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Findings in Sport, Hospitality, Entertainment, and Event Management

Empirical - Sport

Is There Really No Crying in Baseball? Examining the Acceptance of Crying in Sport

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Abstract

It is not uncommon to see tears shed by players on both the winning and losing teams, particularly after a championship game. However, sport is also seen as an environment where competitors go to "put their game faces on" and keep their emotions in check, such as during the film *A League of Their Own*, when a manager tells a sobbing player that "there is no crying in baseball!" The current study sought to examine the extent to which individuals agree with this perspective. Specifically, participants rated the acceptability of crying by males and females in both sport and non-sport scenarios. The results revealed different expectations for emotional reactions in sport as individuals were more accepting of crying in non-sport scenarios than in sport scenarios. Additionally persons with higher levels of restrictive emotionality were particularly likely to believe that crying in sport was not appropriate.

Keywords: Sport; Emotion Expression; Gender Norms; Gender Differences

Emotions serve to motivate humans to avoid negative, and approach positive, situations (Cosmides & Tooby, 2000). Although emotions are diverse, there are more distinct negative emotions than positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998). This may be due to the adaptive value of emotions; positive emotional expression usually denotes happiness, but there are a variety of negative situations that require specific emotional responses for survival, such as crying (Nesse, 1990). Although crying is a pervasive and unique form of emotional expression, the underlying mechanisms and purpose for tears is up for debate (Vingerhoets et al., 2000). In this paper, the authors aim to empirically assess differences in the acceptability of crying between men and women in sport and non-sport settings.

In American culture, females tend to experience and express a wider range of emotions than males (Cornelius, 1986; Plant et al., 2000; Spalek et al., 2015). Women also tend to report higher levels of empathy than men, which can lead to higher acceptance of emotionality (Williams, 1989). Research suggests that emotional suppression by men may be due to strict adherence to male gender norms and beliefs that emotionality is feminine (Berger et al., 2005; Good et al., 1989; Simon & Nath, 2004). In general, men are restrictive in their emotionality (Wolf, 2000), including the expression of sadness (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). However, within American culture emotions such as pride, joy, or anger may be viewed as masculine and are associated with high levels of male acceptance (Plant et al., 2000).

Individuals high in restrictive emotionality (i.e., resistance toward, and disapproval of, emotional expression) refrain from emotional expression and tend to criticize those who do not (Wong et al., 2006). Additionally, individuals high in restrictive emotionality often experience psychological distress (Wester et al., 2007), anxiety (Wong et al., 2006), increased vulnerability to stress (Snell et al., 1986) and devalue therapy (Tanielian et al., 2008). Wong and colleagues (2006) argue that this may be partially due to communication difficulties. Because highly restrictive emotional individuals struggle to identify and comprehend emotional expression, they are more likely to judge and suppress it. The deficits in emotional communication may influence the acceptance of crying, because crying is viewed as instrumental to emotional communication (Kottler, 1996; Roes, 1990).

Psychological research in American culture finds that men are less critical when women cry compared to when other men cry (Cretser et al., 1982). Women are typically more empathic and supportive of crying regardless of the target's gender (Jesser, 1982). The situation also matters; crying in a professional setting is considered unacceptable in comparison to intimate or personal situations (Plas & Hoover-Dempsey, 1988). Although crying has been found to elicit positive communication and emotional responses from women (Hill & Martin, 1997), that is not always the case. Labott et al. (1991) found that women were more approving of crying men than women. The inconsistencies surrounding the acceptance and understanding of emotional expression stress the importance of further research to develop a more precise understanding of the topic.

Emotional Responses in Sport

Crying in sport is common after winning, losing, injury, or error. Athletes seem permitted to behave counter to society's norms by crying, even though it is commonly perceived as feminine and weak in American culture (MacArthur & Shields, 2015; Serazio, 2019). However, the existence of crying in sport does noee acceptance. College football players were asked to rate the acceptance of differing forms of emotional expression after a game and suggested that having tears in one's eyes was more acceptable

than actually crying (Wong et al., 2011). Interestingly, crying was considered more acceptable after a loss than a win.

Crying in sport is prevalent. In 2009, then University of Florida quarterback Tim Tebow cried after losing the Southeastern Conference Championship game. During the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup, Nualphan Lamsam, Thailand's general manager, wept after her team scored. In 2008, NFL player Terrell Owens cried while defending his teammate Tony Romo against media criticism. Adeline Gray, a World Champion Olympic wrestler, cried after losing in the 2012 Olympic trials. Andy Murray, a professional tennis player, wept after losing (in 2012) and winning (in 2016) at Wimbledon. Candace Parker cried after winning the 2016 WNBA Championship and the WNBA Championship MVP.

These athletes acted in a manner that is generally inconsistent with American male sex role stereotypes (Berger et al., 2005). Given that competitive sport is frequently viewed as a male-dominated arena (Wann, 1997), the ability for men and women to be comfortable expressing emotions while competing provides an interesting area for study.

The Current Investigation

Until now, most discussions and investigations of crying in sport have been qualitative studies (MacArthur & Shields, 2015) or popular media accounts. The current study sought to investigate whether or not individuals believe that it is more acceptable to cry during sport versus non-sport situations, and potential sex differences.

Research Question: Will individuals be more accepting of male and female crying in sport or non-sport settings?

Hypothesis: Individuals with higher levels of restrictive emotionality (i.e., those who are less accepting of expressions of emotion) will be less accepting of crying, and this will be especially ture in sport settings.

Method

Participants
The original sample contained 149 students from a mid-sized, mid-southern university in the United States. The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board of the host university, and all participants were at least 18 years of age. However, 31 individuals failed to complete the entire

questionnaire packet and were not included in the analyses. As a result, the final sample contained 118 persons. The sample was comprised of mostly individuals identifying as White (n=105), female (n=79), and had an average age of 19.79 years (SD=3.49).

Materials and Procedure
Participants were recruited via an electronic data collection maintenance system (i.e., SONA). Upon accessing the online survey, participants were presented with an informed consent statement. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete and consisted of three sections:

Male and Female Crying Statements. The first two sections consisted of 30 crying statements created specifically for this research (Appendix A). One version focused on the acceptability of men crying while the second targeted women. Furthermore, 15 of the statements were sport-based and 15 non-sport. The items instructed participants to rate their own approval of crying by another person in the described scenario. The statements attempted to cover a broad range of likely situations that would occur in either sport or non-sport instances. Response options ranged from 1 (*low acceptance*) to 7 (*high acceptance*). An example of a sport statement was: "For a male (female), crying after winning a championship in sport in which he (she) competed." An example of a non-sport statement was: "For a female (male), crying after a natural disaster."

Restrictive Emotionality Subscale of the Male Role Norms Inventory – Revised. This scale was used to assess the beliefs individuals hold about emotionality (Levant et al., 2007). The scale consisted of eight items scored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A sample item from this subscale was: "A man should never admit when others hurt his feelings."

Demographics and Debriefing. The final section consisted of a demographics survey assessing gender (male, female, prefer not to disclose), race, and age. Upon completion of this section, participants were debriefed. They then received course credit for their participation.

Results

Preliminary Analyses
Reliability assessments were conducted on the acceptance of crying statements and each subscale had acceptable reliability estimates (male sport

Table 1.
Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	19.79	3.49							
2. Gender	0.33	0.47	.16 [-.03, .33]						
3. Restrictive Emotionality	18.44	10.16	-.01 [-.19, .18]	.41** [.24, .55]					
4. Race	0.11	0.31	-.03 [-.21, .16]	.16 [-.03, .33]	-.03 [-.21, .15]				
5. Male Sport	61.68	15.63	-.23* [-.40, -.05]	-.26** [-.42, -.08]	-.26** [-.42, -.08]	-.09 [-.27, .09]			
6. Male Non-sport	67.84	18.12	-.18 [-.35, .00]	-.27** [-.43, -.09]	-.52** [-.64, -.37]	-.15 [-.32, .04]	.77** [.68, .83]		
7. Female Sport	67.25	16.86	-.02 [-.20, .16]	-.05 [-.23, .13]	-.18* [-.35, -.00]	.10 [-.08, .28]	.56** [.42, .67]	.45** [.30, .59]	
8. Female Non-sport	78.42	16.52	-.04 [-.22, .14]	-.01 [-.19, .17]	-.24** [-.40, -.06]	-.02 [-.20, .17]	.48** [.32, .61]	.61** [.48, .71]	.78** [.69, .84]

subscale α=0.92; male non-sport subscale α=0.92; female sport subscale α=0.92; female non-sport subscale α=0.91). Next, we examined the reliability of the restrictive emotionality subscale which was acceptable (α=0.93). Additionally, a correlation was conducted including age, gender, race, restrictive emotionality scores, and the four crying statement subscales (Table 1).

Note. Gender: 0 = Female, 1 = Male; Race: 0 = White, 1 = Other; Male Sport = crying statements involving males in sport statements; Male Non-Sport = crying statements involving males in non-sport scenarios; Female Sport = crying statements involving females in sport scenarios; Female Non-Sport = crying statements involving females in non-

sport scenarios. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.

Tests of Research Question and Hypothesis

The first analysis concerned whether or not individuals would be more accepting of males or females crying in sport and non-sport settings. To examine this, a series of paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to investigate the differences between scores on the four subscales. First, sex differences were examined to determine if there was a difference in acceptability of crying per statement (Table 2). The results suggested that participants believed it was more acceptable for women to cry than men in both sport and non-sport environments. Next, we compared acceptability scores in sport and non-sport settings (Table 3). The data suggested that it was *less* acceptable for both males and females to cry in sport settings relative to non-sport environments.

Table 2.
Paired sample t-tests analyzing the difference in levels of the acceptance of crying per sex.

	Male		Female		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*-test
Sport	61.68	15.63	67.25	16.86	-3.94**
Non-Sport	67.84	18.12	78.42	16.52	-7.78**

Note. M = Mean. *SD* = Standard Deviation. **p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001*

Table 3.
Paired sample t-tests analyzing the difference in levels of the acceptance of crying per scenario.

	Sport		Non-Sport		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*-test
Male	61.68	15.63	67.84	18.12	-5.69**
Female	67.25	16.86	78.42	16.52	-10.87**

Note. M = Mean. *SD* = Standard Deviation. **p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001*

Then, we examined the hypothesis predicting that individuals with higher levels of restricted emotionality (i.e., those who are less accepting of expressions of emotion) would have particularly negative ratings of the appropriateness of crying in sport settings. The correlation analyses revealed that the acceptance of crying in sport for males and females were positively correlated. Additionally, scores on the restrictive emotionality subscale of the MRNI-R were negatively correlated with the acceptance of crying in sport for both males and females. Thus, in support of the hypothesis, restrictive emotionality is related to lower levels of crying acceptance which is consistent with past findings (e.g., Wong et al., 2006).

Finally, to further assess the hypothesis, a series of hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted wherein crying acceptance was first predicted by participant gender, and then restrictive emotionality when controlling for gender (Table 4). Participant gender was an independent predictor of male crying subscales, such that female participants were more likely to accept crying than male participants. However, when restrictive emotionality was added to the models, gender was no longer a significant predictor. Furthermore, restrictive emotionality only predicted the acceptance of crying in non-sport statements such that greater restrictive emotionality was related to lower crying acceptance. The relationship between restrictive emotionality and crying acceptance was especially strong in male ($R^2=0.20$) compared to female ($R^2=0.05$) non-sport statements.

Table 4.
Predicting the acceptance of crying by gender and restrictive emotionality.

Crying Subscale	Model	Predictor	β	Std. Error	*t*-value	Sig. *t*	Fit	ΔR^2
Male Sport	Model One	Gender	-0.26*	2.97	-2.88	0.005	$R^2 = 0.06$	
	Model Two	Gender	-0.18	3.21	-1.90	0.06	$R^2 = 0.08$	
		RE	-0.18	0.15	-1.90	0.06		0.02
Male Non-Sport	Model One	Gender	-10.22*	3.43	-2.98	0.004	$R^2 = 0.06$	
	Model Two	Gender	-0.07	3.34	-0.76	0.45	$R^2 = 0.26$	
		RE	-0.49*	0.16	-5.64	<0.001		0.20*
Female Sport	Model One	Gender	-1.90	3.30	-0.57	0.57	$R^2 = 0.00$	
	Model Two	Gender	0.03	3.58	0.26	0.80	$R^2 = 0.02$	
		RE	-0.19	0.17	-1.93	0.06		0.02
Female Non-Sport	Model One	Gender	-0.21	3.25	-0.07	0.95	$R^2 = 0.00$	
	Model Two	Gender	0.11	3.45	1.12	0.27	$R^2 = 0.05$	
		RE	-0.29*	0.16	-2.89	0.005		0.05*

Notes: Asterisk denotes a significant relationship at the .005 level

Discussion

In the 1992 film *A League of Their Own,* based on the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, a player cries after being reprimanded by her manager. The player's sobbing led to the manager's famous quote: "There is no crying in baseball!" The data suggests that many people agree. Specifically, individuals believe it is less acceptable to cry in sport than non-sport domains for both men and women.

The role of participant gender in restrictive emotionality was of particular interest. The results of the hierarchical multiple regression show partial support of past research. When gender was the sole predictor, female participants were more accepting of crying, while males viewed female crying as more acceptable. However, when restrictive emotionality was added as a second predictor of crying acceptance, participant gender was no longer a significant predictor. When controlling for gender, restrictive emotionality was only a significant ($p <$ .005) predictor of crying acceptance in non-sport statements within our sample. This suggests that gender and American cultural norms play an important role in sport settings.

While gender wasn't predictive of crying for women in either condition, men were less approving of crying in male sport scenarios. Past research (e.g., MacArthur & Shields, 2015; Serazio, 2019) suggests that crying is typically seen as feminine, and the our suggests the same as crying was more acceptable for men than women. Additionally, it is important to note that the current study took place in the United States within a predominately young, White, and female sample. Therefore, the results may differ if the study were replicated using different gender and racial makeup, and/or in countries with alternate norms regarding emotionality.

Furthermore, the stronger relationship between restrictive emotionality and crying approval in male scenarios versus female scenarios shows the existence of a double standard. While it was rated as more acceptable to cry in non-sport versus sport instances, the predictive abilities of restrictive emotionality were not as great in sport. Future research should investigate this phenomenon, as it seems to suggest that those high in restrictive emotionality hold different expectations of individuals within sporting environments. Wong et al. (2011) found evidence for greater acceptance of crying after losing versus winning, and the situations described via the crying items were mostly negative. Future research may consider including positive examples to determine whether affect is differentially predictive of crying acceptance.

Additionally, we found different expectations for gender as respondents believed it to be more acceptable for women to cry relative to men. These results replicate past findings which suggest women are viewed as more emotional than men (Shields & Shields, 2002; Vingerhoets & Scheirs, 2000). The current study provides new findings concerning situational influences on emotional acceptance. Women were expected to show less emotion in sport versus non-sport settings. This extends to male athletes too, suggesting that the sport domain encourages more stereotypically masculine behaviors.

These results replicate Wong et al. (2006) as restrictive emotionality was negatively associated with crying acceptance. These results provide support for the importance of context as acceptance of crying in sport scenarios was found to be lower than that of non-sport settings. Additionally, the relationship between restrictive emotionality and crying acceptance was strongest within male non-sport items. Therefore, social norms surrounding male emotional expression may be strongly associated with restrictive emotionality.

Implications and Future Investigation

Although it is unrealistic to always expect a stoic demeanor from athletes, many individuals view crying in sport as inappropriate – at least compared to other contexts. This is surprising, given the aforementioned pervasiveness of crying in sport. Athletes should be able to express themselves in an honest and authentic fashion, but our findings suggest they may receive criticism if they cry.

Regarding sport marketing, research indicates that player attributes are a critical component of attitudes toward teams and sponsors (Wann & James, 2019). Based on the current work it seems that advertisers may need to tread lightly when displaying athletes or fans crying. While it may be beneficial to display the full range of emotions that come along with sport and sport fandom, our data suggests that the inclusion of crying may alienate certain groups, such as those with high levels of restrictive emotionality. Further research should be conducted to better understand the effect of showing negative emotions within sport marketing.

Future studies should explore is the relationship between restrictive emotionality and fandom. This study was desgined to explore the existence of double standards between emotional expressions in sport versus society, thus the results do not explore the role of sport fandom. It would be interesting to explore the dynamics within the culture of sport fans to get a better understanding of their perception of crying in

sport and how that relates to team identification and fan dysfunction.

Conclusion

The current study provides a first step for future research by providing empirical data to support the overwhelming notion that sport is unique regarding emotional expression. Future studies should further examine the driving forces behind these beliefs. Due to the largely exploratory nature of this paper, restrictive emotionality and gender were the only variables discussed. Future studies may look at the role of factors such as emotional intelligence, age, political orientation, or competitiveness.

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Appendix A: Crying Statements

Please indicate on a scale of 1-7 how acceptable it would be for a ***MALE/FEMALE*** to cry during or after each of the following statements. (1 meaning not at all acceptable, 7 meaning completely acceptable)

1. For a male/female, crying after winning a championship in sport in which he competed
2. For a male/female, crying after retirement from a career in sport
3. For a male/female, crying after the death of a teammate in sport
4. For a male/female, crying after getting injured during a sporting event
5. For a male/female, crying after his favorite coach retires from coaching
6. For a male/female, crying after a loss in a sporting competition
7. For a male/female, crying when being yelled at by a coach during a sporting event
8. For a male/female, crying when removed from the starting lineup on a sport team
9. For a male/female, crying when placed into the starting lineup on a sport team
10. For a male/female, crying after a pep talk for a sport team
11. For a male/female, crying after accidently breaking his equipment or uniform for a sport team
12. For a male/female, crying after being disqualified from a sporting event (e.g., fouling out of a basketball game)
13. For a male/female, crying after a poor performance in a sporting activity
14. For a male/female, crying after the death of a sport coach
15. For a male/female, crying after losing a video game
16. For a male/female, crying after or during a sad movie or TV show
17. For a male/female, crying during a romantic date
18. For a male/female, crying after a breakup with his significant other
19. For a male/female, crying after winning the lottery
20. For a male/female, crying after graduation from college
21. For a male/female, crying during a wedding (such as when the wedding party comes down the aisle)
22. For a male/female, crying after the birth of his first child
23. For a male/female, crying when a car breaks down on a trip
24. For a male/female, crying after the death of a loved one
25. For a male/female, crying out of frustration
26. For a male/female, crying after getting reprimanded at work or at school
27. For a male/female, crying after receiving a superb grade on an important college test or assignment
28. For a male/female, crying after receiving a poor grade an important college test or assignment
29. For a male/female, crying at a reunion
30. For a male/female, crying after a national disaster

Note: When taking the survey, participants were given separate versions of the scale per target gender.