



The Kleenex® For Men Crying Game Report

A study of men and crying

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Introduction

We are constantly being told that men are becoming more emotionally open, that the old taboos on men crying have been eroded, and it is now perfectly normal and acceptable for a man to be seen shedding tears. World leaders, pop idols and sporting heroes are happy to be filmed and photographed with tears in their eyes – and they are applauded for their uninhibited expression of emotion. In the currently fashionable therapy-speak, men crying is 'healthy', a sign that they are 'in touch with their feelings', 'emotionally intelligent', 'not afraid to show their vulnerability', 'willing to share', 'in touch with their Inner Child' and so on. In our new caring, sharing, compassionate, post-Diana world, crying is officially Good For You – therapeutic, cathartic, de-toxing, stress-busting – and men should be encouraged to cry.

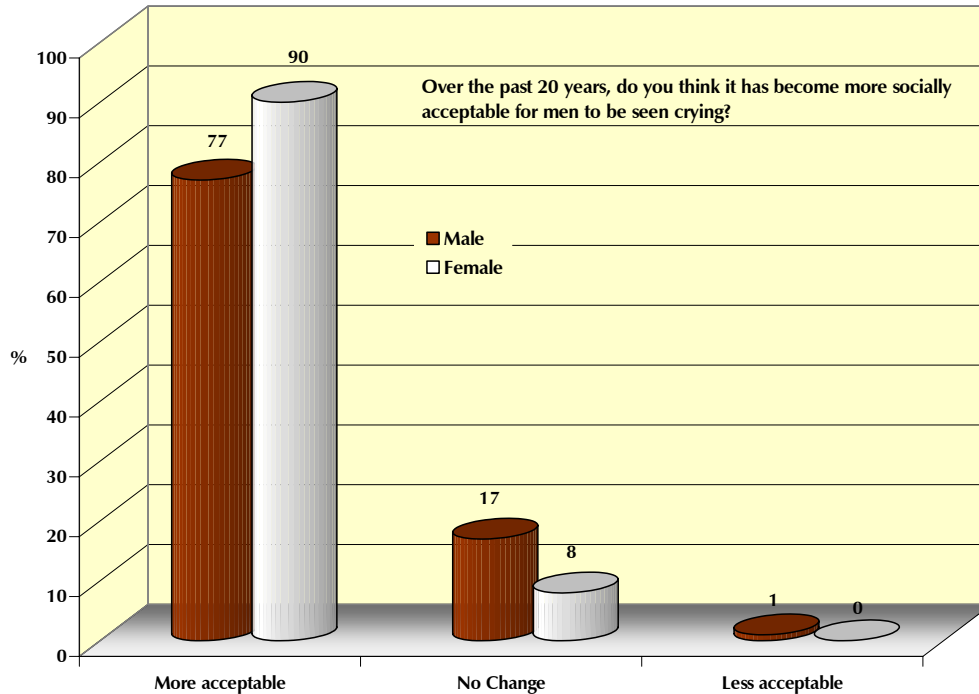
But how much has really changed? Are men more emotionally expressive? Is it socially acceptable for men to be seen crying? How much do men cry? What makes them cry? How do they cry? Whose shoulders do they cry on? Does crying make them feel better? What did their fathers teach them about crying? What messages are they giving their sons? How do they really feel about the new crying etiquette? How do women really feel about male tears? What are the real differences between male and female crying? Are they due to nature or nurture?

Kleenex® for Men commissioned the Social Issues Research Centre (SIRC) to find out. The SIRC research involved a review of the existing scientific literature on crying, as well as focus groups, interviews and a national YouGov survey of 2000 people. The findings may surprise you...

The findings

New rules - same behaviour

Yes, it's official: It's OK for big boys to cry. Our national survey found that 90% of women and 77% of men think it has become more socially acceptable, over the past 20 years, for men to be seen crying. In our focus groups and more in-depth personal interviews, the message was the same: the majority of both men and women felt that attitudes had changed – that the taboo on male tears is now generally regarded as outdated and 'unhealthy', and that men are allowed to be more emotionally open. "It's one good thing about modern life," said one of our male focus-group participants, "men getting more emotional". "I kinda think it's a healthier way to be," said another. "When Gazza cried, that opened the floodgates for everybody to be allowed to cry," said a female participant.



Young men vs. older men: the differences

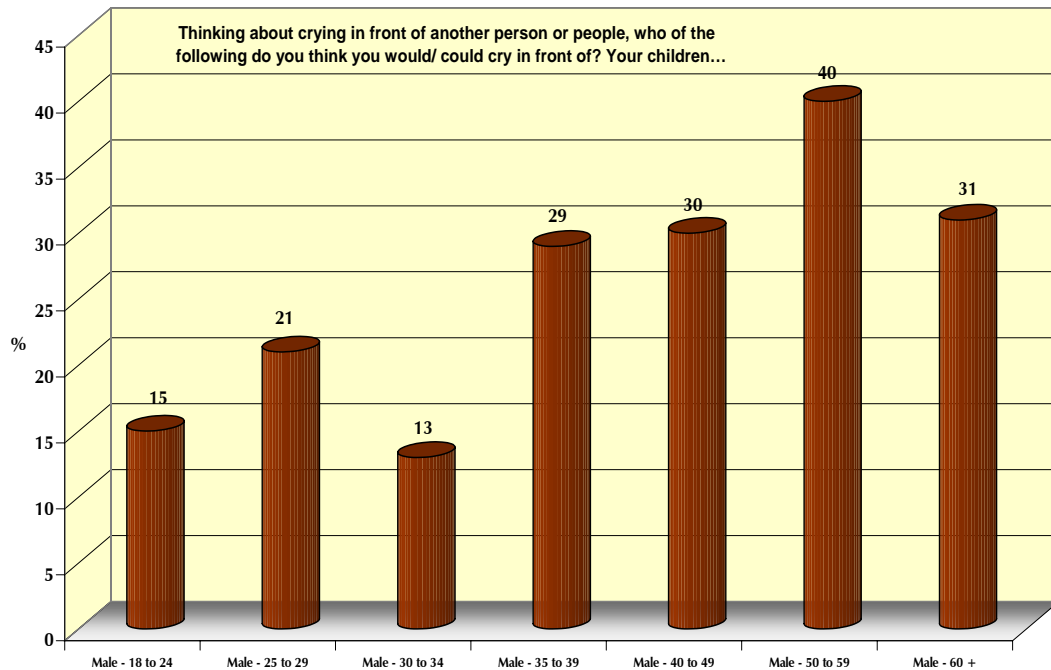
Our survey covered all age groups from 18-24s to the over-60s. Are today's younger men crying more than older men? ("It certainly is a generational thing: we're encouraged to be more open now," said a focus-group participant.) They may well believe that the rules have changed, and that male tears are more acceptable, but in terms of their actual crying behaviour, the answer is 'no'. If anything, the older ones cry very slightly more.

On the other frequency measure we used (when did you last cry?), about 30% of men have cried in the past month, and again this is roughly the same across all age groups: young males are no more likely to have cried than older ones. By contrast, 70% of women had cried in the past month.

There are some signs that things are changing, if only very slowly. In public life, we note that back in 1972, the US presidential candidate Ed Muskie was widely believed to have ruined his chances of election by crying publicly over an insult to his wife. In the 1990s, by contrast, Bill Clinton's regular blubbing never seemed to do his popularity any harm. (It might not have been so acceptable in Britain, though – it is worth noting that our politicians still do not indulge in tearful displays.)

Our own survey also provides some evidence of a long-term, gradual shift in attitudes. Among the over 50s, for example, 63% have never seen their father cry, while for the 30-50 year olds, the figure is 48%, and down to 44% among the 18-29 year olds. (Fathers are somewhat more likely to cry in front of their daughters than their sons -59% of men have never seen their father cry, compared to 49% of women.) A 56-year-old woman commented, "It's a complete turn-about from my generation, because I never saw my mother or father cry, and I had a brother who died at 21 and I never saw anybody else cry, but we all used to cry buckets in private" "I also think it's like a generation thing because our fathers and grandfathers never cried-it's how we were brought up," said a 37-year-old man. Another commented, "I know my father cries, but obviously I would never see him cry." "At my Gran's funeral, if my Dad had cried I would have felt very strange," said a 39-year-old man. But a 40-year-old man said that he would cry in front of his children, "It's like you mature into realising why not? Show your emotions." And a 52-year-old man agreed, "I share my emotions with my son and daughter."

Overall, however, only 28% of males in our survey said that they would cry in front of their own children (only 9% 'definitely would' – the rest only said that they 'probably would') – and younger males are even less likely to say they would cry than older males. Perhaps surprisingly, men in their fifties seem to be the most emotionally open in front of their children: in this age group, 40% say they would cry in front of their children. This suggests that a large proportion of the next generation may also grow up never seeing their fathers cry. If (and it is a big if) we feel that crying is unequivocally a good thing and men should do more of it, then this could be a problem, as other studies have shown that 'emotional expressiveness' is very much influenced by one's family - people from 'emotionally expressive' families are much more likely to be emotionally open themselves – or, as one of our male focus-group participants put it, "My whole family is quite emotional. My Dad's a sappy twat – he's cried lots – I think that's where I get it from because I'm a sappy twat as well!" Another (37-year-old) had the opposite experience: "My grandparents were very unemotional. There's no emotion – you feel conditioned to that. I know it's my emotion but how am I supposed to express it?"



Mothers are more likely to cry in front of their children than fathers: 48% would do so (19% definitely, 29% probably). A 46-year-old mother commented, "When I'm watching TV or something my son always says to me 'do you want some tissues?' If they are used to seeing you cry and it's a normal thing, then it's not a problem." But again, older mothers were much more likely to shed tears in front of their children than the younger generation.

It is worth noting, however, that many parents (of both sexes) told us that they felt young children might be very upset by seeing their parents cry, and that they refrained from shedding tears in front of their children not out of old-fashioned stiff-upper-lip inhibition, but to avoid causing them unnecessary distress and anxiety. And the younger parents in our survey are of course likely to have much younger children, which could at least partly explain their relative reluctance to cry in front of them. There is a valid argument that young children need to see their parents as strong and capable carers and protectors – although older children can probably cope with more evidence of weakness and vulnerability. Crying is, among other things, a powerful plea for help or support, and it may be inappropriate for parents to expect such responses from young children¹. A 38-year-old man said, "Men don't want to sob in a situation where they feel they have to be a rock for everyone else." A 68-year-old female interviewee said, "I cried on my eldest daughter's shoulder much too much, when she was very young – 7 or 8 – and I regret it deeply, because although she seemed to be able to handle it, it was far too much responsibility for a child." A 42-year-old male felt that even older children should not see their father cry: "As a father of grown-up children, I think you are more openly conscious of not

¹ One recent study showed that even very small children – babies – show signs of 'empathic' responses to people crying, and infants as young as 12-14 months show signs of 'helping behaviour' when they see their mothers looking distressed.

crying in front of them. You are there to guide them – you don't want them crying at everything."

Perhaps we need to examine the 'new norms' a bit more closely. The broad-brush figures cited at the start of this report could be misleading. Yes, most people think male tears are now more acceptable, but looking a bit closer, we find that although 25% of men think it has become 'much more acceptable' for them to be seen crying, the majority, 52%, think it has become 'a *bit* more acceptable' – and that bit may not be enough for them to feel entirely comfortable about crying. 17% think there has been no change. Even among women, although 37% say male crying has become 'much more acceptable', there is still a significant element of doubt: 53% only think that male crying has become 'a bit more acceptable'.

In our focus groups, almost all of the male participants paid lip-service to the current view that 'men should be more emotionally open and in touch with their feelings', and seemed eager to demonstrate that they did not subscribe to old-fashioned notions of stiff-upper-lipped masculinity. "Young men should be encouraged to cry," said a 38-year-old man. (Only one man – a restaurant manager in his mid twenties – stuck rigidly to the macho 'men shouldn't cry' line. Ironically, he became quite tense and visibly distressed while arguing this point, and often seemed choked-up and close to tears, while all of the pro-crying males remained calm and dry-eyed.) But the politically correct, New Man views of our male focus-group participants seemed to have little or no influence on their actual behaviour: the majority still did not report crying anywhere near as much as the female participants, and their comments and anecdotes indicated that they were still clearly reluctant to be seen crying. "When you 're on your own it doesn't matter – I think the only reason you try and stop it is because there is somebody else watching."

One got the impression that they felt somehow obliged to parrot the current 'crying is healthy' mantra, but that, at another level, they were not quite entirely convinced. "I don't think I have a problem crying in front of people, but I don't do it all that much so I'm not too sure..." said one male participant. "It's 'supposed' to be good, isn't it?" said another, looking doubtful. Another interviewee was more cynical: "Yeah, yeah, we all go along with the whole touchy-feely 'men shouldn't be afraid to show their emotions' thing, but secretly when you see a man blubbing, you think 'wimp!'"

Evidence that the traditional, 'macho' social norms are slow to change can be found not only in the *results* of research studies on crying, but sometimes even in their *design*. A group of American researchers recently (2000) conducted a study on 'gendered heteronormativity' (yes, that's the way they talk), in which they tested public reactions to 'gender norm violations': these 'violations' included men wearing lipstick, carrying handbags and.. .crying. That fact that the researchers regarded male crying as being on a par with wearing lipstick and carrying a handbag suggests that, even in the land of Oprah, people are perhaps still rather more bound by old-fashioned rules and conventions than we like to imagine. (The study found, perhaps not entirely surprisingly, that men who wear

lipstick, carry handbags and cry in public tend to get funny looks and comments.)

Are the sex differences in crying biological or social?

The human species is the only animal that cries 'emotional' tears – as opposed to 'reflex' tears for lubrication and washing away irritants. Other animals have their own distress-signals, but crying from sorrow, stress, pain or joy is unique to humans. The origins, and indeed the functions, of human emotional crying are not clearly understood. It is thought that adult human crying serves two main purposes: to relieve tension or stress, and as a social signal, communicating our distress to others and eliciting comfort and emotional support.

The sex differences in crying that our study found are not peculiar to Britain; they are universal: in all cultures, women cry more often than men (usually between two and three times more often), cry more intensely and are more prone to crying. This could indicate that men's relative tearlessness may be due to biological differences, rather than 'socialization for inhibition'. Evolutionary psychologists argue that men have evolved to cry less than women, as tearful males would have been at a physical and reproductive disadvantage among our hunter-gatherer ancestors – such displays of weakness would have made a man vulnerable to attack by other males, and possibly also less attractive to females, who looked to males for protection². The tougher, more dry-eyed males would have been more likely to survive, attract mates and pass on their manly genes – so today's men are descended from a long line of non-crying males, with a degree of inhibition about crying hard-wired into their brains.

But the crying difference is not apparent in infants under two years of age – if anything, researchers have found that male babies cry somewhat more than females – which has led some to assume that the dramatic sex differences in adult crying must be purely the result of social conditioning. In fact, the delayed emergence of sex differences does not rule out a biological component, as these differences could be linked to later developmental stages, such as hormonal changes at puberty (baby boys are not born with deeper voices than girls either, or with beards, but no-one would suggest that these are due to socialization).

The research on childhood and adolescent crying is patchy and somewhat inconclusive, but there is a growing consensus that the adult sex difference – females crying significantly more often and more readily than males – starts to become apparent at around age 11, and increases through puberty and adolescence. It would seem, however, that the differences are more likely to be associated with a decrease in male crying than an increase in female tearfulness – and it has been suggested that male hormones, such as testosterone, may play a part in inhibiting crying among adolescent boys, and adult males. (In one of

² Such reactions to male tears were evident among our female focus-group participants and interviewees. While they subscribed to current wisdom about the need for men to show their emotions, most women confessed to being disconcerted by male tears: "I'm the female – I'm the weak one – now what do I do? My rock of Gibraltar is crying!" said a focus-group participant.

our focus groups, a woman working as a matron in a boarding school, 'surrogate mother' to a large number of 13- to 18-year-old boys, told us that in an entire year at the school, she had never once seen any of the boys cry – “I take them to the hospital frequently with really nasty things and I have not seen a single one cry” – while the female pupils "are always in tears".) Another hypothesis, that the hormone prolactin may affect crying in females, does not seem to be supported by the research evidence.

Clearly, socialization plays a large part as well, with male crying being generally discouraged from an early age, while female crying is accepted or even rewarded. "I was brought up by a father who said 'you will not show any emotion – you're a man'," said a 38-year-old male focus-group participant. Another commented, "When I was growing up, I wasn't really allowed to cry either, but it wasn't like I was told that - it was just like it was implied." "It was unsaid," explained another man "[but] if you showed any sign of weakness it was like 'what are you crying for, you girl!'" "You are always told to 'be a brave little soldier,'" said a 40-year-old man, "Not crying is a good way to show how tough you are."

Cross-culturally, men are more likely than women to feel ashamed of crying. There are variations in degree, but this indicates that social norms restricting male crying may be pretty much universal. It has been suggested, however, that shame and social inhibitions cannot fully account for men's reluctance to cry, as they do not cry as much as women even when they are alone, and at least one study found no sex difference in the number of times men and women 'feel like crying but do not cry'. It is possible that social norms have become 'internalised' to such an extent that inhibition is automatic, that men hide their emotions from themselves as well as others. "I can remember trying to hold myself back even when I was alone," said one of our focus-group participants, "there is no reason for that." It has also been suggested that men may cry less than women because they tend to avoid 'emotional' situations, and/or because they perceive potentially distressing situations differently (e.g. as a problem to be solved) and have different ways of coping with them (more assertive, active and instrumental).

There is no evidence to suggest that men are somehow intrinsically 'less emotional' than women – that they are by nature more cold or callous or unfeeling. ("I wouldn't actually cry – I would just be very 'moved', even though the emotion is the same," said a focus-group participant.) In fact, all the available research indicates that they experience just as much emotion as women: experiments measuring physiological responses such as heart rate and skin conductivity show that men respond at least much as women to sad or moving films, for example. Men are simply less emotionally *expressive* than women – less willing (perhaps less able?) to display their emotions by crying.

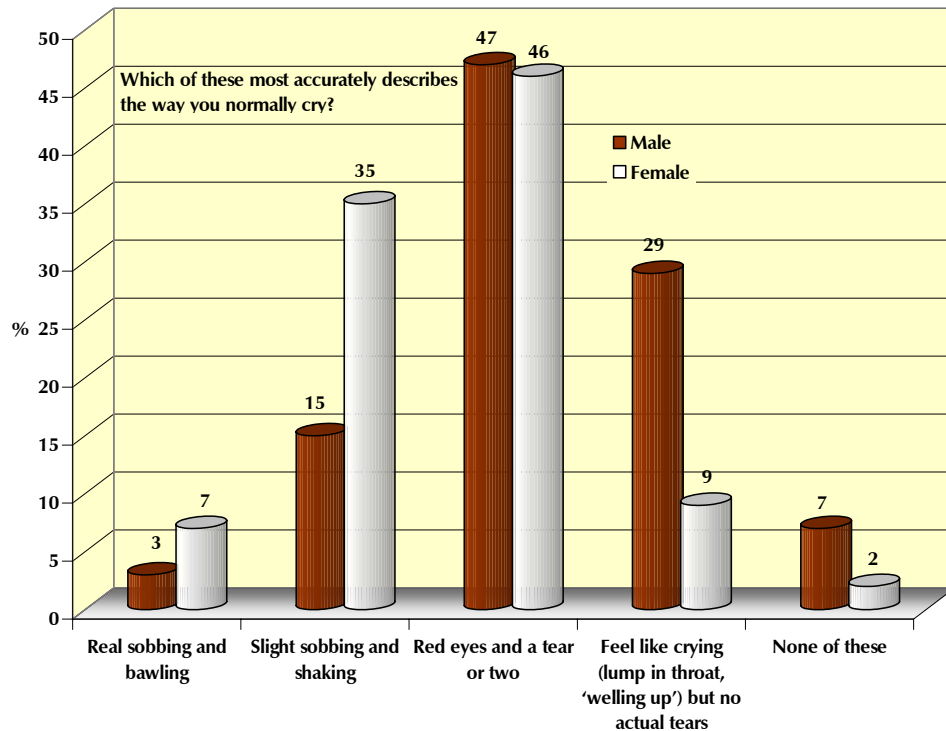
Recent studies have shown that androgynous men – those with more 'feminine' traits – are more tearfully inclined than traditionally 'masculine' males. Androgynous males have fewer inhibitions about displaying weakness or vulnerability, and are more emotionally expressive generally. These findings could be seen as lending support to either the 'nature' or the 'nurture' side of the

crying debate, depending on whether such androgyny is seen as a cultural or biological phenomenon (much recent research suggests that 'femininity' in males is due to exposure to hormones in the womb, influencing brain development). In any case, our data would seem to indicate that the New Man/Metrosexual trend, whereby more men are said to be 'getting in touch with their feminine side', has not had as much impact as is often claimed. As always with these nature/nurture debates, the answer on crying is almost certainly that it's probably a bit of both - that men's and women's different crying habits involve a complex interplay of cultural and biological factors.

How do men cry?

Men not only cry less often than women, but when they do cry, their crying tends to be less intense. Forty-seven percent of men said that 'red eyes and a tear or two' was normal for them. ("I don't really 'boo' ...but I let it trickle," said a 39-year-old man.)

Forty-six percent of women also picked this category, but 35% said their normal crying would involve 'slight sobbing and shaking' (compared with just 15% of men) and 7% of women admitted to 'real sobbing and bawling' (only 3% of men). In our focus groups, men were at pains to distinguish between 'acceptable', relatively 'manly' crying, which consisted mainly of just 'welling up', and outright sobbing or 'bawling', which many seemed to feel uncomfortable about. "Having a really good sob is equated with weakness," said a 39-year-old man, "particularly if you're English. You're no longer the alpha male." A 52-year-old man explained, "It is controllable, that welling up where you actually build up to a pitch where you know the next thing is tears. It's that last second – you take the deep breath – I never let go. Maybe I should have that last gasp and let go to see what happens. I know what happens: you cry." "You'd be in tears all the time," warned a 40-year-old man, "It's that last bit where you 'bawl' – that's what I can't do – it's probably because when there are people around I don't want to be seen to be losing control."



Younger people of both sexes are more likely to admit to the more dramatic type of crying than the older generations: among the 18-24s, 6% of men and 14% of women described their typical crying as 'real sobbing and bawling' (compared to the average of 3% and 7%, respectively) while none of the over-60 males and only 3% of the over-60 females picked this category. This is not, however, necessarily evidence for a significant social trend towards noisier crying – it may well be that younger people have always tended to cry in a more noisy, uninhibited, 'childlike' fashion, and that we all become somewhat more discreet, restrained and 'grown-up' in our crying as we get older. "I think you hold it back, definitely," said a 42-year-old man "It could be a full-on cry if you let it go."

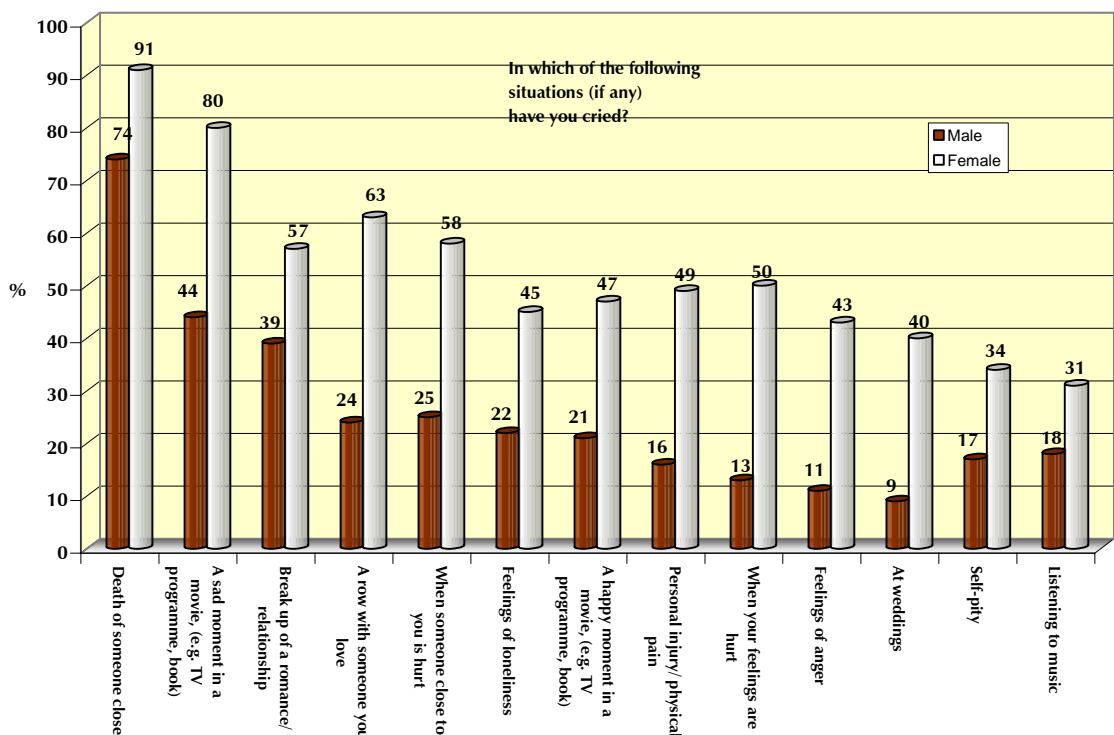
What makes men cry?

Our survey found that the majority of men (74%) have cried over the death of someone close to them, although when questioned in more detail about this in interviews and focus groups most men said that they had shed their tears of grief in private, rather than at funerals. "It's like when my grandfather died, I didn't cry at the funeral but I cried when I got home," said a focus-group participant, "I saved it because it was more personal." "Funerals just weird me out," said another, "This inbuilt thing kicks in and goes 'You will not cry, you will be tough and stand up for everybody else'." Another remembered, "At the funeral I was very upset, but it was a few weeks later that I suddenly, when I was just doing something and thought of her, burst into tears."

The other main tear-triggers for men are sad moments in films or TV programmes (44%) and the break-up of a romance or relationship (39%). Men in their late twenties and early thirties are the most likely to have shed tears over a break-up, and this age group is also the most susceptible to weepy films. The

18-24s are less sentimental. In our focus groups and interviews, men seemed particularly happy to talk about the films that had moved them to tears: "I think we can all admit to a 'film cry'," said one 45-year-old man. "At the end of *Moulin Rouge*; the end of *Shadowlands* is another classic one; at certain war films, because they are true, it's real stuff based on actual facts," said a 39-year-old man, who admitted to crying a lot over films, although he stressed that this involved a tear or two, not 'sobbing and bawling'. A 42-year-old man talked about a documentary that had moved him: "It was a very sad moment. It stunned me really; I couldn't talk about it. It wasn't blubbing – it was a welling up and a tear, probably because there was somebody else there."

Many of the men in our focus groups felt that moving films, or even pieces of music, were 'triggers' that allowed them to release 'stored up' emotions, connected with events or experiences in their own lives – emotions which they had been unwilling, or unable, to express at the time of the event or experience, or perhaps just feelings that they had not fully acknowledged. A focus-group participant explained: "A lot of the time it's a trigger. I was watching a film with a friend; it was a Sean Penn film, *Indian Runner* – it was about two brothers and at that point I hadn't seen my brother for about 12 years and watching the interaction between them, that spurred me on to shed a few tears." Another man agreed: "I've watched something on telly that can make me well up, make me emotional. I'm not a great one with loss, something semi-related to that in a film would bring up the feeling again."



Happy moments in films and TV programmes are quite high on the male tear-trigger list as well (21%). Other studies have also shown that men are particularly likely to cry 'happy tears'. "I shed a tear in films more at euphoria and at happy endings rather than sad outcomes" said one focus-group participant. "I like emotional films," said another, "It was a joyous film, I think,

or even Eastenders in some cases, I suppose!" Another commented "I can't remember the last time I openly cried, but the other day a little bit of emotion went when that girl won the tennis... I didn't actually cry, but it was moving. I was on my own."

In every situation in which men cry, however, women are still generally twice as likely to shed tears, sometimes three times more likely. Eighty percent of women have cried at a sad film, for example, and 57% have cried over the break-up of a relationship. Even a row with a loved one causes 63% of women to cry, compared with just 24% of men – and women are at least twice as likely as men to cry when someone close to them is hurt, when feeling lonely and at happy moments in a film, TV programme or book.

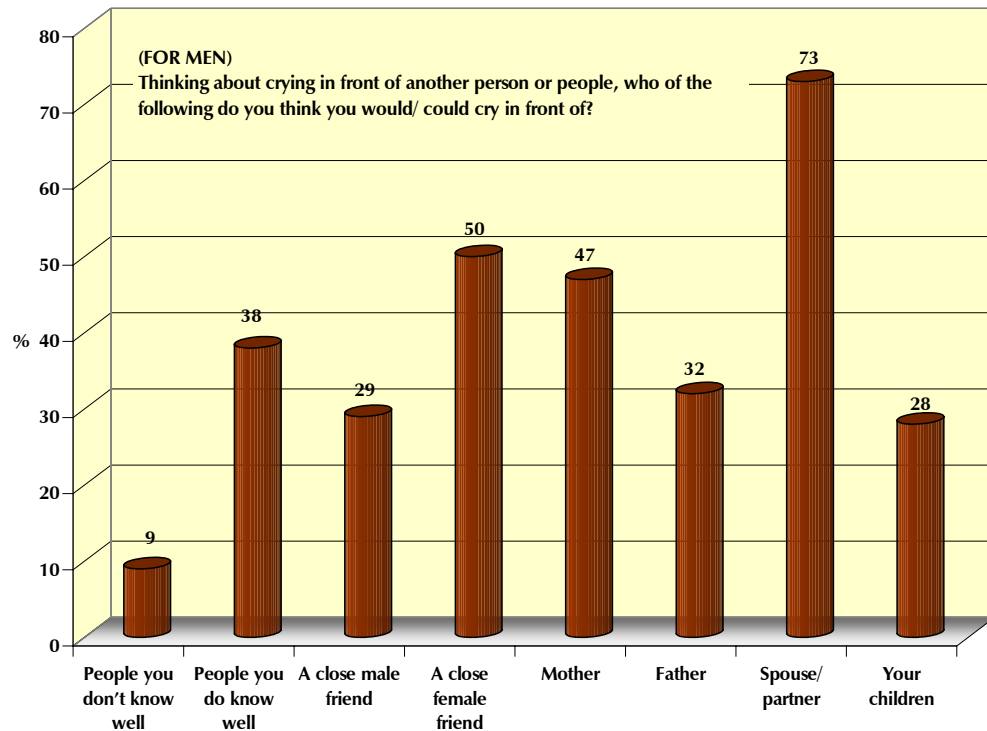
The biggest sex differences, in our study and others, are found in crying out of anger, frustration, conflict/hurt feelings, stress at work, helplessness and fear – all situations in which women are between 3 and 5 times more likely to cry than men. In our focus groups, both men and women felt that male anger is more socially accepted than male tears, whereas it is more acceptable for women to cry than to display anger. "We just get angry and punch something," said one man. "Yes, I think men are *allowed* to get angry and punch things," agreed a female participant. "Women often cry when what they are really feeling is anger," said another female interviewee.

Other research, including cross-cultural studies, has shown that women are generally much more likely to cry in conflict situations than men, and that the differences are least marked in crying over bereavement and crying for positive reasons (such as happy moments in films or a sporting victory) – situations which are most likely to elicit male tears.

It is worth noting that, in our survey, there was only one category in which men had cried as much as women: 'when your football team loses'. But perhaps surprisingly, only three percent of respondents (male and female) said they had ever cried over a football defeat. Unfortunately, we did not ask about crying over a football triumph – other studies suggest that men might be more likely to shed tears over a victory than a defeat.

Whose shoulder do men cry on?

Men are most likely to shed tears in front of their wives or girlfriends: 73% said they 'definitely or probably would' cry in front of their spouse/partner, and only 8% 'definitely would not' let their partner see them cry. The next most favoured shoulder to cry on would be a close female friend (50%), very closely followed by their mother (47%). (Men in their late 20s seem to be the most inclined to shed tears with their mums (63%).)



Previous studies had failed to distinguished between spouses, mothers, fathers and children in this context – lumping them all together as 'immediate family', which struck us as inappropriately vague, as our focus-group discussions had indicated significant variations in men's feelings about crying in front of different family members. In most previous studies, the most popular shoulder to cry on, for both men and women, has been found to be the 'close female friend', with 'immediate family' a poor second or even third choice. Our findings show that one particular family member – the spouse or partner – is in fact the first choice of both males and females.

Looking at our results in more detail, we find even stronger evidence for this preference: while only 10% of men and 28% of women say that they 'definitely would' cry in front of a close female friend, 30% of men and 51% of women 'definitely would' cry in front of their spouse/partner. Much has been made, in discussions of crying in social-science journals, of the apparent preference of both males and females for a 'close female friend', when in fact our findings show that women are much more likely to cry on a male shoulder, if the male in question is their husband or partner, and that males feel much more comfortable crying in front of their wives or girlfriends.

The unhelpfully vague 'family' category in previous studies may also have led to an undervaluing of mothers as shoulders to cry on. We have already noted that our male respondents ranked mothers a very close third to female friends. Again examining our data in more detail, we find that more men 'definitely would' cry in front of their mother (17%) than in front of a close female friend (10%). Among 25-29 year old males, 25% 'definitely would' cry on their mother's shoulder. "My son cries: he was crying on my shoulder yesterday," said a 56-year-old mother. "You don't have to be embarrassed with your mum," said a 46-year-old mother. "I cry on my mum's shoulder," said a 28-year-old man, "I

suppose because I used to when I was little – somehow it's still OK; she still thinks I'm about 10, really, anyway. Perhaps she's right!"

It is clear that men are still very wary of crying in front of other men. Only 29% of men would cry in front of a close male friend – the 25-35s being marginally less squeamish about this than either the 18-24s or the over-35s. Only a very small minority of men (around 5%) said that they *definitely* would cry in front of a close male friend – 'probably would' was as far as most would go. Thirty-one percent 'probably would not' and 34% 'definitely would not' let even their best mate see them cry. "I haven't seen any of my [male] friends cry...we've never seen each other cry – it's weird," said a 40-year-old man. "I'm trying to think if I can remember my [male] friends crying, cos I've got a lot of really old friends as well. Now that I think about it, maybe I haven't."

Does crying make men feel better?

Folk wisdom, along with many modern self-help manuals, holds that crying is therapeutic. The fact that 'emotional' tears have been found to contain toxins that are not present in tears resulting from irritants (dust, or chopping onions, for example) has been held up as evidence for the cathartic benefits of crying. As a corollary, it is also widely believed that not crying – suppressing one's desire to cry – is 'unhealthy', resulting in a build-up of stress that is emotionally and perhaps even physically 'toxic'.

The scientific evidence on the cathartic and health benefits of crying is somewhat more equivocal. There is little or no evidence for any health benefits. Only one study to date has found a positive relationship between crying frequency and good health, and the differences involved were quite small. Several studies, by contrast, have found either no correlation between crying frequency and health status, or a negative relationship – where crying is associated with an increased likelihood of physical illness. Another study found that people who cried in response to a sad film had significant decreases in secretory immunoglobulin A levels – an indication of immunosuppression – compared to people who did not cry.

The evidence on the emotionally cathartic effects of crying is much stronger. In most questionnaire studies, a fairly high percentage of people report feeling better after crying (although there are some indications that women may gain greater relief from crying than men) but there are some caveats. A sense of relief and a feeling of being better able to cope are quite common, but people may often experience a wide variety of other moods and feelings following a bout of crying, and this 'post-crying affect' is not always positive. People often report feeling tired, embarrassed, weak or even depressed after crying.

Research has also shown that improvement in mood after crying depends on a number of other factors, such as whether or not the issues or events that caused the person to cry are resolved, and, perhaps even more importantly, how the person's crying was perceived and received by others. Crying may not have any cathartic effect if the issues that led to the tears remain unresolved, or if one experiences negative reactions from others over the tears. Although both men and women may feel disconcerted by men crying, in our focus groups, both

sexes agreed that male tears are often 'taken more seriously' than female tears, perhaps because men generally cry much less than women – it is perhaps more of an 'event' when they do so. "Men crying has more novelty-value," said a female interviewee. "Yes," agreed another female, "I mean, if you see a man crying, you do tend to think it must be something important – whereas my girlfriends, we are always having a weepy-fit about something; it could be like someone gave me a funny look, or I think these trousers make me look fat or something."

In this context, it is worth noting that a major cross-cultural study of 'post-crying affect' found that men in countries with higher levels of shame about crying (where crying is less common, and socially frowned upon) experienced significantly less positive mood-change after crying. How men feel after crying is clearly influenced not only by the immediate response of those around them, but also, perhaps even when they are crying alone, by cultural norms and expectations about male crying. "It wouldn't be very therapeutic if you were embarrassed, would it?" said a focus-group participant.

The social acceptability of male tears, which clearly influences their cathartic effect, may often depend on what the man in question is crying about. While crying over something 'important' such as a bereavement or divorce may be accepted, many of the women we interviewed would feel considerably less sympathy for a man crying over something 'trivial', even though they would react sympathetically to a woman crying for the same reason. "It's not fair, I know," said one female interviewee, "but I'm afraid I would look down on a man crying over some of the things I have cried about – like not being able to find a parking space when I'm late for something." "Oh, that's so true," agreed another, "a woman can burst into tears when she's just frustrated – like when you can't make your computer work or it keeps crashing – but imagine a man crying because he'd lost a document and would have to re-type it all! You'd think 'what a baby!'"

While questionnaire studies have generally found, despite these caveats, some evidence to support the view that crying is cathartic or emotionally beneficial, laboratory studies on crying have almost all found quite the opposite – that crying results in increased tension, stress and negative feelings or moods. Almost all of these experiments involved showing people sad or moving films and recording both their subjective, verbal reports on how they felt after crying over the film and their physiological responses (heart rate, skin conductivity, temperature, respiration and so on).

One could argue that these laboratory studies are too artificial, too unlike real-life crying episodes, for their findings to carry any conviction, but crying at sad films is in fact one of the most commonly reported 'real-life' crying situations for both men and women, and women in particular often report deliberately watching moving films in order to 'have a good cry' – so the laboratory data should not be dismissed out of hand. More reasonable objections have focused on the limited time-frame of these experiments, which generally record responses only during and immediately after crying, and on the social and

personal context in which the crying occurs – where a 'resolution' of the kind required for cathartic effects is highly unlikely to occur.

Most of the questionnaire studies (which are arguably more reliable than the laboratory experiments) have provided support for the popular assumption that crying is cathartic or emotionally therapeutic. The majority of these studies have also found that this positive 'post-crying affect' is linked to crying frequency - that people who cry more often are more likely to feel better after crying.

Our own findings, from our national survey, suggest that crying is indeed therapeutic – *but only in moderation*. In this country, people who cry 'fairly often' are somewhat more likely to feel 'relieved' (40%) after crying than those who cry either 'not very often' (27%) or 'very often' (30%). Moderate criers are also more likely to feel 'better able to carry on' (40%) after a cry than either the frequently tearful (30%) or the more dry-eyed (30%).

Generally, women are more likely to feel relieved (34%) and better able to cope (36%) after a good cry than men (29% and 26%, respectively), but the difference is not very marked – and women are much more likely than men to feel tired after crying (40% vs 15%). It is interesting to note that men and women are more or less equally likely to feel embarrassed or silly after crying. Some other studies have indicated that women working either in male-dominated professions or in management positions cry significantly less than other females, which may perhaps be due to embarrassment – feeling that crying would be inappropriate, at least at work. "You cannot show a sign of weakness like that, otherwise people lose faith in you," commented a male focus-group participant. "That's exactly how I feel about being management," agreed a female, "I think that people who work for me think that I cannot cry."

Conclusion

The Kleenex For Men® study has shown evidence of a distinct change over the past two decades in attitudes towards the ways in which men express their emotions and sensitivities. Such changes undoubtedly reflect the broader shifts in gender roles that have occurred during this period. As men and women now increasingly relate to each other on equal terms in the fields of work and leisure and in the home, and as the old stereotypes of masculinity and femininity have been eroded, men who cry when it is judged appropriate for them to do so are no longer seen as weak or effeminate. On the contrary, being 'in touch with one's emotions' is now regarded as not only permissible but also a sign of strength and self-assurance.

Differences between the sexes still remain, of course, and women continue to shed tears significantly more often than men. This is likely to remain the case for a long time, reflecting perhaps our evolutionary heritage and the lasting impact of our time spent as hunters and gatherers. But in the way that women can actually read maps, and men can actually learn to ask for directions when they get lost, despite inherent differences in visual-spatial and linguistic competencies, so too can men learn to cry in order to express their feelings, and women can learn to appreciate that those who do so are not necessarily wimps.

Summary of report findings

Highlights

- It's OK for men to cry – 90% of women and 77% of men think it has become more socially acceptable over the past 20 years, for men to be seen crying
- The situations when men feel it is more *acceptable* to cry are:
 - Births and deaths of people close to you (93%)
 - Break up of relationship (62%)
 - Physical pain (41%)
 - Sad or happy moments in films (26%)
- In focus groups/ in-depth interviews, both men and women felt that attitudes had changed: the taboo on male tears is seen as 'outdated' and unhealthy
- "When Gazza cried, that opened the floodgates for everybody to be allowed to cry", according to one female participant
- About 30% of men have cried in the past month vs 70% of women
- 15% of men's crying involves 'slight sobbing and shaking'; 3% of men admitted to 'real sobbing and bawling'
- Whilst women subscribed to current wisdom about the need for men to show their emotions, most women confessed to being disconcerted by male tears
- The study provides evidence of a long-term, gradual shift in attitudes. Among the over 50s, for example, 63% have never seen their father cry, while for the 30 – 50 year olds, the figures is 48%, and down to 44% among the 18 – 29 year olds.
- Men in their fifties seem the most emotionally open in front of their children: in this age group, 40% say they would cry in front of their children.

Tear triggers: how and when do men actually cry

- 74% of men have cried over the death of someone close to them: when questioned more in focus groups and interviews most men said they had shed tears of grief in private, rather than at funerals
- 44% of men cry at sad moments in film and TV: these allow the release of 'stored up' emotions
- 21% of men cry at happy moments in film and TV
- There is a lot of evidence in other studies to suggest that men are particularly likely to cry 'happy tears'
- 39% of men cry at the break-up of a romance or relationship
- 24% of men cry over a row with a loved one
- despite a summer of sporting losses, only 3% of men had ever cried over a football defeat
- 25% of men cry when someone close to them is hurt
- 22% of men cry over feelings of loneliness

- men are most likely to shed tears in front of their wives or girlfriends: 73% said they 'definitely or probably would' cry in front of their spouse/ partner.
- Only 8% of men 'definitely would not' let their partner see them cry

- The next most favoured shoulder to cry on would be close female friend (50%), very closely followed by their mother (47%)
- 29% of men said they would cry in front of a close male friend

- men are likely to feel relieved (29%) and better able to cope (26%) after a good cry

- men use the following to dry tears
 - hands: 35%
 - hanky: 33%
 - tissues: 24%
 - sleeve: 20%
 - loo roll: 15%
 - kitchen roll: 14%
 - Kleenex® For Men: 13%

Regional figures

- London-based men are more likely to have cried in the past month (32%) than anywhere else in the country. Scottish men are least likely (27%)

- Furthermore, London men are more likely to have either slightly or really sobbed and bawled (23%). Again, Scottish men are least likely (10%).

- London men are more likely to cry in front of a male friend (35%). Midlands and Wales are least likely (27%)

- London men are far more likely to cry in front of a female friend (56%) than Scottish men (39%)

- Similarly, London men are far more likely to cry in front of their mother (52%) than Scottish men (39%)

- Conversely, men in Scotland are more likely to cry in front of their children (31%) than Londoners (25%)

- Men in Midlands/ Wales are more likely to cry at a sad moment in a movie (48%) than elsewhere in the country

- The break up of a relationship results in tears for London men (47%) more than the Scots (31%). Similar figures for 'a row with someone you love': Londoners are twice as likely to cry over this as Scots (33% vs 15%)

- Men in the Midlands and Wales are more prone to crying over self pity (20%) than anywhere else in the country.

- Men in 'rest of South' are nearly twice as likely to cry for joy (14%) as men in London (8%)

- Scots are nearly twice as likely to cry over the birth of a baby (14%) than London men (8%)

- Scottish men are also more likely to cry at weddings (17%) than men anywhere else in the country

- Men in London are twice as likely to use tissues to dry their eyes (32%) than men in Scotland (15%); Londoners are nearly twice as likely to use Kleenex® For Men (15%) than Scots (8%).

About Kleenex® For Men

Kleenex® For Men commissioned the Social Issues Research Centre to investigate the male display of emotion to coincide with the brand re-launch. The brand has been redesigned to appeal to a younger family man (in his 40s) who is more modern in his outlook.

- Kleenex® is a Top 50 UK brand
- Kleenex® for Men has been around for almost 50 years and is worth £30m
- Kleenex® for Men has been the No1 facial tissue brand for over 40 years
- 2.5m households buy KFM every year
- 1 pack of KFM is sold every 1.5 seconds in the UK
- Kleenex® for Men loyalty is over 50%
- Kleenex® for Men shoppers spend more per visit and more per annum – (spend per visit for category average = £1.50, KFM = £2.29; Average annual spend for category = £9 and annual spend = £16)
- Key consumer perceptions of the Kleenex® for Men brand are: it has a strong heritage, its suitable for everyday use, it's the strongest tissue on the market
- The first Kleenex® for Men pack hit the shelves in 1956 and the pack design preceding the latest version was on shelves for five years
- The new Kleenex® for Men tissue has an increased overall strength whilst maintaining current softness levels
- The new pack will be launched in September with through the line marketing support - PR, PoS, 3 for 2 promotions and advertising in December

Kleenex® is a registered trademark of Kimberly-Clark Worldwide