reported a higher rate of crying compared to boys who grew up in a more traditionally masculine household (Bronstein, Briones, Brooks & Cowan, 1996). Carlson & Hall (2011) argue that masculinity is therefore a socially constructed concept rather than it being something that is natural and innate in men. Using a Bourdieusian approach, they explain how masculinity originates from the military but has been reinforced and maintained in westernised culture as a normative way for men to behave. Furthermore, they explore how crying has been socialised as unmanly which decreases the likelihood of this behaviour occurring in men. They also raise concerns for the mental health of men, as they suggest that the socialisation of masculinity discourages men from expressing their emotions. Due to sociocultural attitudes towards manliness it is argued that men have developed an internalized inhibition against crying (Reichbart, 2006). This research therefore demonstrates an interactional relationship between socialisation, masculinity and crying. Thus, it would seem that how emotionally expressive a man is or how likely he is to cry depends greatly upon the attitudes and values of those in the environment that he grew up in.

To summarize, there is some research evidence to show that both biology and culture may be partly responsible for the difference in crying frequency between men and women. However, biological research into the relationship between hormones, genetics and crying frequency is largely inconclusive. Thus, no definite claims can be made about the role of biology and the impact it has on the frequency of crying for men and women. There is a far greater amount of research to support a sociocultural explanation of gender differences in crying. The attitudes of those in the environment a boy grows up in relation to their opinion of masculinity and emotional expressiveness, appear to interact and influence how

the young boy perceives crying. One could conclude therefore that while hormones and genetics may result in a higher crying threshold in men, it is likely that sociocultural constructions of masculinity influence men's attitudes towards crying which in turn impacts how often they cry. Research on crying frequency between men and women has thus proved insightful in being able to uncover the possible factors that are involved or responsible for this phenomenon. However, very few experiential studies on crying have been carried out, thus little is known about the quality of a man's or a woman's crying experience. In the first part of the literature review, I considered the pros and cons of an explanatory research focus on a phenomenon such as crying. I concluded that it is useful to understand what factors may be involved in evoking crying as well learning about the effect crying has on mood and wellbeing. Nevertheless, it does not seem to be able to insightfully uncover what it actually feels like to cry and thus we cannot be certain that the explanatory literature reflects the actual or lived experience of crying. In a similar view, focusing on why men cry less than women rather than the experience of crying for men and women may limit what we can know and understand about the similarities and differences in crying between men and women. Very little is known for example, about the way in which constructions of femininity and masculinity may influence the experience of crying for men and women. The research primarily focuses on how biology and culture impact the frequency of crying in men but fails to consider how they may interact with the experience of crying itself.

## **1.4 Crying and constructions of masculinity**

The term masculinity encompasses a range of behaviours and characteristics that reflect the social and cultural perception associated with being a man (Burr, 2002). Masculinity is therefore a culturally shaped phenomenon constructed by the beliefs and values of a society; it is not a fixed concept and thus changes across time, place and historical context (Kaufman, 1994; Kimmel, 1995). As a result, it is widely agreed that there is more than one version of masculinity (Burr, 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).



According to Thompson & Pleck (1986) a traditional masculine ideology promotes anti-femininity, success and toughness. Men who adhere to a traditional masculinity are therefore expected to be strong (both physically and emotionally) as well as independent. As previously identified, the socialisation of a traditional masculinity within the family, peers and the wider sociocultural environment have been found to impact the frequency of crying in men. However, research suggests that contextual factors regarding masculinity constructions may also affect crying behaviour in men (MacArthur & Shields, 2015). Studies have shown that men feel more comfortable and able to cry in front of women than they do in front of other men (Fischer & Manstead, 1998). Furthermore, in certain contexts where a high emotional response is expected of men, such as sporting activities, the act of crying or being tearful is perceived as both typical and acceptable for men (Walton, Coyle & Lyons, 2004). This includes both the male fans as well the athletes themselves since research suggests that the act of crying in male football players is viewed as normal behaviour (Wong, Steinfeldt, LaFollette & Tsao, 2011). Despite there being an increased acceptability to cry in some sporting environments or tragic contexts such as funerals, Fox (2004) found that men still would rather cry alone in a private setting. Men feel able to cry in certain environment such as in the presence of women, in sports or at funerals but not others. Good, Sherrod & Dillon (2000) suggest that crying and a traditional masculinity are often perceived by men as incompatible with one another because of the femininity and weakness that is associated with crying. However, by taking a closer look into the immediate context of crying in men we can see that the notion of a traditional masculinity shifts or changes in different environments (Wetherall & Edly, 1999). As a result, the act of crying for men appears to be a complex phenomenon, it is influenced not only by one's upbringing but also contextual factors regarding who is present and the social norms of masculinity attached to a particular environment. This supports the view that masculinity is a performance (MacArthur & Shields, 2015), and therefore avoiding crying in an environment where a traditional masculinity is sought or expected is a way for men to prove or demonstrate their manliness.

The emotions men experience when crying also appear to be influenced by the construction of a traditional masculinity. Research has shown that women are more likely than men to cry when feeling sadness or stress (Choti, Marston,

Holston & Hart, 1987; Sung et al, 2009). In fact, in Fox's (2004) study, male participants revealed that they actually find it considerably more comfortable to cry when feeling angry than they do when feeling sad. Moreover, studies have shown crying in response to something positive is easier for men than it is for them to cry due to something negative (Vingerhoets & Becht, 1997; William & Morris, 1996). Thus, it seems that there is an aversion for men to cry or be emotional when feeling certain negative emotions such as sadness but not when angry or happy. An experiment by Condry & Condry (1976) examined the observers' perception of crying in boys and girls. A video clip of an infant crying was shown to 204 participants, half the participants were told that the infant was a boy and other half were told it was a girl. Those participants who believed it was a boy concluded that he was crying from anger, whilst those who thought it was a girl stated that she was crying from sadness. The findings indicate that boys and girls may be socialised to experience or express different emotions when crying according to their associated gender. As a result, men feel comfortable to cry when angry or due to something positive because they are perceived as masculine or non-weak emotions (Bekker & Vingerhoets, 2001). This supports MacArthur & Shields's (2015) argument that contemporary westernised masculinity does not strip men from feeling all emotion but rather, puts constraints on when and to what extent a man can be emotional and cry. They propose that this version masculinity is about being in control of one's emotions; instead of allowing their emotions take control of them. Some researchers have distinguished between the act of crying and being tearful, the former consisting of a greater volume of tears (MacArthur & Shields, 2015). Thus, being tearful is viewed more positively than crying as it shows the man is still human and emotional but has the power to control himself (Vingerhoets, Cornelius, Van Heck & Becht, 2000). Contemporary westernised masculinity therefore appears to restrict and limit the experience of crying in men as it dictates when and from what emotions men can cry (Kottler, 1996; Shields, 2002).

It has been suggested that some of the pressures of a traditional masculinity in modern society have decreased, as has the expectation that men should not cry (Labott, Martin, Eason & Berkey, 1991). Using interviews, focus groups and questionnaires Fox's (2004) study uncovered a slow generational shift in societal attitudes towards crying in men. He found that young men between the age of

eighteen and twenty-four felt more comfortable in crying and expressing how they feel compared to older participants aged forty and over. These findings indicate that the perception of crying has shifted slightly, as a result some men of a younger generation perceive crying to be more acceptable. Trying to understand why men cry less often than women therefore seems of limited usefulness when research is beginning to show a change in the perception of crying in young westernised men. Furthermore, in light of the research which suggests that the actual experience of crying in men is subjective and influenced by contextual factors concerning constructions of masculinity; it uncovers a need for an alternative methodological focus in the study of men's crying. In order to extend our understanding of the changing perception of crying in young westernised men, researchers need to explore the first person perspective of crying in men. Only in doing this will we be able to understand and identify the meaning of the crying phenomenon for some young westernised men and how contextual factors may influence this experience.

## **1.5 Rationale and aims**

The majority of crying literature has focused on trying to identify the nature and function of crying as well as attempting to explain why men cry less frequently than women. The methodological approach adopted by existing research has thus relied upon using experimental methods to identify cause and effect relationships and explain crying behaviour. However, without examining the first person perspective, we cannot be sure that the theoretical assumptions proposed hold any relevance to the actual lived experience of crying. Research has shown that men cry less often than women but offers very little insight into what they are actually crying about. Mainstream psychological literature has therefore focused on the measurement of crying behaviour rather than seeking to understand how men experience the phenomenon. According to Sartre (1939/1971) quantifying phenomena limits what can be known or understood about human experiences. Furthermore, experimental research on crying has generally ignored subjectivity and context, as a result it offers generalized descriptions of the crying phenomenon. In the beginning of the literature review I reflected on Singh's (2015) account of crying in which he described his experience as both cathartic

and embarrassing. He identified a struggle to cry in front of others but also suggested that crying was helpful as it allowed him to let go of some of his unpleasant feelings. Examining the first person perspective of crying therefore has value in that allows researchers to explore how crying is experienced by an individual. Only through examining the subjective experience can we begin to understand some of the difficulties that men like Singh encounter when crying.

McGinley (2008) has argued for an alternative approach in the study of adult crying, one that does not aim to explain or categorize the phenomenon. Instead, he proposes the need for a phenomenological understanding which centres on the lived experience of crying. By focusing on the participants' language to describe their real-life accounts of crying, McGinley (2008) suggests that we will be able to explore how crying is experienced and what meaning it holds for an individual. His argument for a phenomenological exploration of crying resembles that of Sartre's (1939/1971) in relation to emotions. Sartre criticized the scientific approach adopted by mainstream psychology in the study of emotion. He claimed that emotions are the consciousness of feeling, a way of reacting to the world and thus are always directed towards something. However, Sartre explained that empirical psychology examines emotions in isolation of the world and therefore neglects this interactional relationship that is core to the human experience about emotion. As a result, he argued that empirical psychology provides us with information of emotion that does not reflect the experience of it as it is lived by humans. In this way, Sartre's argument is congruent with McGinley's proposal that in order to understand the experience of emotions or emotional experiences such as crying we must carry out a phenomenological study of its conscious experience.

Due to the explanatory focus of existing literature and its failure to provide insight into the phenomenon of crying as it is lived by humans, the focus of this research has therefore shifted to exploring the first person perspective of crying. I sought to adopt a phenomenological methodological approach that aimed to provide a holistic understanding of how crying is experienced by humans. I have chosen to focus specifically on men's experience of crying and tearfulness, in particular, young men aged eighteen to twenty-four. The reason why men and not women were the target sample is because researchers have expressed concern over the wellbeing of men due to their lack of or suppression of crying (Reichbart, 2006).

However, little attempt has been made to understand what crying is like for men, whether and how constructions of masculinity impact this experience and whether it is of any value. Furthermore, existing literature demonstrates a slow generational shift in attitudes towards crying in westernised men; with men of a younger age perceiving crying as more acceptable compared to men of an older generation (Fox, 2004). As a result, I concluded that it would be interesting to examine this phenomenon in young men as they have been exposed to competing views of masculinity. Three research aims have been formulated in the hope of conducting a holistic and meaningful phenomenological exploration of crying and tearfulness in young men, these can be found below.

1. To understand the lived experience of crying and tearfulness in young men from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective.
2. To explore the relevance of competing views of masculinity to these experiences.
3. To identify ideas about the values of crying and tearfulness in young men.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

### **2.1 Phenomenological psychology**

In the early twentieth century Edmund Husserl founded phenomenology, the philosophical study of human experience (Langdridge, 2007). At this time, psychological research was governed mostly by empiricism and experimental methods imitating that of the natural sciences (Spinelli, 2005). The scientific method adopted by psychology aimed to identify causal relationships and explain human behaviour. However, Husserl (1925/1962) argued that it was inappropriate to investigate human beings in the same explanatory and hypothetico-deductive way as the natural sciences. As a result, he initiated the phenomenological turn in psychology, by which he disputed the existence of an objective reality that can be measured or accessed via our senses (Spinelli, 2005). Husserl (1925/1962) claimed that the subject of psychological research is largely based on internal experiences, which cannot be objectively investigated, as they do not necessarily have a separate or physical nature like that of the natural sciences. All we can ever begin to know and understand is the reality that we experience, that is, a reality based on our consciousness (Spinelli, 2005). True reality, according Farber (1962) will forever be unknowable to us. Thus, Husserl proposed that the purpose of psychology should be to understand how humans live in the world (Langdridge, 2007). Hence, the primary aim of phenomenological psychology is to understand lived phenomena as they are consciously and subjectively experienced.

This brings us to the notion of intentionality, which is at the heart of phenomenology. Intentionality is implied in the sense of there always being an object of our consciousness or that our consciousness is always directed towards something in the world (Langdridge, 2007). Whether this is a feeling, person or specific event, the important idea here is that there is an inter-connected relationship between consciousness and the world. Therefore, in order to understand the lived experience of a phenomenon it is necessary to explore this interactional relationship. Here we can see how the foundation of phenomenological psychology is deeply embedded in a philosophical exploration of human experience and an understanding of how we can come to know about

such experiences (Langdridge, 2007). The current piece of research sought to gain a rich understanding of the experience of crying and tearfulness in young westernised men by exploring the phenomenon as it was lived. Furthermore, by considering the intentional relationship between consciousness and the world I hoped to uncover meaning and insight into how crying and tearfulness is experienced in young adult men. In the following section I have included a detailed discussion of the specific phenomenological position that I adopted in order to learn about lived experience of crying and tearfulness in young men.

## **2.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology**

Phenomenology is the overarching methodological approach to investigating human experience, which includes descriptive phenomenology and interpretative or hermeneutic phenomenology (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Husserl's (1925/1962) work led to the development of the descriptive strand, which ultimately focuses on uncovering the invariant structure or the essence of a phenomenon. He suggested that this could be achieved by removing one's personal beliefs and preconceptions via the process of epoché or bracketing (Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nyström, 2008). Researchers adopting a descriptive phenomenological methodology aim to analyse data by describing the experience so that they can arrive at the phenomenological attitude (Husserl, 1925/1962). As explained by Finlay (2008) this occurs when researchers have set aside their preconceived perceptions of the phenomenon, leaving us with its true essential structure.

However, Martin Heidegger (1927/1962) opposed the view that we are able to fully bracket away preconception to arrive at the true essence of a phenomenon. He argued that description in itself is an interpretation of what we think something is; therefore, Heidegger (1927/1962) claimed it was impossible to describe without interpreting. Moreover, he explained that as human beings we naturally interpret and construct meaning in our experiences (Racher, 2003). Heidegger's work, therefore, led to the formulation of hermeneutic or interpretative phenomenology, which seeks to understand how participants make sense of a phenomenon. The notion of a double hermeneutic reveals that as a researcher we

are always trying to make sense of the participants' own interpretation or meaning making of an experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). While there is an attempt to bracket away preconception there is also acknowledgment that this can never be fully achieved. Thus, interpretative or hermeneutic phenomenology strives to understand what an experience means to the participant and is less concerned with achieving the true essence of a phenomenon (Dowling, 2007; Racher & Robinson, 2003). However, another way in which Heidegger's phenomenological position differed to Husserl's descriptive phenomenology was influenced by his interest in human existence. Heidegger's (1927/1962) notion of Dasein or being-in-the-world describes the nature of humans as being inextricably a part of, engaged or involved in the world. He believed that phenomenological research could help to shed light on the qualities of Dasein such as temporality, facticity or being-towards-death and being-with others (Langdrige, 2007). In this way, interpretation within phenomenological research is not only key to understanding the meaning of a phenomenon but it is also essential to understanding the characteristics of what it means to be a human in the world (Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nyström, 2008).

According to Papp, Markkanen & Von Bonsdorff (2003) the interpretive versus descriptive debate is a useful way to help researchers to establish which phenomenological methodological position to adopt in their research. I support Heidegger's view that description is not possible without interpretation. Therefore, I chose to adopt a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to investigate the experience of crying and tearfulness in young westernised men. Contextual constructivism, as outlined by Madill, Jordan & Shirley (2000), acknowledges that there is no single or true interpretation of a phenomenon. I also support this view and therefore recognise that the sociocultural context influences how a phenomenon is experienced and interpreted, thus there can be many alternative interpretations. In relation to my own research I did not believe there to be, and nor was I trying to reveal one true interpretation of the meaning of the lived experience of crying. My intention was not to arrive at a conclusion of crying that is universal or representative of all young men. Instead, my aim was to gain insight into how crying and tearfulness was made sense of and what the lived experience of crying was like for a particular group of young men living in a westernised society in the present day.



## 2.3 Van Manen's method

Langdridge (2007) argues that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology are the two most popular methodological approaches to interpretative phenomenological research. In one sense, the method described in IPA and Van Manen's work are very similar; both essentially aim to do the same thing, which is to learn about the meaning of lived experiences (Langdridge, 2007). However, Van Manen offers a non-prescriptive methodological approach to hermeneutic phenomenological research. It was this kind of flexible approach that I sought to adopt, for this reason, Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology was used to inform my methodology. His approach provides guidance in how to carry out a hermeneutic phenomenological study, yet there is freedom for researchers to modify the method appropriately and accordingly to the phenomenon under investigation. According to Murray & Holmes (2014) IPA's philosophical foundation neglects the work of Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), especially in relation to embodiment. Merleau-Ponty argues that emotional consciousness is embedded within the body. However, in the study of crying this idea has been ignored within mainstream psychological research. In the rational I identified that I wanted to shift away from the mainstream psychological approach of studying emotional experiences thus it was important that I used a methodological approach sensitive to Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodiment. Van Manen's approach, therefore, coincided with the type of hermeneutic phenomenological methodology that I was looking to use since it is both flexible and deeply rooted in phenomenological philosophy.

Van Manen (1990) provides a human science method, which does not aim to study human beings or the lived experience in a controlled manner. He offers researchers six inter-connected and adaptable research activities that are not to be carried out in a rigid way or in any particular order. Below, I have included an outline of how Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological approach has been used to guide this research.

According to Van Manen (1990) when carrying out hermeneutic phenomenological research it is important to examine a phenomenon that interests us. The reason for studying the chosen phenomenon was largely influenced by the explanatory focus of existing literature trying to identify why men cry less often than women. As a result, I became interested in an understanding of what the experience of crying and tearfulness was actually like for young men. However, I have a great interest in emotional experiences and how they relate to what it means to be human, therefore, I also found this phenomenon to be personally fascinating. Van Manen highlights an importance in actively identifying one's prejudgments and preconceptions of the nature of the chosen phenomenon. This was not intended in terms of Husserl's sense of epoché, as Van Manen did not believe it possible to simply or successfully ignore our pre-understandings. This process is referred to as reflexivity in which researchers take a proactive approach to be critically aware of their preconception (Finlay & Gough, 2008). A detailed exploration of my own reflexive reflections can be found in the method chapter.

Van Manen (1990) recommends using a form of data collection that allows researchers to learn about participants' lived experience of a phenomenon such as interviews, observations or diary entries. Observations did not seem the most appropriate way to collect data about the lived experience since research shows men are unlikely to cry in public (Fox, 2004). Van Manen (1990) also suggests that it is easier for the researcher to ensure that the participant stays close to their lived experience during an interview, than it is if the participant is asked to write down their experience. For that reason, I decided to collect data through interviewing, and in the following method section I have outlined which exact type of interviewing technique I chose to use.

Another one of Van Manen's methodological activities highlights the importance of reflecting upon the different layers of themes that make up the essential structure of an experience (Van Manen, 1990). When analysing the participants' accounts, therefore, Van Manen acknowledges that there is an element of describing their subjective experience. However, as previously identified, researchers carrying out hermeneutic phenomenological research recognise that all description is interpreted and a product of language and of the sociocultural context (Langdrige, 2007). As a result, the themes formulated do not reflect what is

essential or universal to the phenomenon of crying but rather they reflect what is essential to experience of crying for the participants within the study. Van Manen's approach avoids using a fixed or mechanical step-by-step guide to thematic analysis. However, in order to interpret meaning and to formulate themes some form of procedure or structure is needed to achieve this. Due to the lack of phenomenological research on crying and tearfulness in men I sought to use a more systematic method to thematic analysis. Template analysis, proposed by King (2012) offers researchers a flexible approach in the way that the data is analysed. Template analysis was therefore the chosen form of analytical procedure as it coincided with Van Manen's flexible methodology.

The three remaining methodological activities all relate to the process of writing in human science research. Van Manen recognises the difficulty of remaining focused on the phenomenon especially when writing up as researchers may go off in a direction unrelated to the lived experience. However, his methodological activity of "writing and rewriting" in itself helps to ensure that I "maintain a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon" and "balance the research context by considering parts and whole". By writing and rewriting and by using a systematic analytical procedure, both the analysis and the research text as a whole were constantly being revised to ensure that the phenomenon was described and interpreted in a way that was meaningful, balanced and focused.

## **Chapter 3: Method**

### **3.1 Participants**

As I identified in the literature review I chose to focus on young men's experience of crying and tearfulness. However, I did not wish to use a completely homogenous sample of young men, instead I sought variation in participant characteristics in terms of their backgrounds and interests. According to Reay, David & Ball (2005) young men in university today come from a range of different class backgrounds and ethnic groups, including middle and working class as well as ethnic minorities. They also suggest that the course chosen by the individual reflects what they enjoy and are interested in. The student population was therefore an ideal source of participants for the current study. It offered a large availability of participants who met the desired demographic characteristics in terms of their sex (men), age (eighteen to twenty-four) and westernised culture however it also offered some variance in participant characteristics in terms of interest, class and ethnicity. International students were excluded from the study as I did not want an overly broadened sample of young men from different sociocultural backgrounds.

A purposive sampling technique was initially used to recruit a desired sample of eight to twelve male participants aged eighteen to twenty-four from a student population from one university within the United Kingdom. Originally young men from five different courses were contacted by email via a participant information sheet (see appendix 1). However, due to difficulty in recruiting this way, I decided to broaden my inclusion and exclusion participant criteria by recruiting from a second university within the United Kingdom. Additionally, graduate students were also invited to take part. Thus, through personal contact and snowballing, I recruited nine young men in total. Eight of the nine young men were studying in higher education whereas the remaining participant had recently graduated and was currently in employment (see table 1 for a summary of participants). All participants were given the participant information sheet (see appendix 1) so that they could make an informed decision about their participation; no one was pressured to take part. It was also advised within the information sheet that any

individual who had experienced any form of mental health issues within the last twelve months should not not take part in the study due to the potentially sensitive nature of the research topic.

Table 1: Summary of Participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>University Course/Occupation</b>
Noah	Music Technology
Lucas	Sports Journalism
James	Mechanical Engineering
Sam	Graphic Design
Joshua	Mathematics
Harry	Mathematics
Liam	Physics
William	Graduate job in computing
Pete	PhD

### **3.2 Data collection**

According to Langdrige (2007) semi-structured and unstructured interviews are the most appropriate types of interviewing technique for hermeneutic phenomenological research. The ability to question spontaneously is perceived as highly valuable because it allows phenomenological researchers to prompt for meaning as the participant talks about their lived experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Due to the absence of an interview schedule it would seem that unstructured interviews are more suited to researchers with plentiful interviewing experience as a high level skill is required to keep the interview focused. The pre-planned interview schedule in semi-structured interviews offers guidance but also flexibility to explore areas that the researcher may have not considered prior to formulizing the interview questions (Langdrige, 2007). Thus, semi-structured interviews were thought to be the most appropriate form of phenomenological data collection for a novice researcher like myself.

In order to “investigate experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it” participants were asked about their concrete and real-life experiences of crying

and tearfulness (van Manen, 1990). Lindseth & Norberg (2004) suggest that interviews which focus on the narrative of a participants lived experience are particularly relevant to a hermeneutic phenomenology because they bring us nearer to the participants' lifeworld. I therefore asked participants to describe and explore two somewhat contrasting examples of a time that they cried or shed tears. As a result, I was able to explore each example of crying individually but also alongside one another. By drawing on similarities and difference within as well as across the participants' accounts of crying I hoped to understand what was meaningful about their lived experience.

An ethics form (see appendix 2) was submitted for assessment to the School Research and Ethics Panel at Huddersfield University and was approved outright. The research was therefore carried out in keeping with the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009). Before the interview took place all participants were fully briefed about the aims of the study, anonymity, confidentiality, their right to refuse to answer any question and right to withdraw from the study and to withdraw their data up until the date of analysis. Participants were informed that if they experienced any discomfort during or after the interview then information on advice and help would be given to them. All participants signed a consent form (see appendix 3) and were given the opportunity to ask any questions before the interview took place.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in a quiet room within the university; they lasted between half an hour to two hours and were recorded using a digital audio recorder. The interview guide (see appendix 4) consisted of several open-ended questions which participants were able to view one week prior to the interview. The participants were informed of the flexible nature of the interview schedule and that unplanned for questions may be asked during the interview. The interviews were transcribed within a week of taking place and any relevant nonverbal communication was also recorded in order to explore embodiment during the interview (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

### **3.3 Analytical procedure**

Template analysis is congruent with Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology as both analytical procedure and methodology adopt a flexible approach. King (2012) explains that researchers have the option to create a priori themes based on existing literature, thus template analysis offers a deductive as well as grounded approach to analysis. If there is a lack of research or a deductive approach is not considered appropriate to the philosophical underpinnings of the methodology then researchers are able to create an initial template from a subsection of the data without the use of a priori themes (King, 2012). As a result, I constructed an initial template of themes (see appendix 5) from four out of the nine transcripts. This was based on my reading and rereading of each transcript in order to get a feel for the transcript as a whole. I used NVivo software to code the transcript data which included both descriptive and interpretative coding (see appendix 6). I then clustered the codes appropriately and formulated a hierarchy of themes. Next I applied this initial template to each of the nine transcripts and continued to modify it until a final template of themes that meaningfully described the participants lived experience of crying and tearfulness was formulated. The final template of themes can be found in the following analysis chapter. By creating an initial template of themes from a subsection of the data, which was then reapplied to the rest of the data and modified accordingly, it encouraged a more critical and interpretative analysis of the lived experience of crying and tearfulness in young men.

### **3.4 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is the process where a researcher reflects on their research aims, choice of method and personal beliefs in relation to how they may influence the research process and findings (Finlay & Gough, 2008). Reflexivity therefore offers researchers the chance to be critical in order to minimize the impact of their own preconception (Haynes, 2012). The aim of the study was to understand young men's lived experience of crying and tearfulness. In addition, I sought to explore whether and how masculinity influenced the crying experience, furthermore I also wanted to see whether the young men found their experience to be valuable. In

order to not presume that the construction of masculinity impacted on the participants crying experience or that the young men found crying to beneficial I made sure that I did not use leading questions during the interview. I focused on the participant's subjective experience of crying and tearfulness, and only prompted the participant to explore masculinity and the value of crying if they themselves identified these ideas to be relevant or meaningful to their experience.

In regards to personal reflexivity, something to consider early on is the fact that I am a young adult female researcher attempting to learn about young men's experience of crying and tearfulness. In one sense, this would suggest that I have no first-hand experience of what it is like to cry as a man, which to some extent reduces my own personal preconception of this experience. However, it is important that because of this I do not assume that young men's experiences of crying and tearfulness will be inherently different to my own or other women's experiences of crying. Nevertheless, I have witnessed men cry. It was not something that I particularly focused on at the time but in reflection the men seemed comfortable crying in my presence. As a result, it is again important that I do not assume that because of this all men feel more or less able to cry in front of women than men. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, I have a personal interest in emotionality and view my own experiences of crying to be both insightful and useful. Of course, I should also not assume that the participants in the study will view their experiences of crying to be positive and helpful. By exploring my identity and personal experiences of crying, I hoped to reduce any preconception of the young men's experience of crying that I might have as a researcher. Throughout the whole research process, I continued to explore my pre-understandings of crying and tearfulness in young men, and where appropriate critically considered these reflexive observations.



## **Chapter 4: Analysis**

### **4.1 Overview of top-level themes**

Within the current chapter I will discuss the analysis of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and then consider the relevance of this to broader theory in the following chapter. In total twenty examples of crying and tearfulness were collected, analysed and used to formulate themes. Seven out of the nine participants offered two examples of crying and tearfulness as suggested, and two of the nine participants (Noah and William) provided three examples. I produced two top-level themes during template analysis, including *Making Sense of an Unexpected Situation* and *Difficulty in Comprehending Crying*. All twenty examples, minus one, were about crying or being tearful due to something unpleasant, unexpected and unwanted. Sam was the only participant to have given an example of crying at an event that was unexpected but desired. Thus, a notable commonality across all of the participants' accounts of crying was the notion of unexpectedness in an event, situation or feeling. This is explored throughout the top-level theme *Making Sense of an Unexpected Situation*, see figure 1 for the final template of themes.

There was some variation between the participants' examples of crying and tearfulness. The theme *Making Sense of an Unexpected Situation* was constructed from those accounts of crying and tearfulness where the participants were more deeply immersed in the emotional situation. The young men within these examples of crying and tearfulness appeared to have cried freely and spent time exploring their feelings related to the unexpected situation. In contrast, *Difficulty in Comprehending Crying* was developed from accounts of crying and tearfulness through which the young men were more critical of the act of crying itself. There was a sense of awareness and reflection on being a man who was crying, as they were unsure as to whether they were doing something abnormal. It made sense to organise the top-level themes in a way that captured this difference and ensured that no aspect of the experience of crying and tearfulness was overlooked or under analysed. It is important to highlight that these two top-level themes, or rather, facets of crying and tearfulness, are not fixed or separate in any concrete

way. When the participants explored their experience of crying and tearfulness they would sometimes draw upon ideas outlined in both of the top-level themes. However, on the whole, the participants' description of crying gravitated towards ideas presented in one of the top-level themes more than the other. As a result, the two top-level themes to some extent differentiated the accounts. The more that the participant was engaged in the emotional situation the less they struggled to understand their act of crying as a man and vice versa.

Another observation that is important to note here was in my ability to analyse, interpret and write about some of the findings. In the second top-level theme I struggled to coherently make sense of the participants' confusion regarding their crying experiences. I believe that this further reflects and emphasises the sense of puzzlement in crying experienced by many of the young men within the study. Furthermore, some of the participants felt relieved after crying and suggested that this experience helped them to deal with the unexpected and unwanted event that had occurred. Others continued to feel as uncomfortable and embarrassed as they did when they were crying. It appeared, therefore, that being in the midst of tears and crying was almost always unpleasant for the participants. However, there was variation in how the young men felt after crying in terms of whether they felt better or worse. Likewise, for some, the experience of crying was neither completely helpful nor completely unpleasant but rather a conflicting experience that was both painful and liberating. Below, I have included a more detailed analysis of each top-level theme introduced here.

Figure 1. Final Template of Themes

1. Making Sense of an Unexpected Situation
  - 1.1. Sense of Shock**
  - 1.2. Intense Emotional Engagement with the Situation**
    - 1.2.1. Embodied Breakdown*
  - 1.3. Release of Emotions**
    - 1.3.1. Discharge of Emotion*
      - 1.3.1.1. Acceptance and Solace*
2. Difficulty in Comprehending Crying
  - 2.1. Crying as a Private Activity**
    - 2.1.1. Crying in Front of Men as Uncomfortable*
    - 2.1.2. Crying as a Positive Form of Communication*
  - 2.2. Crying as a Weakness**
  - 2.3. The Conflicted Nature of Crying**

## 4.2 Making Sense of an Unexpected Situation

This section provides an analysis of the participants' accounts of crying and tearfulness where the emotional situation was at the centre of their lived experience. As these young men described their experience of crying they insightfully explored the nature of their feelings in relation to an unanticipated event or situation that evoked their tears. Crying was therefore an experience of intense emotional feeling, but at the centre of their feeling was the emotional situation. The analysis of these accounts of crying and tearfulness led to the notion that crying is feeling and to cry means to feel, rather than crying being a separate and isolated response to feeling.

There appeared to be a common pattern of features embedded in these accounts of crying and tearfulness. Ideas explored within the low-level themes *Sense of Shock*, *Intense Emotional Engagement with the Situation* and *Release of Emotions* often occurred in a sequential manner and this is illustrated more closely in the analysis of the subthemes below. The experience of crying typically began with a feeling of shock, confusion or denial about an upsetting situation that the participants had recently come to learn about. Following this was the realization that an unwanted and unexpected situation had in fact occurred. It was in the acceptance of this that the participants identified as the point at which they started to cry or be tearful. The young men characterized the moment of beginning to cry as a "breakdown", whereby their feeling of emotions was so raw, absorbing and intense. Upon reaching this point, the young men spent time feeling and exploring their thoughts about the emotional situation or event. This was then followed by what participants described as a *Release of Emotions* by which they let go unpleasant feelings or moved towards feelings of solace and resolution. This pattern was consistent in all of the accounts that focused on the emotional situation; nonetheless some of the ideas explored in the subthemes were experienced more intensely for some of the participants than they were for others. Additionally, some participants would often move back and forth and thus it was not a clear-cut linear process.

Furthermore, in these accounts of crying and tearfulness participants indicated that crying had involved a frequent shift between different intensities of feeling. From being in shock, to accepting an emotional situation and breaking down, participants go from not knowing how to feel to then experiencing an intense awareness of their emotions. But also, participants move away from feelings of unpleasantness, despair and turmoil towards a place of emotional discharge or emotional control. Each of the low-level themes, therefore, captures the shifting nature of feeling in the lived experience of crying and tearfulness for these young men. Moreover, the shifting nature identified here reveals that the experience of feeling when crying is chaotic, intense and constantly changing.

### **Sense of Shock**

Prior to crying, all of the participants identified a feeling of shock at an event or situation that had recently occurred. There was a sense of confusion and difficulty comprehending what had happened or how to feel. This revealed that the situation related to crying and tearfulness was always unanticipated. The unexpectedness of the event or situation was apparent across all accounts of crying; regardless of whether it was desired or unwished for. All but one young man spoke about the emotional situation related to crying as something that was unwanted and therefore the focus of analysis will be on these accounts. In addition to being unanticipated, the emotional situation connected to crying was always something relatively life changing such as a death of a loved one, relationship breakdown or a change in lifestyle. The theme *Sense of shock* explores the moment between learning about an unwanted and unexpected situation and the point of crying. During this time, these young men felt stunned, emotionless and immobile.

Upon finding out that his grandfather had passed away James described being in a state of emotional numbness:

*I didn't have a clue what was happening because nobody told me, nobody let me know and I was just, to start with there was no emotion whatsoever, I was just blank, nothing, erm and everybody thought I was alright.*

The news of losing a loved one was so unexpected for participants like James that his emotional response to the situation was somewhat suspended. There was a sense of feeling dazed and confused as he struggled to make sense of or comprehend the situation. In the quote below, Harry characterized this experience as becoming numb and expressionless. When he found out that his grandmother had died he stated he was in "complete shock" to such an extent that he did not feel fully alive:

*Completely expressionless, erh erm no smile, no frown, erm literally your face just completely relaxed, erm wide eyes barely blinking no tears, calm breathing literally as if you are almost as if you are dead but obviously breathing.*

Harry's experience of shock was so overwhelming that it took over his whole body. He spoke of being very still, collected and composed but in a way that was devoid of any feeling or emotion. For participants such as James and Harry, the sense of shock that they felt at the situation of losing a loved one was incredibly intense and absorbing. It stunned them to such an extent that they felt unable to move or feel. However, for some young men, the *Sense of shock* experienced before crying differed from a state of physical and emotional numbness. Instead, some of the participants struggled to accept and come to terms with the fact that the unwanted event had actually occurred. William, for example, was aware of the extent to which his father was unwell. Yet he did not conceive that something so unfortunate like the death of a father would ever happen to him:

*The first thing was pure shock, like we'd knew he was ill we know he was kind of going, but it was still erm (.) that doesn't happen to me kind of thing I was in that mind set I guess, and yeah I think the first thing was the sheer shock the "no no that can't be my dad".*

The quote above suggests that for some participants such as William, the death of a loved one was so unwanted that there was a disbelief in it ever actually happening. This emphasises the shock he experienced because it was something that he had not extensively considered or prepared for. The fact that William did not believe his father would pass away also indicates a sense of hope for his recovery. Therefore, upon learning about his father's passing, William struggled to accept and process the permanence of the situation. As a result, his experience

of shock was also one of denial. In the following quote, Joshua identified feeling in shock when his girlfriend informed him that she no longer wanted to be in a relationship. However, similar to William, Joshua did not immediately accept that what was happening at the time was permanent as he had hope that he could resolve his relationship with her:

*She decided to end it erm I was very very very surprised because it appeared to be going somewhere, so I was quite sort of shocked and upset. My immediate sort of reaction to it when she told me, she told me by text, which was great ((laughs)) but erm my immediate reaction was confusion and perhaps attempts at persuasion to reconsider.*

Joshua's quote evidences again that the participants' experience of shock was associated with the fact that they did not anticipate the event that had recently taken place. However, there was also a reluctance to believe or accept the reality of the situation. It seems, therefore, that the shock experienced prior to crying encompasses two different aspects. In one of these, there is an emotional and physical numbness through which participants are unable to engage with their feelings as a result of the situation being unexpected. Whereas, in the other aspect, participants are in a state of disbelief as they struggle to face up to and accept the reality of the unwanted situation. Either way, all of these participants had not yet fully processed what had happened or engaged with their feelings related to the emotional situation.

### **Intense Emotional Engagement with the Situation**

In a *Sense of Shock* participants had recently learnt about an unwanted and unanticipated situation but had not yet begun to cry. These young men were unable to fully process what had happened due to a feeling of emotional or physical numbness or an unwillingness to accept a situation. *Intense Emotional Engagement with the Situation* captures what it was like for these young men to start crying and to be in the midst of tears. Participants described the moment they began to cry as something that was connected to their acceptance of the permanence and reality of the unexpected and unwanted situation. As a result, these young men were deeply engaged in the emotional situation that influenced their experience of crying and tearfulness.

In the following quote, Joshua contemplates the moment he started to cry in two of his examples of crying and tearfulness:

*I can't quite remember how I heard the news in the first one (.) someone on Facebook or something. So you sort of my immediate reaction "is that true you know I hope it's not," you don't want that news to be true. And with this second there is an element of "can I change her mind does this have to be it?" So almost maybe the crying came when I realize or after I realized it was definitely true in both cases. I realized with the first one obviously this it is true and it is really sad, realizing with the second one that there is no erm sort of away around it.*

Once the shock had faded, participants like Joshua began to reflect upon the situation. In doing this the realization that something unwanted had occurred started to sink in. As a result, participants were able to engage with how they felt because they were able to process and make sense of what had happened. This suggests that the point at which participants began to cry was interwoven with two features. One being the recognition of the reality and permanence of the situation and the other being the moment participants began to feel and react emotionally towards the situation. This is observed in the quote below by which William described his experience of crying when his father passed away:

*I think erm, I guess the first thing was probably just the initial shock, kind of like yeah I don't want to say it but it was like "shit my dad is dead" kind of thing. Erm and then and kind of and every time you tell yourself that it kind of gets worse erm (.) and yeah the instantaneous it was just kind of sheer shock and realization what had happened or what I had just witnessed. And the more I guess the more that went on the more I thought about sort of seeing him the night before and then kind of as horrible as it is seeing him in that same bed but imagining him dead. And then but then that went on to kind of your happy memories and then that only makes you kind of sadder because you know there not going to happen again.*

William's quote suggests that once he had come to terms with the death of his father he started to reflect and contemplate the consequences of the situation. William spoke about memories of his father, both of a painful and happy nature, of when he was alive but also processing the idea of him no longer being in this world. In reflection on these memories, William explored how they made him feel at the time of crying. His description of this suggests that he was in an intense



cycle of thinking and feeling about the death of his father. The more participants thought about the unwanted situation the more they felt and vice versa. In the midst of crying, participants were therefore in constant evaluation and reflection of the emotional situation. Thus, crying for these participants was a chaotic experience of feeling that centred upon the unanticipated situation.

### Embodied Breakdown

Often, participants would use the term “broke down” “break down” or “breaking down” when trying to describe how they began to cry. The idea of crying as a breakdown therefore appeared to capture something important about the experience of crying for these young men. The word “breakdown” implies disintegration and a crumbling of something. It suggests what was once whole and together is now fragmented and in pieces. In the next quote Liam described himself as breaking down when he realized that his girlfriend had decided that she wanted to end their relationship:

*She wanted to leave me but she wasn't sure, so I went outside, I said think about it and when I come back in let me know. I went outside had a cigarette and I just broke down, cried, because I saw her crying and I knew the answer, I knew what she was going to say.*

When I asked Liam to explore in more detail how exactly he was crying he described a shift in his experience of feeling. He suggested that before crying he felt very little whereas when he began to cry his experience of emotions was poignant and intense. This brings us back to the idea explored above in which crying occurs at the point that the participant began to process the reality of the situation, such as the ending of a romantic relationship, and consequently or simultaneously became incredibly emotional:

*It was like it was like someone had got a bottle upside down, there was nothing, but then somebody removed the cap and there was (.) yeah. I was angry, angry at myself for pushing her away erm I was just er yeah in pieces you know I put everything into her into our relationship.*

Liam's quote highlights a change in the intensity of feeling that is experienced when crying. The idea of crying as a “breakdown” therefore captures the shifting

nature of feeling experienced when these participants began cry. When in shock, they described the self as still, numb and with little emotion. Then as the reality of the situation began to sink in, the participants started to feel and consequently started to cry. Thus, the phrase "breakdown" that is used by many of these participants describes a change in the nature of their emotions. As a result, there is a shift from no feeling or feeling very little to a state of full emotionality that comes when the participants begin to let go or no longer attempt to control or change the situation. Their intense feeling of emotion is thus connected to their acceptance of the unwanted situation. Furthermore, Liam suggests that he was "in pieces" when he realized his relationship had ended which I believe emphasises the physicality of the crying experience. It shows that crying is an experience that is both physical and emotional, where the individual can no longer remain as composed or without feeling. Combined, both *Intense Emotional Engagement with the Situation* and *Embodied Breakdown* illustrates that for these participants crying was an experience of intense embodied feeling.

## **Release of Emotions**

After having cried participants would sometimes state that that they experienced a "release of emotion". For many of the participants, this implied a *Discharge of Emotion*, through which the unpleasant emotional tension that was present prior to the crying episode or during the crying episode was released via the experience of crying. These participants shifted to a more positive emotional state after crying in which they felt calm, in control and generally free of emotional discomfort. Every single participant who engaged in their emotions related to the unwanted and unexpected situation identified a feeling of emotional release and discharge.

### Discharge of Emotion

Before crying Liam explained that he had been in a state of unhappiness for a long period of time:

*I am thinking it's probably something to do with the er the action of it, the fact that you are expelling your tears, you are expelling your cry, the sound of crying, and it's like you almost releasing this tension this weight this er cloud of something that has caused you this unhappiness.*

Through the experience of crying participants like Liam were able to let go of emotions of a painful nature. Crying therefore appeared to facilitate a feeling of release in which participants were relieved from the emotional discomfort that was present prior to crying. As a result, there is something about the bodily experience and action of crying that allowed these young men to discharge their emotional tension. Noah was another participant who like Liam was able to release his unpleasant emotions via crying:

*I think it was the best way to vent out these emotions because before I had just sort of, I don't know, I was a bit catatonic really, so from after that it was the first time I had kind of been outwards in expressing anything in regards to that so I thought it was a bit of a milestone.*

Noah identified that he had not necessary explored how he felt about his mother's death for a long time. He further explained that the experience of crying enabled him to release those emotions that he had not recently engaged with. This reveals a relationship between *Intense Emotional Engagement with the Situation* and *Release of Emotions*. Through the act of crying, Noah was immersed in emotions regarding his mother's passing and a result of this intense emotional feeling Noah experienced a sense of emotional release. Crying, therefore, enabled participants like Noah to explore and engage in their feelings, as well as let go of and release them. A *Discharge of Emotion* shows how the act of crying, in terms of being immersed in emotion allowed participants to release emotional tension that had been present in their lives for a long time prior to the crying episode. However, Pete's account of crying showed that even though he experienced a release of unpleasant emotion he was still unable to fully resolve the situation that had evoked his tears:

*By crying it was cathartic and it would be a natural way of releasing emotions so in that sense I would say it is helpful but I suppose conversely you could consider it problematic in the sense if it is an issue that isn't resolvable you know in my second example a lot of it was to do with questions of identity, independence and who I wanted to be you know things that aren't easier resolvable if you know you have cried over that situation it could be problematic in the sense you think well it is clearly a very big issue for me something that is very personal to my life if I am crying over it and it is a situation I can't resolve it is quite possible that I'll in the future I'll have similar emotions again.*

Pete's quote illustrates that despite not resolving the emotional situation, he was still able to experience a liberating release of emotions. A *Discharge of Emotion* therefore appears to be a core part of the lived experience of crying for many of the participants. Pete identified that crying uncovered some important issues regarding his sense of identity and choice of lifestyle. This shows that a deep engagement with emotions that is experienced when crying can shed light and uncover to an individual an unpleasant truth about themselves or a situation. By crying, Pete was able to engage with some of these issues that had been troubling him and as a result he experienced a release of emotion tension. However, these issues were not easily resolvable and so Pete feared that crying uncovered something that would increase his emotional pain in the future.

### Acceptance and Solace

In addition to a Discharge of Emotion, a few of the participants explained that they felt a sense of *Acceptance and Solace* with the emotional situation after crying. In the following quote, Joshua stated that in both of his examples of crying (when his high school teacher passed away and when his girlfriend ended their relationship) he experienced a sense of acceptance with that had happened:

*I kind of felt a bit more again that kind of acceptance came with the or well after the crying, I think so that's probably not a coincidence both occasions that kind of acceptance. Again it's already there to some extent, but I feel like after I have cried about them I was more willing to accept it and erm get on with it I guess. The next morning I did normal things, spoke to people, did some exercise, got on with some work and it wasn't disrupted. I felt I was sad about it I was still very sad and not necessarily less sad than I was before just more able to move on.*

The following day after crying Joshua still felt a deep sadness about his girlfriend breaking up with him. However, he was able to go about his day as normal. He explained that crying somehow helped him to shift from feeling painfully sad to a degree of acceptance about the unanticipated and unwanted situation. In doing so, crying allowed him to process his feelings in a way that was not limiting or inhibitory to his being. This further shows that for some participants like Joshua a release of emotion does not imply a complete removal of those emotions of an unpleasant nature. But rather, there is a shift from a chaotic experience of

emotions to an emotional experience that is controlled. After crying these participants therefore moved away from an experience that was intense and painful to something where they felt calmer, clearer and more able to accept what had happened.

### **4.3 Difficulty in Comprehending Crying**

All of the participants within the study identified a widespread societal opinion that positioned crying as unmanly. The extent to which the participants' accounts focused on this dissonant relationship between crying and masculinity differed considerably. Some of the participants were aware of the perception of crying and masculinity as incompatible but gave more attention to how they felt in relation to the unwanted and unexpected situation. Whereas, for other participants, the societal perception of crying as unmanly appeared to have a much greater influence on their experience of crying and tearfulness. It is these accounts that are the focus of analysis here, however it is important to acknowledge that some of the themes discussed in this section are relevant to other accounts of crying and tearfulness such as those explored in *Making Sense of an Unexpected Situation*. For many of these participants there was also a degree of uncertainty as to whether or not they themselves believed crying to be unmanly. They were conflicted between their own experience of crying and tearfulness and the perception of crying as a man held by others and wider society. These young men therefore struggled to understand or make sense of crying and how they felt because they were unsure whether their emotional response was abnormal, or a natural and human way of being. The low-level themes below take a closer look into those accounts by which the lived experience of crying and tearfulness felt incredibly confusing and uncomfortable.

#### **Crying as a Private Activity**

In addition to an overarching perception of crying as unmanly, participants also identified a preference or an expectation to cry alone in a private environment. These participants felt as though they were not allowed to cry in public because it was perceived as abnormal and atypical for men to engage in emotional behaviour. As a result, there was a sense of discomfort in the experience of crying in the company of others. However, at the same time some of the participants found that crying in public was a helpful way of communicating their true feelings. This revealed ambivalence about the value of crying in front of others; therefore, the restrictions on men crying in public were to some extent open to negotiation. This theme explores how the opinion or expectation of *Crying as a Private Activity*

in men appeared to interact with the participants' lived experience of crying and tearfulness in the presence of others.

### Crying in Front of Men as Uncomfortable

Some of the participants identified a struggle to cry comfortably and freely in a public environment, but especially in the presence of men. Regardless of whether these men were their father, brother or close friends, many of the participants were unwilling to cry in their company. These participants would often attempt to stop themselves from crying in front of other men, as they believed the environment was not accepting of their tears. This theme therefore highlights how crying in front of men felt particularly difficult.

Lucas became tearful upon hearing about his grandmother's stroke however when his father entered the room he quickly forced himself to stop crying:

*Because I was around my dad I was like no way I can let my dad see me cry ((laughs)) that is not going to happen. So it was suck it up and pull yourself together. So yeah, I was probably on the brink, if I was on my own I probably would have burst out into tears.*

In the presence of his father Lucas restrained the urge to cry, feel or be emotional. The phrase "suck it up and pull yourself together," suggested that by crying Lucas felt as though he had overreacted or was being irrational. The notion of pulling himself together therefore appears to be at the opposite of those participants who described the experience of crying as breaking down. Instead of exploring how he felt about his grandmother's stroke Lucas tried to remain poised and avoided any display of emotion in front of his father. Participants like Lucas felt able to be emotional and cry freely in a private environment but not with other men. As a result, there appeared to be something about the environment created by the presence of his father that made crying in front of him terribly uncomfortable:

*He'd spent 24 years in the RAF so he was sort of conditioned in a way to just get on with things you know, crying never solved anything being down never solved it you know just get on with things. So that's kind of how he tried to bring me up in the best way possible you know, it doesn't matter if it's upsetting angry whatever you just have to try and get on*

*with it. So I thought if he sees me crying he'll think I'm not dealing with it, I'm not getting on with it.*

Lucas did not wish to cry in front of his father because of the view that crying was an inefficient way for men to deal with their emotions or a traumatic situation. It also showed that being emotionally expressive or outward was often discouraged in front of other men. Lucas felt as though he had to remain calm and controlled, and silently and solemnly deal with his feelings regarding his grandmother's stroke. Many of the participants, therefore, stopped themselves from crying. However, some of the participants were unable to successfully reduce their tears, and as a result explained how unpleasant it was to cry in the presence of men. In both of his examples of crying James described his experience of crying in front of other men as unnatural and uncomfortable. When I asked him to explore what it was about crying in the presence of men that was difficult, he further emphasised the idea that crying was not typically seen as the manly way of handling a situation:

*Males don't accept it as acceptable behaviour really it's more of a "no you don't do that" and I am the same if it was one of my mates and a guy came up to me crying I would be like "dude just stop" because it's just the way you deal with things as men. But crying in front females I don't have any issue with that I am fine with that.*

Crying became increasingly incongruent or incompatible with masculinity in the presence of men. When in front of other men, the participants appeared to be reminded of the rules and expectations regarding the meaning of being a man, which did not include crying or tearfulness. Failure to stop oneself from crying resulted in an incredibly uncomfortable and awkward experience for these young men. Pete argued that the widespread view of masculinity limits the extent to which men can cry and be emotionally expressive in front of one another:

*I think erm, largely the westernised view would be that men have to sort of put on a façade of masculinity and bravado in order to achieve that, crying would go against that, and I think a lot of men sort of myself included often erm we pent up a lot of frustrations and emotions, and don't feel as if we can maybe discuss them openly, certainly not with each other any way, I think men who have partners can.*



The idea of there being a particular perception of how men should behave in order to be masculine is something all of the participants spoke of. When Pete said, "put on a façade of masculinity," it suggested that the attributes and characteristics of what society deems as masculine are not how he sees his real self. Instead, masculinity to Pete, and many of the other participants, was almost like a costume or performance of manliness that they felt that had to embody especially when they were in front of men. As a consequence of this societal view of crying as unmanly, Pete admitted that he avoids crying, being emotional, or any emotional engagement with other men. The preference to cry in a private setting therefore may be due to the expectation to do so. This theme shows how participants felt unable to cry comfortably in the presence of men because crying is not deemed as traditionally masculine. The fact that men felt able to cry freely in front of women shows that acting masculine and unemotional was not necessary in front of women. There is not enough data to identify the reason for this; nevertheless, it illustrates that masculinity was mostly important in front of men. This suggests that masculinity is about proving oneself and therefore, not crying in the presence of men is about proving one's masculine status. Due to this, any display of emotion that occurs in the presence of other men such as crying becomes particularly shameful, awkward and embarrassing.

### Crying as a Positive Form of Communication

There was ambivalence in the participants' experience of crying in front of others. As explored above, some of the young men found the experience to be highly unpleasant whereas other young men saw value in being able to show others how they truly felt. Crying in the presence of others, man or woman, as a result was never desired, though on some occasions the participants were actually grateful to be seen crying. The lived experience of crying was often still uncomfortable, unpleasant and restrained. However, the act of crying seemed to communicate to these loved ones something that the participants felt unable to do verbally. This theme, therefore, looks at the positive interpersonal aspect of crying in front of others who were understanding and emotionally supportive. Furthermore, this theme reflects a sense of conflict and confusion in some of the participants' experience of crying as it was seen as both unpleasant and beneficial.

Crying in front of his father enabled Pete to convey nonverbally the truth about the extent to which he no longer wished to play for his football team:

*I felt like it was probably a good thing to cry in front of my dad because then he could then see how at the age of nineteen or twenty I felt quite emotional about erm erm my sport. He could then see, understood and recognise how much I had committed to it and how much little enjoyment I was getting out of it.*

Although he did not wish to cry in front of other men in case this meant criticism as 'unmanly, here Pete felt that crying had given him something positive – the opportunity to communicate. Thus, during crying there was still a degree of discomfort and shame but afterwards he was glad to have been able to express his true feelings to his father. Furthermore, Sam was another participant who preferred to deal with emotional issues independently. However, he was appreciative of his mother being present when he cried:

*I don't like putting my burden onto other people. If I am struggling or a bit upset I like to be able to fix them myself, but in that situation I was just I had no idea what was going on. It shocked me so much that I wasn't thinking straight and then my mum had to fix it for me. So in that case I am kind of thankful for crying it worked out well.*

Sam explained that by crying in front of his mother she was able help him to move past what had happened, which he felt unable to do alone. Both Pete and Sam's quote show that feelings of discomfort in crying in front of others, even men, can change during or after the experience of crying. Due to the dissonant relationship between crying and masculinity most of the participants felt uncomfortable crying in front of others especially other men. They either predicted a negative reaction or they themselves felt as though they were doing something wrong and unmanly. However, Pete and Sam's experience of crying and tearfulness show that the actual reaction of those in the environment also interacts with how the participants felt during and after their experience of crying. As a result, participants began to view crying in a different and more positive light. Crying, therefore, was not solely seen as an unmanly way of acting but also as a positive and efficient way to show others how they truly felt. William was another participant who like Sam received emotional support from those who were with him when he was crying about the death of his father:

*Yeah it was nice it put a kind of (.) a kind of softener on it I guess because (.) it was the fact that they said to me it is okay to cry as well so that made me feel kind of I guess better about not only the situation but how I reacted. I think I think I was almost upset about being upset as well so yeah to be in that environment was really really comforting yeah just quite soothing and yeah and I don't know how you would say it but just cushioning what had happened.*

William began to cry again when he and his mother arrived at a family friend's house. These individuals told him that there was nothing wrong with him crying, he suggested that it was because of this that he felt less critical of crying. William's experience of crying in front of others shows how sensitive these young men were to the environment in which they cried. Crying in the presence of those who were emotionally supportive reduced their negative perception of crying. Upon feeling less critical William hinted that he was able to cry more freely. His feelings of anger towards crying faded in a way that would seem he was able to engage more comfortably with his feeling and emotions related to his father's death. Crying alone or with those who had no issue with the participant being a man who was crying seemed to allow a greater engagement with their feelings related to the emotional situation. This theme shows that the reaction of others influenced the young men's overall experience of crying, thus, views on crying in relation to masculinity appeared to be mutually negotiated.

### **Crying as a Weakness**

Although crying was sometimes perceived as a beneficial form of communication, many of the young men identified a feeling of weakness and inadequacy as they explored the incongruence between crying and masculinity. The perception of crying as a sign of weakness in men appeared to threaten and reduce their sense of masculinity. The analysis below revealed that connected to their experience of weakness was the feeling of being overly emotional, a loss of control and immaturity. This theme therefore illustrated that there are certain qualities such as rationality and control that are embedded in the notion of masculinity. However, crying seemed to symbolize the opposite of these things. As a result, the young man's experience of crying was one by which they felt unmanly but also weak, inferior and embarrassed.

When I asked Noah what he meant by feeling “weak” he explained that crying was associated with being upset, overly emotional and irrational, which were not qualities that others valued in men:

*I think it was because it indicated that I was upset, and because it showed that in the moment it time it showed that I was definitely not like I wasn't capable of rational thought maybe, I don't know it's weird. I just see it as maybe I was too emotional then and I was being a nuisance maybe ((laughs)).*

This sense of weakness experienced by Noah and many of the other participants was interwoven with the realization they were feeling sad or upset. These participants felt weak for crying because of the fact they were being emotional or feeling emotions of a negative nature. This further revealed that being emotional was not something these participants felt at ease or comfortable doing. By saying “I was being a nuisance” suggests that Noah believed he was making the situation worse by crying. The feeling of weakness also shows how degrading the experience of crying was and how small and negative it made participants feel. Another reason as to why participants felt weak for crying was linked to a loss of emotional control:

*You kind of feel quite weak as well, not by being less masculine, just be I guess by crying in general, I guess it makes you feel because you, I guess, because I felt like I lost control as if I am not strong enough to control my own emotions.*

Many of the participants spoke of the idea that all men must be controlled beings who show little emotion. However, crying was often experienced as something that was not consciously initiated or chosen. Also, participants were not always successful in their attempt to stop crying. The involuntary and uncontrollable nature of crying therefore was embedded in the feeling of weakness for these participants. Crying made these young men feel as though they did not have the strength or power to control their feelings. In addition to feeling a loss of control, many of the participants identified that their experience of weakness was connected to a feeling of immaturity:

*I was quite ashamed of crying because you know I was nineteen twenty at uni, and I felt I shouldn't be so upset about it but it just felt like a climax,*

*that's my that's my that's it I am not going to play football with them any more.*

Pete realized that he no longer wanted to play for a team that did not appreciate the years of hard work and training that he had committed. He also felt that a man of his age who was studying in higher education should not be crying or acting emotionally. Many of the participants felt that crying was something only children or babies do, thus they felt immature and juvenile. The notion of immaturity, therefore, was connected to many of the participants' perception of masculinity and their feeling of unmanliness. *Crying as a Weakness* shows how belittling the experience of crying was for these participants. It made them doubt their sense of maturity or how emotionally strong and in control they were. In the following quote, Noah demonstrated that the weakness he felt when crying was directly linked to his sense of masculinity:

*I also assumed that there was this whole archetype to be this real man you must be like this sort of strong protector almost who doesn't show any kind of weakness otherwise everything might fall a part in the sense I know in todays society it is okay to cry and it is but I would just feel as I would be weak if I started crying.*

Like many of the participants, Noah felt unmanly and weak for crying even though he believed society had become accepting of men crying. Furthermore, Noah's idea of a "real man" indicates that there are many different types of men in which some are considered truly manly or masculine and others are not. Noah's experience illustrates a degree of freedom for men to cry and be emotional however it also shows that many of the negative connotations associated with crying still exist. Due to this many of the participants believed that they were immature, had no control or were being overly emotional. Crying affected how these young men perceived themselves in terms of their status as a man as well as their overall sense of self. Crying made them feel inadequate and inferior as though they were failing at being "real" men. As a result, they battled with the act of crying as a man rather than how they felt about the emotional situation that evoked their tears.

## The Conflicted Nature of Crying

For many of the participants the lived experience of crying and tearfulness was conflicted. On the one hand these young men felt ashamed for crying because they believed that they were doing something unmanly and weak. But on the other hand, they argued that crying was a natural, normal and an essential part of being human. This theme, therefore, explores the ambivalence in some of the participants' experience crying, as something was perceived as unmanly but also as a natural human quality. Furthermore, due to this conflict, participants struggled to make sense of crying and were confused as to whether they were responding appropriately to an event that had occurred.

Throughout the analysis of a *Difficulty in Comprehending Crying* the participants identified a number of ways in which they felt unable to cry comfortably or freely. They stated that crying in public, in front of men, as an adult or due to feeling negative emotions all as contexts where crying in men is especially frowned upon by society. In addition, many of the participants suggested that the only time they feel able to cry publically is when there had been a life or death situation or atrocity of some kind. As a result, crying in any context that was not alone or with a romantic partner left many of the young men feeling terribly weak and ashamed. However, the participants also believed that it was only natural to cry if they were feeling sad or upset:

*I remember being annoyed at myself for being upset, and because that was me thinking that about myself I guess I kind of still feel that, but like I said I still have the other side of the coin that you know that your dad just died it's fine to cry.*

William was angry at the fact he was sad and crying. However, he also felt as though his experience of sadness and crying was normal considering the circumstance of his father's passing. William was conflicted between the way in which a man should react and his natural response to the death of his father. As a man William felt that he should not have been crying in public or feeling sadness but what he naturally felt was the very opposite. Thus, in the experience of crying and tearfulness participants like William battled between acting manly and how they naturally felt. Moreover, due to this conflict, participants such as William

struggled to understand and make sense of their crying experience. They were unsure whether or not they were being irrational and overreacting or whether their emotional reaction was normal and natural in relation to how they felt and what had happened. Harry was another participant whose experience of crying and tearfulness was conflicted:

*Well crying is associated with weakness and weakness is associated with lesser, if you are a human crying you are lesser of a human. And the fact is emotions are fine and normal, and if you are crying you are more of a human, emotions are there, if you resist crying you are not human you become a robot yeah. Emotions make us more human.*

Harry's quote revealed the extent to which the belief or perception of crying as a weakness can impact a man's sense of self-worth. However, Harry argued that crying and the expression of emotions is not weak. He believed that crying is evidence that a person, man or woman, is feeling and is emotional. It is this sense of emotionality that Harry and other participants claimed was at the very core of being human. Thus, crying for these participants was intrinsically connected to being human because it was an experience of feeling and emotion. Likewise, another way in which crying was characterized as a natural human quality was in terms of it being an involuntary bodily instinct:

*I think it's probably quite different to laughter for instance, but erm when something makes you laugh, and even though it shouldn't make you laugh the laughter itself still feels natural you know, what I mean it is a natural thing to do rather than a choice, so I think even if it was an uncomfortable situation or something or I didn't want to be crying it would still feel natural you know, what I am saying it was a natural thing.*

In the quote above Joshua reasoned that like laughing, crying is an involuntary response that we do not always have conscious control over. He seemed to suggest that individuals cry and laugh in situations that are not considered acceptable or normal but that this does not mean that they are not a human quality. Participants were fighting against how they naturally felt because of the perception that "real" men do not cry. The discomfort and conflict that these participants experienced when crying was thus influenced by the societal perception that crying is unmanly. Many of the participants therefore struggled to comprehend their experience of crying due to the conflict and confusion in terms

of what it meant to cry. Thus, at the same time as feeling weak and unmanly, the participants believed that crying was a natural human quality to which they had the same right as anybody else to experience.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This is the first time to my knowledge that an understanding of the lived experience of young men's crying has been offered. On some occasions, crying was an experience in which the participants were immersed in emotion evoked by an unwanted and unexpected situation. Whereas, at other times, the participants felt ashamed of losing control and acting emotionally thus they attempted to restrict or even stop their tears. For the most part, there was little middle ground between these different experiences of crying and tearfulness in young men, they were generally either engaged in the emotional situation or focused more critically on the perception they were acting unmanly. As a result, there appeared to be an interactional relationship between these different experiences of crying and tearfulness reported by the participants. When a young man engaged with his feelings and emotions related to the situation that made him tearful he had very little concern regarding his sense of masculinity or how he appeared to others. However, when the participant felt unmanly and embarrassed for crying he was unable or unwilling to explore how the situation made him feel emotionally. The young men's exploration of emotion and feeling was thus limited or restricted by the notion that were weak, irrational and unmanly. The findings, therefore, suggest that in order for these young men to have understood what they were crying about they needed to feel comfortable in the action of crying itself. It became incredibly difficult or almost impossible for the young men to explore how they felt if they were unable to accept that they were a feeling and emotional being.

In attempting to learn about crying in men, existing research has concentrated heavily on drawing comparisons with women's crying. Past literature has focused on the observations that men cry less frequently, for a shorter duration and with less intensity than women (Vingerhoets & Schiers, 2000). Based on these findings, previous research portrays crying in men as being a lesser experience compared to crying in women. The majority of past research has thus used quantitative measurements to identify and categories the similarities and differences in men and women's crying. As a result, the meaning and value of crying for young men has received limited attention. By adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the current study has been able to explore how crying is made sense

of by young men and what meaning it holds to them. The value of the crying experience depended greatly upon the context in which the young men cried, many of the participants felt better, worse or a mix of both after crying. The current findings are therefore in support Bylsma, Vingerhoets & Rottenberg's (2008) research that shows crying can have both positive and negative outcomes depending on the context in which one cries. Nonetheless, the interview accounts uncovered that crying was often an experience that enabled some of the young men to release or discharge emotions of an unpleasant and painful nature. When crying the young men were sometimes able to work through their emotional difficulties and find resolution or acceptance in something that had been troubling them. Many of the participants characterized the experience of crying as a breakthrough moment where they were able to move forward with a greater sense of positivity. This is an important finding of the current study, which offers an alternative understanding to existing research of the different ways young men interpret and experience crying.

## **5.1 Examining theory in the light of the current findings**

Within this section I will present a critical analysis of the current findings in relation to existing theoretical explanations of crying and tearfulness. I will give particular focus to Vingerhoets, Bylsma & Rottenberg's (2009) model of adult crying as this offers a comprehensive exploration of the different theoretical positions that were examined in chapter one. By reviewing the current findings alongside existing theory I hope to provide further insight into the phenomenon of crying and tearfulness as well as shed light on the value of adopting a phenomenological methodology.

The understanding of the relationship between crying and affectivity derived from the current study differs to that offered by existing literature. In their biopsychosocial model of adult crying, Vingerhoets, Bylsma & Rottenberg (2009) explain that the appraisal of an external situation leads to a specific set of emotions, and programmed within these emotions is a set of different responses such as crying. Crying is thus seen as symptom that occurs as a result of an

individual being in a particular emotional state. Yet, when asked to speak about their lived experience of crying and tearfulness, many of the participants centred on their experience of feeling that had been evoked by an unwanted and unexpected situation. During the analysis of interview transcripts, it became difficult to separate or distinguish between crying, feeling and emotion. Crying did not appear to simply be a physiological response to feeling but rather an intense emotional and embodied form of feeling. This coincides with Sartre's (1939/1971) argument that emotions are the consciousness of feeling and that feeling is always related to something in the world. The lived experience of crying for many of the young men was an exploration of feelings directed towards a personally meaningful event such as the death of a loved one or ending of a romantic relationship. The biopsychosocial model conceptualises adult crying as an expression of feeling in which it is seen as a physiological or behavioural manifestation of internal emotion. Instead, the current study argues against this and proposes that crying is the experience of emotional consciousness and feeling itself. For the participants in the study crying was an embodied way of reacting and engaging with the unwanted situation that occurred within the world. The findings therefore also illustrate Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) notion of embodiment, in which emotional consciousness is argued to be embedded in the body. Furthermore, some of the young men shifted from different intensities of feeling during their crying experience: from feeling very little due to the shock of the unexpected event, to an intense experience of deep emotion accompanied by the tears to finally the release and discharge of emotion. This research shows that the experience of crying for these participants was thus a complex, shifting and embodied experience of feeling rather than a fixed linear process of appraisal, emotion and crying.

Past research has shown that crying is often evoked by events relating to loss such as the ending of romantic relationship or death of a loved one (Vingerhoets, Van Geleuken, Van Tilburg & Van Heck, 1997). In accordance with this, young men within this study also reported crying in response to these real-life situations. However, the current research highlighted that the events which prompted crying were often unwanted and unexpected. This was a common theme throughout the participant's accounts of crying and appeared core to the experience of crying for these young men. Many of the participants did not anticipate the event that

occurred or neither did they wish for it to happen. The unexpectedness of the event meant that the participants experienced an overwhelming sense of shock and emotional numbness prior to being tearful. Likewise, due to the event being unwanted, the nature of the young men's feelings was painful and intense. Past studies have found that antecedents that are not unexpected or unwanted; music and film or joyous events such as weddings can also evoke tears (Vingerhoets, Boelhouwer, Van Tilburg & Van Heck, 2001). The event as unexpected and unwanted thus does not appear to be an essential quality of crying. Nevertheless, the current findings demonstrate that an individual's lived experience of crying and tearfulness may be sensitive to the nature of the antecedent that evoked their tears. As previously mentioned, one version of masculinity promotes men being in control (MacArthur & Shields, 2015) however the unexpectedness of the event challenged this as the young men did not anticipate the situation or prepare for it. The participants were unable to do anything to change the situation which may have contributed to their feeling of a lack of control. The findings therefore suggest a possible link between the unexpected nature of the antecedent and the feeling of unmanliness in the experience of crying and tearfulness for these young men. As a result, the participants' experience of unmanliness appeared to be connected to their lack of being in control.

It has been long understood by many researchers that crying occurs due to one's cognitive appraisal of an antecedent or external event (Ellis, 1994; Vingerhoets, Bylsma & Rottenberg, 2009). According to Arnold (1960) this process involves an individual evaluating the objective situation and assigning it a label that characterizes it for what it is such as unfair or threatening. Nesse (1990) explains different appraisals lead to different emotions and within these emotions exist a set of various behavioural, experiential and physiological responses such as crying. The findings from the current study suggest that crying occurred as a result of some level of reflection however this differs to the mainstream view of appraisal. The participants' reflection of the emotional situation was found to be a part of the crying experience whereas the mainstream understanding of appraisal positions it as something that is separate from crying. The participants in the current study cried when the shock of the unexpected event had faded and they began to accept that something undesired had happened. At the same time of processing the reality of this unfortunate event, the participants also explored how

it made them feel and contemplated what it meant for them. The participants, therefore, appeared to have cried or shed tears during the process of interpreting the meaning of the event that had taken place. This further demonstrates Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) notion of phenomenological perception, he argued that meaning is embedded in our perception of the world. He explains that an individual cannot stand outside of a situation and appraise it objectively solely through their senses. However, the mainstream understanding indicates that appraisal is distinctively separate from the situation or event as well as the feelings evoked by it. The findings from the current study suggest that the participants' reflection of the situation was inextricably linked with their own subjective perception or meaning of it. Furthermore, the feelings that the participants experienced when crying were evoked by their own personal interpretation of the significance of the event. These findings as a result further challenge the mainstream view of the relationship between appraisal and crying. They uncover a need to broaden the theoretical understanding of appraisal regarding its relation to the situation that prompted the young men to cry and feel emotional.

Psychoanalytic researchers suggest that crying offers a sense of emotional release and in turn an improved mood (Koestler, 1989; Breuer & Freud, 1985; Reichbart, 2006). More recently however, it has been argued that social support is the reason why individuals feel better after crying (Hendricks, Nelson, Cornelius & Vingerhoets, 2008; Nelson, 2005). Some of the participants in the current study acknowledged that they felt comforted and were more willing to cry as a result of the emotional support offered by loved ones. However, many of the participants reported that the experience of being immersed in emotion during crying led to the positive feeling of emotional release after crying. By examining the lived experience, the current research has been able to take a holistic approach and explore the different ways in which crying was seen as beneficial to the young men. The current findings therefore indicate that the notion of an improved mood may have multiple layers meaning; the experience of feeling better because of social support may differ from the experience of feeling better due to an emotional release. This highlights a need for researchers to expand the understanding of what is meant by "feeling better" or an "improved mood" within the phenomenon of crying and tearfulness. The findings also suggest that there is a pivotal relationship between the engagement of unpleasant emotion and the release of

unpleasant emotion. Existential theorists such as Van Deurzen (2007) have argued that the avoidance of life's difficulties can lead to feelings of discontentment as it may prevent an individual from seeing the positive in life. She views as important the ability to accept and explore negative aspects of existence such as death and loss. To some extent this coincides with some of the participants' accounts of crying and tearfulness in the present study. By actively engaging in their painful emotion the participants suggested that it enabled them to discharge emotional tension and move forward with increased clarity and positivity. Crying in response to something tragic may therefore provide an individual with the opportunity to explore these difficulties and come to terms with them. Tavis (1989) also explains that many Freudian terms such as catharsis have been incorporated in the westernised vocabulary and now have broadened or additional meanings. The term catharsis is often not implied in the way that Freud intended, instead it is used more generally to describe the feeling of letting go of unpleasant feelings (Tavis, 1989). The participants use of the words "release", "catharsis" and "discharge" therefore may not reflect a specific process but rather their way of making sense of the feeling of dealing with and overcoming some of their emotional difficulties through crying.

## **5.2 Relationship between crying and constructions of masculinity**

The current findings support past research that has shown men often perceive crying and masculinity as incompatible with one another (Good, Sherrod & Dillon, 2000; MacArthur & Shields, 2015). At times the participants reflected on crying as something that was opposite to characteristics of a traditional masculinity such as rationality, emotional control and independence. In addition to this, the current study has explored how the perception of crying and masculinity as incompatible impacts on the real-life experience of crying. The participants identified a sense of uncertainty in whether their reaction of crying at the event that had occurred was appropriate, justified and normal. Because of this, the young men recognised a struggle to cry freely and thus exploration of their feelings was stunted. Instead, their focus re-shifted to their masculine identity and whether they were acting manly. However, crying was not always perceived as incompatible with masculinity. In the presence of women or within a private setting the young men

were able to cry freely and did not feel weak for doing so. Whereas, when crying in front of other men, the participants felt unmanly as though they were doing something unnatural and wrong. Whether or not the young men perceived crying as incompatible with masculinity in a particular context appeared to shape their overall experience of crying and tearfulness. These findings are in accordance with the view that masculinity is a performance (Wetherall & Edley, 1999), it is something that men do and act within environments where it is perceived as a social norm or desirable. Within the current study, the performance of masculinity was seen as important in the presence of men but not women. Past research explains that there is a greater sense of pressure for men to behave masculine in front of other men but not necessarily in front of women (Lumb, 2012). According to Sabo (2011) a man's sense of masculinity is threatened by the presence of other men. Behaving in a way that was perceived as opposite to masculinity, such as crying, demonstrated weakness as a man, not only to the individual himself but other men in the environment also. The participants' performance of masculinity was thus about proving their masculine status in the presence of men by restricting their tears and controlling their feelings. It is also important to highlight that the participants in the study were highly educated and had volunteered to take part. As a result, it was likely that they may be less influenced by a stereotypical masculinity than other men, nonetheless it still appeared to have constrained many of their crying experiences.

As identified in the literature review, existing research has shown that the conceptualisation of masculinity has changed throughout history (Kaufman, 1994). It is therefore understood as a socially constructed and culturally shaped phenomenon that reflects the current sociocultural attitudes concerning gender representations of that time (Kimmel, 1995). According to Shields (2002) the contemporary westernised notion of masculinity promotes some degree of emotional expressivity but in a controlled and context specific way. In accordance with this, young men in the present study felt able to cry and be emotional but only within particular environments. Likewise, recent literature has shown a shift in men's attitudes towards crying with men of a younger generation more able to cry freely and comfortably than older generations of men (Fox, 2004). This supports MacArthur & Shield's (2015) argument that contemporary westernised masculinity is about asserting control over where men are emotional rather than

a full eradication of their emotion. However, the participants in the present study viewed this as repressive and restrictive of their human existence thus masculinity was rarely spoken about positively. Masculinity was referred to as a façade or costume that they felt compelled to enact to avoid criticism or social exclusion. The young men battled between acting manly or being human; they felt as though emotion was innate to human nature but that manliness discouraged it. Despite there being some flexibility or negotiation in the context in which young men cry the current findings therefore show that the expectation to be manly was dehumanizing for these young men.



## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Summary of findings**

The study has shown that crying and tearfulness is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon for young men. The overall experience of crying was influenced by the immediate and wider sociocultural attitudes concerning constructions of masculinity and gender identity. In an environment which crying was not viewed as unmanly the participants cried freely and thus had meaningful crying experiences. Through being immersed in emotion during crying these young men felt able to release unpleasant emotional tension and shift to a more positive emotional state. In contrast, in a context where crying and masculinity were perceived as incompatible, the young men struggled to cry comfortably. They felt weak, immature and embarrassed, and often worse than they did prior to crying. As identified within the rationale, the study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of crying and tearfulness in young men. In addition, I also sought to explore whether and how constructions of masculinity impacted on the experience and outcome of crying for the participants. It is therefore clear from the summary above, as well as the analysis and discussion chapter, that the study has achieved all three of its research aims.

### **6.2 Wider implications**

In adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the current study has drawn attention to features of crying and tearfulness that have not often been discussed by previous theorists. The notion of crying as a shifting experience of feeling, or the nature of an antecedent as unwanted and unexpected, or how crying can occur at a specific point when the individual accepts the reality of what has happened; these are examples of some of the novel insights brought about by using a phenomenological methodology. Not only has the current study provided new insight into the phenomenon of crying but in doing so it has suggested reconsideration of some aspects of existing crying theory. This study has therefore been able to contribute to the research literature by offering an expanded and broadened understanding of crying and tearfulness. Furthermore,

it further demonstrates the usefulness of adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology in the psychological study of emotional experiences such as crying.

In addition to the contribution made to the research literature, the current study also holds real-world importance and application. This research has been able to illustrate the extent to which the experience of crying and tearfulness can be incredibly beneficial to young men but at times also deeply degrading for them. This study, therefore, has brought awareness of the restriction of a limiting and rigid version of masculinity within the experience of crying and tearfulness. It shows how the performance of masculinity can often prevent young men from engaging with their emotion and experiencing the benefits that can be brought about by doing this. These findings, as a result, can help further challenge the value and notion of masculinity as the participants viewed it as something that was repressive and limiting of their ability to be emotional. I hope that the insights uncovered within this study can thus promote greater freedom for young men to cry without being criticized for acting unmanly by themselves or others.

### **6.3 Limitations and suggestions for improvement**

As previously mentioned, research has shown that constructions of masculinity reflect the sociocultural beliefs and value of a specific time, space but also historical context (Kaufman, 1994). It is important to acknowledge that the young men's experience of crying within this study thus may not reflect what crying and tearfulness is like for other groups of men. Crying and tearfulness may therefore be experienced differently for men of an older generation. Furthermore, all of the participants within the study attended university thus it is likely that they had participated in similar social and educational practices. In regards to the transferability of the findings to other young men, further research needs to be conducted of young men of a different sociocultural and educational background.

The literature review highlighted the significance of different contexts in relation to how comfortable men feel when crying. If I had given more thought to the specific context prior to the interviews, I could have tailored my research

questions in a way that yielded more insight into the relationship between context and crying for men. I asked the participants for example to talk about two contrasting examples of a time they had cried. However, in hindsight, it would have been more useful to have asked the participants to distinguish between their experience of crying in front of men, women, strangers and privately as well as crying in response to something joyous and upsetting. In doing so, I might have been able to have clarified or shed further light on how specific aspects of a context and others may influence the experience of crying in young men.

It is also important to acknowledge how my presence as a woman may have influenced the participants' willingness to talk about their accounts of crying. The current findings indicate that being a female was more of a positive than a negative as during the interviews the young men identified that they felt able to cry and talk openly about their emotional experiences with women than they did with men. If the interviews had been conducted by a man, then the participants may have chosen to reflect on different aspects of crying and tearfulness, as a result the findings may have differed to those of the current study.

## **6.4 Ideas for future research**

Past research has focused on how crying in men differs from women in terms of the frequency, duration and intensity of crying. Carrying out a phenomenological study of crying in both men and women will thus allow researchers to explore similarities and differences in the lived experience of this phenomenon. Findings from the current study uncovered that the young men's experience of crying was sensitive to others in the environment as well as constructions of masculinity. It would therefore be interesting to explore whether women's experience of crying is also influenced by the presence of others or constructions of femininity. In doing this it may help to further identify how the immediate and wider sociocultural context concerning gender representations of men and women can influence the experience of being emotional and crying. Carrying out a phenomenological study of women's crying experiences therefore may help to generate a broader understanding of the crying phenomenon.

Another important topic of future research concerns the promotion of positive outcomes of crying within therapy. Some past research has shown that the therapists response to the patient can impact upon their therapeutic outcome when crying (Nelson, 2008; Van Heukelem, 1979). The participants within the current study acknowledged that crying was often an experience that allowed them to let go of unpleasant feelings that had been triggered by the immediate event or that built up prior to crying. For these individuals, crying was an effective medium of emotional release, which enabled them the opportunity to deal with painful emotions and find resolution in issues that had been troubling them. However, in the recent years, researchers have given more focus to the positive benefits of crying brought about by others (Hendricks, Nelson, Cornelius & Vingerhoets, 2008). It is clear from the current study and existing research that others influence the individual's experience and outcome of crying. Nonetheless, the present findings, suggest that there is a link between the experience of being immersed in emotion during crying and the experience of releasing emotion after crying. In carrying out further investigation of this relationship it may help to better advise mental health professionals how to handle or respond to patients crying in a way that increases the likelihood of the positive effects of crying.

Some of the young men within the study explored how societal expectations to be masculine limited their ability to cry freely or comfortably in front of others. The act of being emotional was often perceived as forbidden for men, thus, many of the participants recognised a sense of difficulty in disclosing their emotional problems particularly with other men. The participants identified that as a result of restricting their tears in the presence of other men they did not experience a release of emotions like they had when they cried alone or in front of women. Existing research suggests that there is a relationship between constructions of masculinity and health related behaviours adopted by men (Courtenay, 2000). In order to demonstrate their strength and independence men are less likely to seek help from others and more likely to deny that they are in pain or experiencing difficulty (Pyke, 1996). In the light of the current findings and past research, the performance of masculinity therefore appears to limit men's willingness to cry, be emotional or ask for help when they are in difficulty. Furthermore, existing research indicates that the long-term suppression of tears can negatively impact men's emotional wellbeing as it denies an individual the opportunity to deal with

their emotional difficulties (Reichbart, 2006). By carrying out further research regarding the relationship between masculinity, crying and wellbeing, researchers can potentially uncover ways of reducing the difficulties that some men face within the phenomenon of crying and tearfulness.

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## **Appendices**



## **Appendix 1: Participant information sheet**

You are being invited to take part in a one to one interview as a part of my Masters by Research at the University of Huddersfield. Before making the decision as to whether or not you would like to take part it is important that you read the information presented below.

### **What is the study about?**

In the world of research very little is known about what crying is actually like for men, what it means to them and also how it might influence their well-being. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to understand more about young men's experience of crying in terms of exploring real life incidents of crying, as well as looking into what it is like to be a man expressing emotion in the form of crying in today's society.

### **Why I have been approached to participate?**

You have been asked to participate in this study because I am looking to recruit young men, aged 18-24, who have lived in a westernised country the majority of their life, who are a student at a university in England and who have not experienced any serious mental health issues within the last 12 months.

### **Do I have to take part?**

The decision as to whether or not you take part in this study is completely your own. If you meet the participant requirements stated above and feel as though this is something you are interested in or wish to take part, then please feel free to contact me to discuss your participation further. If you decide to take part you will be asked to read and sign a consent form prior to your participation, and you will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time up until the date of analysis (July 2015) without having to give a reason.

### **What will I need to do?**

If you agree to take part, then you will be interviewed for about 30-60 minutes in a private room on campus. You will be asked to come to the interview having chosen two separate occasions in which you **cried or became tearful** and that you feel comfortable to talk about. These should either be the two most recent crying/tearful experiences you have had or two crying/tearful experiences that you are able to recall in some detail. Your interview will be recorded, transcribed and analysed for the purpose of this research and you will have the chance to see the interview questions at least a week prior to the interview. It is important for you to know that this is a semi-structured interview and so even though there will be planned questions I will also be asking questions spontaneously depending on your responses. However, during the interview, if you do not wish to answer any questions you have the right to refuse to answer and will not be pressured to talk about anything you do not wish to.

**Will my identity be disclosed? What will happen to the information?**

All information disclosed during the interview will be kept confidential, and a false name will be used in the research project to ensure that your identity remains anonymous. Any personal information such as your name, e-mail and telephone required for this project will be secured safely and deleted a year after completion of this project. Anonymised transcripts will be kept for five years and then destroyed. In the event of publication of this research in a journal, your identity will remain anonymous.

If you would like to discuss anything further with me, regarding your participation or this research project, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

**Researcher's details:**

*Name: Priyanka Chauhan, E-mail: [U1154030@unimail.hud.ac.uk](mailto:U1154030@unimail.hud.ac.uk)*

**Supervisor's details:**

*Name: Prof Nigel King, E-mail: [n.king@hud.ac.uk](mailto:n.king@hud.ac.uk)*

## Appendix 2: Ethics form

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD**  
**School of Human and Health Sciences – School Research Ethics Panel**

### OUTLINE OF PROPOSAL

**Please complete and return via email to:**  
**Kirsty Thomson SREP Administrator: [hhs\\_srep@hud.ac.uk](mailto:hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk)**

**Name of applicant:** Priyanka Hope Chauhan

**Title of study:** An exploration of the lived experience of crying in men

**Department:** School of Human and Health Sciences      **Date sent:** 11.01.15

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Please provide sufficient detail for SREP to assess strategies used to address ethical issues in the research proposal</b>
<b>Researcher(s) details</b>	Priyanka Hope Chauhan, DOB: 27.06.1993. Master of Science by Research, full-time. Student Number: U1154030
<b>Supervisor details</b>	Prof Nigel King, <a href="mailto:n.king@hud.ac.uk">n.king@hud.ac.uk</a> Dr Dawn Leeming, <a href="mailto:D.Leeming@hud.ac.uk">D.Leeming@hud.ac.uk</a>
<b>Aim / objectives</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To understand the lived experience of crying in men from a hermeneutic phenomenological approach.</li> <li>2. To explore the relationship between crying and well-being by looking at how the context of the crying phenomenon impacts on well-being.</li> <li>3. To learn more about the westernised young men's perspective and experience of expressing emotion in the form of crying in today's society.</li> </ol>
<b>Brief overview of research methodology</b>	<p><b>Research approach</b></p> <p>Due to the research literature revealing a lack of phenomenological research on crying and ambiguity in terms of the relationship between crying in men and their well-being I have chosen to adopt a phenomenological approach to explore young men's experience of crying. Therefore, understanding the lived experience of crying is the primary aim of this research. However, more specifically I have decided to use Heidegger's interpretative hermeneutic phenomenology. Also, I will be taking a reflexive approach to increase my awareness of the potential influence I may have on the findings and to try and reduce any bias. Furthermore, van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological method is being considered to help guide the research method process.</p> <p><b>Data collection</b></p> <p>Individual semi-structured interviews will be conducted in a quiet room within the university and should last</p>

	<p>between thirty to sixty minutes long. The interview will consist of several open-ended questions in relation to the aims stated above, thus, all participants will be asked questions regarding a recent crying experience, the effect that this crying experience may or may not have had on the participant's well-being and also about the participant's personal view on being a young man in today's society expressing emotion. Furthermore, participants who volunteer to take part will be asked to come prepared to the interview already decided on the two most recent crying experiences that they feel able to comfortably discuss during the interview and that they can recall in some detail.</p> <p><b>Data analysis</b>  Template analysis by King (2012) is a type of thematic analysis that will be used in this study to qualitatively analyse interview transcripts in this study and to formulate a hierarchy of themes found within the data. An initial template of themes will be constructed by analysing a subsection of the data and this will be applied to the rest of the data and modified accordingly to produce a final template.</p> <p><b>Sampling technique</b>  A purposive sampling technique will be used to recruit 8-12 men aged 18-24 from a student population at the University of Huddersfield. Male students from five different courses will be contacted via e-mail (participant information sheet) asking for any male volunteers who meet the requirements to participate in the study that will involve them to take part in a single interview. The five courses chosen to recruit from differ in terms of their academic discipline (English, Science, Math, Art/Music and Sport) it is hoped that by using male students from a variety of courses that there will be some variation in participant characteristics. The five chosen courses include, Drama and English Literature BA(Hons), Chemistry BSc(Hons), Electronic Engineering MEng/BEng(Hons), Music Technology BA(Hons) and Sport Science BSc(Hons). However, if I am unable to recruit enough participants my next step would be to attend a lecture, class or seminar for the courses outlined above and personally ask for any male volunteers who meet the participant requirements to take part in single interview on crying. I have included a second letter of invitation in this form which will only be sent out to course leaders if the above e-mail participant recruitment process is not successful in achieving 8-12 male student volunteers.</p>
<b>Study Start &amp; End Date</b>	Start Date: 01.10.14      Expected End Date: 30. 09. 15
Permissions for study	Only SREP approval is required for this research project.
Access to participants	Approval from selected course leaders at the University of Huddersfield will be required in order to recruit male participants. Letters of invitation have been sent out to

	<p>the selected course leaders enquiring about the possibility of them circulating a participant recruitment information sheet to male students. Therefore, I will not have access to student e-mail lists, only those course leaders that agree to circulating the information sheet will contact male students directly. Currently 4/5 course leaders have said yes to circulating a participant recruitment information sheet, thus, I am just waiting for the course leader of Electronic Engineering to respond to my letter of invitation.</p>
Confidentiality	<p>Personal information including the participant's name, e-mail address and contact numbers will all be kept confidential; therefore, this private information will not be seen by anyone other than the researcher. Confidentiality will be ensured by storing this personal data on a password protected laptop, and after one year following the completion of the research project (October 2016) this information will be deleted.</p>
Anonymity	<p>Each of the participant's interview responses will be presented and analysed in a research project as a part of the Master of Science by Research programme, and will involve the use of direct quotes from the recorded interviews. As a result, markers and readers of the research project will also have access to participant's transcription data however the participant's identities will not be exposed to anyone other than the researcher as a pseudonym name will be used throughout the entire research project, and any information disclosed by the participant that could reveal their identity will not be used in the research project. In the event of publication of research, this will also be the case and therefore all those who participated in the research project will remain anonymous and their identities hidden/unknown. Furthermore, anonymised transcripts will be kept securely on a password protected laptop for five years and then destroyed</p>
Psychological support for participants	<p>Participants are at risk of psychological distress during and after the interview as the interview topic is of a sensitive nature. To reduce the chance of distress or discomfort, all participants will be asked in advance to choose to talk about a recent crying experience that they feel comfortable and able to openly discuss. Also, the interview schedule will also be made available to participants prior to the interview so that they have time to familiarise with the questions that they are going to be asked, and as a result this will hopefully make the interview process less stressful. Before the interviews, participants will be asked to sign a consent form stating they have the freedom to refuse answering any questions during the interview and therefore they will not be forced or pressured to disclose anything that they do not wish to, thus further reducing the risk of psychological distress. However, if participants do experience any distress during or after the interviews, counselling services will be made available for all participants if they wish to seek support. These will include, Samaritans, The Calm Zone, University of</p>

	Huddersfield counselling service and NHS self-help leaflets.
Researcher safety / support (attach complete University Risk Analysis and Management form)	See appendix 7
Identify any potential conflicts of interest	There are no identified conflicts of interest.
<b>Please supply copies of all relevant supporting documentation electronically. If this is not available electronically, please provide explanation and supply hard copy</b>	
Information sheet	See appendix 1
Consent form	See appendix 3
Letters	See appendix 8 and 9
Questionnaire	N/A
Interview guide	See appendix 4
Dissemination of results	This research is a part of a MSc programme and therefore the findings will be presented in a thesis that will be submitted for examination. In addition, the research project will be stored in the universities repository that will be available to access by any student within the university. I am also hoping to submit my work to be published in a journal.
Other issues	None
Where application is to be made to NHS Research Ethics Committee / External Agencies	N/A
All documentation has been read by supervisor (where applicable)	Please see supervisors report attached to my ethics form submission e-mail.

**All documentation must be submitted to the SREP administrator. All proposals will be reviewed by two members of SREP.**

**If you have any queries relating to the completion of this form or any other queries relating to SREP's consideration of this proposal, please contact the SREP administrator (Kirsty Thomson) in the first instance – [hhs\\_srep@hud.ac.uk](mailto:hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk)**

## Appendix 3: Consent form

### An exploration of the lived experience of crying in young men

*It is important that you read, understand and sign the consent form. Your contribution to this research is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged in any way to participate. If you are satisfied that you understand the information and are happy to take part in this project, please put a tick in the box aligned to each sentence below.*

I have been fully informed of the nature and aims of this research

I consent to taking part in it

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time up until the date of analysis (July 2015) without giving any reason

I understand that I have the right to not answer any question in the interview without having to give a reason

I agree for the interview to be audio recorded

I give permission for my words to be quoted (by use of pseudonym) and used in this research project

I understand that my personal information (name, contact number and e-mail) will be kept in secure conditions for a period of one year and then destroyed

I understand that the anonymized transcript of my interview collected will be kept in secure conditions for a period of five years and then destroyed

I understand that only the main researcher will have access to my personal information and full interview transcript

I understand that my identity will be protected by the use of pseudonym in the report and that no written information that could lead to my being identified will be included in any report

### Please print and sign

Signature of Participant: <hr/>	Signature of Researcher: <hr/>
Print: <hr/>	Print: <hr/>
Date: <hr/>	Date: <hr/>

(one copy to be retained by Participant / one copy to be retained by Researcher)

## Appendix 4: Interview Guide

This is a semi-structured interview on a one to one basis; the following questions will be used as a guide during the interview however I may ask other questions that seem appropriate and that relate to the aims of my research.

**1. About a week ago I asked you to think about two separate occasions in which you cried or became tearful. Can you now please tell me about the first crying or tearful experience that you have chosen to talk about?**

- Probe to clarify whether there was a specific antecedent of crying and nature of said antecedent.
- Probe about the context of crying, in public or alone, was this meaningful to their crying experience?
- Probe about their feelings and thoughts during the crying experience.
- Probe about behaviour/ embodiment: tearful or full body crying?

**2. How did you feel immediately after the crying experience?**

- Probe to clarify whether the interviewee's feelings changed after crying or whether they remained the same.
- If they changed then probe to clarify in what way e.g. an improvement in how they felt or did they feel worse, or a mix of both?

**3. If the interviewee's feelings did change immediately after the crying experience ask them "so can you tell me a little about why you think your feelings changed, was there anything specific about the crying experience or situation?"**

- Probe for clarification about the context that brought about this change: crying itself, public or private settings, social support and whether or not the object of crying had been solved or improved?

**4. Did you feel comfortable crying?**

- Probe to see whether or not they felt comfortable in crying, did it feel natural, normal or embarrassing at all?

**5. Can you now please tell me about the second crying or tearful experience that you have chosen to talk about?**

- Probe to clarify whether there was a specific antecedent of crying and nature of said antecedent.
- Probe about the context of crying, in public or alone, was this meaningful to their crying experience?
- Probe about their feelings and thoughts during the crying experience.
- Probe about behaviour/ embodiment: tearful or full body crying?



- 6. How did you feel immediately after the crying experience?**
- Probe to clarify whether the interviewee's feelings changed after crying or whether they remained the same.
  - If they changed then probe to clarify in what way e.g. an improvement in how they felt or did they feel worse, or a mix of both?
- 7. If the interviewee's feelings did change immediately after the crying experience ask them "so can you tell me a little about why you think your feelings changed, was there anything specific about the crying experience or situation?"**
- Probe for clarification about the context that brought about this change: crying itself, public or private settings, social support and whether or not the object of crying had been solved or improved?
- 8. Did you feel comfortable crying?**
- Probe to see whether or not they felt comfortable in crying, did it feel natural, normal or embarrassing at all?
- 9. How typical do you consider these crying experiences for yourself?**
- 10. Can you talk about any similarities between the two crying experiences you have talked about?**
- 11. What about differences, can you tell me about some differences between these two crying experiences?**
- 12. Now I would like to just ask you a few general questions about the experience of crying as a man. Do you feel like it is acceptable as a young man living in a westernised society to cry and can you discuss some of the reasons as to why you think it is or is not?**
- Probe to clarify whether or not they feel crying as a man is an acceptable in society?
  - Probe for depth and more detail of their response.
- 13. Can you tell me a little about your thoughts on whether you think crying is healthy and good for an individual or do you think that is unnecessary and makes things worse and why do you think this?**
- 14. Are there any ways in which crying can be helpful or problematic?**

## **Appendix 5:** Initial template of themes

### ***1. To cry is to feel***

#### **1.1. Sense of shock**

1.1.1. Emotional and physical numbness

1.1.2. Denial

#### **1.2. Intense engagement with emotional appraisal of a situation**

1.2.1. Embodied breakdown

#### **1.3. Release of emotions**

1.3.1. Discharge of emotional tension

1.3.2. Shift to a positive emotional state

1.3.2.1. Acceptance and Solace

### ***2. Crying as unnatural in men***

#### **2.1. Restriction to cry**

#### **2.2. Crying as a weakness**

2.2.1. Emotional

2.2.2. Loss of control

2.2.3. Immature

#### **2.3. Crying as situational versus a natural human quality**

### ***3. Helpful versus makes worse***

#### **3.1. Choice versus involuntary and unwanted**

#### **3.2. Interpersonal**

3.2.1. Support and comfort

3.2.2. Who

3.2.3. Form of communication

3.2.4. Critical reaction

# Appendix 6: Sample of coding

The screenshot shows the NVivo software interface. The main window displays a transcript with several lines of text highlighted in yellow. On the right side, a list of codes is visible, with some codes highlighted in red. The transcript text includes:

**I Can you explore more about your felt after being tearful?**

**P** Yeah erm I guess there's a degree of acceptance like this has happened and it's sad erm sort of a want to remember him sort of you know like I want to make sure that we don't just forget about him I don't want that to be all there is I still felt sad but I don't think I I think once I cried I don't think there was any danger of it happened again yeah.

**I You said something about acceptance, did you mean with the death?**

**P** Yeah absolutely.

**I Was that after crying or during or?**

**P** Erm I am not saying I didn't accept it when I found out I mean I guess at first I hoped it was a mistake or something it wasn't the case of not accepting it before. The way I was sad about it before I cried was like I was just sad and I didn't feel content I felt sad whereas after crying I felt sad but content sort of but accepted the situation I guess.

The code list on the right includes:

- Support and comfort
- Shift in engagement
- Acceptance and solace
- Crying as helpful
- Significant and poignant
- Comfortable, unashamed, choice and control, can freely cry and understood why he cried
- Versus crying as a natural response
- Processing the reality and contemplating the consequences
- Coding Density

The interface also shows a sidebar with 'SOURCES' (Internals, Externals, Memos) and 'OPEN ITEMS' (Transcript 1-5). A table at the top of the transcript area shows details for each transcript item.

Name	Nodes	Referen...	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Transcript 3	21	56	31 Jul 2015, 16:24	PC	11 Aug 2015, 12:57	PC
Transcript 4	11	36	31 Jul 2015, 16:25	PC	17 Aug 2015, 15:49	PC
Transcript 5	16	51	31 Jul 2015, 16:25	PC	7 Aug 2015, 15:25	PC

Home Create Data Analyze Query Explore Layout View Window Help  
 Application Close All Close Zoom Detail View Coding Stripes Highlight Node Node Matrix Classification  
 Application Analyze Query Explore Layout View Nodes Referen... Created On Modified On Modified By

Name	Nodes	Referen...	Created On	Modified On	Modified By
Transcript 1	16	45	18 Aug 2015, 12:45	18 Aug 2015, 15:45	PC
Transcript 2	17	40	31 Jul 2015, 16:24	31 Jul 2015, 16:24	PC
Transcript 3	21	56	31 Jul 2015, 16:24	11 Aug 2015, 12:57	PC
Transcript 2					

SOURCES Internals Externals Memos  
 NODES Nodes Node Matrices  
 CLASSIFICATIONS  
 COLLECTIONS  
 QUERIES

OPEN ITEMS  
 Transcript 1  
 Transcript 2

**I Can you remember how you were feeling when you were crying?**

**P** That was different than the first example since I was mad and angry it was a release of a lot of emotion whereas this one it was kind of you know erm (.) obviously I was upset I was sad I was just it was shock I was shocked you take like so much of that for granted you things like cancer and having a stroke being stabbed or whatever and then when it hits a family member it puts you in an instant state of shock and then that's how I was it was kind of a slow burner just slowly sinking in which kind of helped because had it me like a tone of bricks and I couldn't deal with it then, because it had time to sink in I had time to process it bit by bit and not have to cry I had a little cry sucked it up and then I was fine. It was just the shock of out just the shock you know sorry my nan's had a stroke she's not got a cold she's not fallen over and hurt her knee it's a really ((laughs)) serious issue here. Then it was upset that my nan had a stroke so yeah it was just kind of them two things it wasn't as overwhelming I just had to remain calm about it as much as I could and it was still you know really

Significant and poignant  
 Sense of shock  
 Versus crying as a natural response  
 Exploration of feeling  
 Crying as unnatural in men  
 Discomfort in crying  
 Release of emotions  
 Restriction to cry or unable to fully cry  
 Coding Density

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Home Create Data Analyze Query Explore Layout View Window

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Close All Close Zoom Detail View Coding Stripes Highlight Node Matrix Classification

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Application SOURCES Internal Memos NODES Nodes Node Matrices CLASSIFICATIONS COLLECTIONS QUERIES

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Support and contact Sources Referen... Created On Created By Modified On Modified By

Name	Sources	Referen...	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Forces you to feel unplea...	2	8	10 Aug 2015, 11:15	PC	11 Aug 2015, 15:33	PC
Identification with a tradi...	2	6	10 Aug 2015, 12:10	PC	11 Aug 2015, 11:04	PC

---

Transcript 9

façade of masculinity and bravado in order to achieve that crying would go against that and I think a lot of men sort of myself included often erm we pent up a lot of frustrations and emotions and don't feel as if we can maybe discuss them openly certainly not with each other any way I think men who have partners can but I think yeah unless like it is something tragic there is not many circumstances I think it is considered acceptable to cry and certainly not cry in front of other people erm especially men who are there friends. I think a lot of men keep a lot of emotions pent up and they may erm sort of release them when crying alone or you know I think in some instances I am not I might be guessing here but I think a lot of young men like suicide rates may be higher than in young women because I think men can't express their emotions men in general even men who are older it's quite hard to discuss well at least with other men like how you feel like even now I feel quite comfortable talking to you about things just because you are female I know that sounds quite bizarre rather than a good guy friend that I have known for a few years.

---

Coding Density

Shift in engagement  
 Conflict between crying as pleasant or helpful versus unpleasant or unhelpful  
 Acceptance and solace  
 Gender  
 Crying as situational  
 Restriction to cry or unable to fully cry  
 Crying in front of men as uncomfortable

---

OPEN ITEMS  
 Transcript 6  
 Transcript 7  
 Transcript 8  
 Gender  
 Transcript 9

---

SOURCES > Internal > Transcript 9

Word File Edit View Insert Format Tools Table Window Help 100% Fri 13:14

Home Create Data Analyze Query Explore Layout View

Close All Close Zoom Detail View Highlight Node Node Matrix Classification

Application Codings

Name	Nodes	Referen...	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Transcript 1	16	45	18 Aug 2015, 12:45	PC	18 Aug 2015, 15:45	PC
Transcript 2	17	40	31 Jul 2015, 16:24	PC	31 Jul 2015, 16:24	PC
Transcript 3	21	56	31 Jul 2015, 16:24	PC	11 Aug 2015, 12:57	PC

Transcript 1

**I After or maybe during you were crying you mentioned you felt quite ashamed what was that like for you?**

**P** It was definitely a negative experience I felt like I had let my dad down I felt like I wasn't as grown up as I thought I was and I don't know it was (.) yeah would definitely say it was a negative experience.

**I** You mentioned before for this crying experience that you thought crying was a weakness is there anything else you can say about that?

**P** Er well (.) I dunno I also assumed that there was this whole archetype to be this real man you must be like this sort of strong protector almost who doesn't show any kind of weakness otherwise everything might fall a part in the sense I know in todays society it is okay to cry and it is but I would just feel as I would be weak if I started crying I don't know maybe its because that experience just then but ever since then I thought that it was anonymous with a weakness really.

Embodyed breakdown  
 Comfortable versus Uncomfortable with unpleasant emotion  
 Change in perception of crying  
 Release of emotions  
 Processing the reality and contemplating the consequences  
 Versus crying as a natural response  
 Crying as a weakness  
 Restriction to cry or unable to fully cry  
 Coding Density

SOURCES > Internals > Transcript 1

OPEN ITEMS  
 Transcript 1

## Appendix 7: Risk analysis and management form

<b>ACTIVITY:</b> MSc research project			Name: <b>Priyanka Hope Chauhan</b>	
LOCATION: <b>Huddersfield</b>			Date: <b>08/12/2014</b>	Review Date:
<b>Hazard(s) Identified</b>	Details of Risk(s)	People at Risk	Risk management measures	
Interviewing participants	Personal safety	Researcher	I will arrange for the interviews to take place in a private room but in a public university building to reduce the risk of personal safety when conducting one to one interviews with a participant. Therefore, there will always be other staff and students available and nearby if assistance is required.	
Loss/theft of data	Security of data	Participants	Electronic data and research project work will be secured safely on a password protected laptop as well as an additional storage devise to avoid loss of data and to ensure security and confidentiality of data.	
Well-being and health	Visual and physical fatigue and poor posture due to sat working for a long period of time	Researcher	I will ensure I take regular breaks and will follow the DSE guidance on health and safety in an office setting.	

## **Appendix 8:** Letter of invitation to course leaders

### **Letter of invitation to course leaders at the University of \*\*\*: *Drama and English Literature, Chemistry, Exercise Sciences, Electronic Engineering and Music Technology***

Hello,

I am writing to ask if you would consider circulating an email request for participants in my research project. My name is Priyanka Chauhan and I am currently doing a Master of Science by Research programme here at the University of Huddersfield under the supervision of Prof Nigel King and Dr Dawn Leeming.

I am hoping to conduct a piece of qualitative research on the experience of crying in young adult men, aged 18-24, who are a student and who have been living in a westernised country the majority of their life. The aim of my research is to learn more about the experience of crying from a young man's point of view and to understand what impact crying has on their lives.

I would like to recruit 8-12 male students at the University of Huddersfield to take part in an audio recorded interview that will last about 30-60 minutes and will be asking male participants to talk about two crying or tearful experiences that they are able to recall in some detail. The reason why I have chosen your course is because I am hoping to recruit young adult men with a variety of interests, thus, I have decided to choose a range of courses to recruit from in attempt to maximize differences in participant characteristics.

Before sending my ethics form for this piece of research I have been advised to contact course leaders to enquire about my ability to recruit participants on their course. Course leaders who say yes to circulating a participant recruitment letter will be informed on whether or not I receive ethics approval and only once I have they will be asked to forward a participant recruitment e-mail.

If you could please get back to me as soon as possible about whether or not you would like to circulate a participant recruitment e-mail for me that would be mostly appreciated.

If you would like to find out any more information then please do not hesitate to contact me or if you would like to talk to my supervisors please contact either of them on [n.king@hud.ac.uk](mailto:n.king@hud.ac.uk) or [D.Leeming@hud.ac.uk](mailto:D.Leeming@hud.ac.uk).

Kind regards, Priyanka Hope Chauhan



## **Appendix 9:** Second letter of invitation to course leaders

Hello,

I am writing to ask if you would consider allowing me to attend one of your lectures, classes or seminars to ask your male students (who meet the participant requirements) to take part in my study that involves a single interview on crying.

I previously contacted you about the possibility of you circulating a participant recruitment information sheet to your male students. Unfortunately, I have not recruited enough participants using this method and therefore I would like approach your students face to face.

I have attached the previous e-mail so that you can familiarize yourself with the nature of my research again if you wish to do so.

If you could please get back to me on whether I would be able to attend one of your classes to ask for male volunteers that would be greatly appreciated.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me or if you would like to talk to one of my supervisors contact them on either [n.king@hud.ac.uk](mailto:n.king@hud.ac.uk) or [D.Leeming@hud.ac.uk](mailto:D.Leeming@hud.ac.uk).

Kind Regards,

Priyanka Hope Chauhan