

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE CRY? A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF SITUATIONS THAT EVOKE EMOTIONAL TEARS

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The aim of two preliminary studies reported in the article was to identify the main reasons for crying and to create a set of situational vignettes that would refer to specific situations or events that potentially can make people cry. In Study 1 ($n = 61$), we asked participants to list six general reasons behind crying. In Study 2 ($n = 70$), participants were asked to identify specific situations in which people shed emotion-related tears. As a result, we selected a set of 34 situational vignettes. Each of them is a short and gender-neutral description of a specific emotional reason that can make people cry and is related to one of the following basic emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, or fear. The vignettes can be used to manipulate the emotional basis of tears in experimental research.

Keywords: emotions; emotional tears; stimulus material; situational vignettes.

Tears are a natural and common yet still understudied phenomenon (Vingerhoets & Bylsma, 2016). Although everyday observations indicate that people cry for many different reasons, the existing literature lacks a precise classification of

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reasons for crying (Zickfeld et al., 2021). Therefore, the purpose of the present pilot studies was to fill this gap and identify emotional situations that may underlie tears and categorize these situations into groups representative of different emotions. Accordingly, in this paper, we intentionally omit tears caused by factors other than emotions, such as cold wind, eyeball contamination (Keijser et al., 2002), as well as infections, allergies (Murube, 2009), or exhaustion (Kottler, 1996). Instead, we focus on the so-called *emotional tears* (Balsters et al., 2013; Ito et al., 2019; Vingerhoets et al., 2016), that is, tears for which there is no clear or direct cause of a physical or physiological nature.

It is assumed that emotional tears are strongly associated with the occurrence of specific, usually negative, emotions. Indeed, tears are most often perceived as a symptom of sadness (Vingerhoets, 2013) associated with loss (Nesse, 1990). Furthermore, the relationship between visible tears and perceived sadness is supported by studies in which tears appearing on one's face enhanced the observer's perceived sadness of the person crying (Provine et al., 2009; Reed et al., 2015). Nevertheless, sadness is not always the dominant emotion at the onset of tears, and sadness alone does not determine the appearance of tears, as it is possible to experience sadness without crying (Vingerhoets, 2013). Therefore, despite the strong link between tears and sadness, crying should not be associated with this emotion alone.

Importantly, sadness is only one of the examples of basic emotions characterized by negative emotional valence. For example, Borgquist (1906) identified three main types of situations of a negative emotional valence in which crying occurs, out of which two (sadness and anger) represent basic emotions. Nonetheless, the existing literature provides only a vague classification of emotional situations or events that can trigger crying. For example, among the reasons for crying of a generally negative nature the end of a relationship, a funeral, anger, humiliation, tragedy, or saying goodbye are listed (Scheirs & Sijtsma, 2001). This categorization, however, does not take into account that these events may be related to different emotions and tears may be associated specifically with these emotions.

Moreover, crying may also occur in response to situations of a broadly positive nature (the so-called "happy tears"). Studies suggest that people cry in response to positive situations, such as those of aesthetic appeal (art, nature, poems), movies and sentimental objects (e.g., puppies), social events (weddings, reunions), or positive personal experiences (obtaining a reward, overcoming a broadly defined obstacle; Damen, 1999; Scheirs & Sijtsma, 2001). In an attempt to classify positive tears, Zickfeld et al. (2020) proposed a *model of positive tears*. The model identifies four qualitatively different types of tears associated with: (1) *achievement*, which occurs in situations of extraordinary achievement or overcoming difficulties; (2) *beauty*, which occurs in situations of exposure to beauty and accompanying feelings of awe

or even thrills; (3) *affection*, which refers to the experience of unexpected acts of kindness or love, often associated with feelings of warmth and communion as well as emotion and sympathy; and (4) *amusement*, which includes feelings of mirth or lightheartedness, associated with a tendency to laugh or giggle.

The observation that tears do not have to be exclusively caused by negative factors led Zickfeld et al. (2021) to create stimulus material in the form of vignettes depicting neutral (e.g., going to the store, doing laundry) and emotionally-laden situations of both positive (e.g., reuniting with a loved one, receiving an award) and negative (e.g., breakup, funeral) valence. However, these vignettes were not created as a result of prior research to gather a representative list of potential reasons for crying but rather based on examples of situations that could potentially make people cry found in the literature (Vingerhoets, 2013; Zickfeld et al., 2020). In consequence, the number of vignettes and their thematic diversity is relatively low (which is especially true for vignettes depicting emotional situations, as the vast majority is limited to close, usually romantic relationships).

An additional limitation of the created set of vignettes is that they were based on a general categorization of tear-evoking emotional situations into positive and negative ones. However, while emotions may be distinguished not only based on their valence but also based on their quality, it is possible that the reasons for crying vary accordingly. For instance, despite differences, most basic emotion taxonomies include happiness, sadness, anger, and fear as their common core (for a review, see Kowalska & Wróbel, 2017). Therefore, it is possible that positive tears can be identified with tears of happiness, while negative tears may be associated with various emotions, e.g., sadness, anger, or fear (Vingerhoets, 2013). Each of these emotions has negative connotations but also a different basis (Oatley et al., 2006). For example, sadness and fear are submissive (Knutson, 1996), whereas anger is connected with dominance (Knutson, 1996) and control (Keltner et al., 2003; Lerner & Tiedens, 2006). Moreover, anger is characterized by an active approach (Potegal & Stemmler, 2010), whereas sadness is passive (Fisher & Manstead, 2018), and fear can be either active or passive (Steimer, 2002). Given that experiencing emotions can be accompanied by crying (e.g., Vingerhoets, 2013; Zickfeld et al., 2021), we can assume that these qualitative differences between specific emotions will also be relevant when tears related to these emotions occur. Hence, although the distinction between tears caused by positive and negative situations used by Zickfeld and colleagues (2021) is a significant contribution to the literature, it seems insufficiently precise, because it cannot be applied to the study of emotional tears associated with different specific emotions.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The review of the existing literature on emotional tears indicated that the stimulus materials created so far enable the exploration of the phenomenon to a limited extent, that is, based on the distinction of situational valence (positive, negative) rather than different emotional qualities. Thus, the present research aimed to identify various categories of situations and events that can trigger crying and, at the same time, indicate the emergence of a specific emotion underlying emotional crying. Put differently, our goal was to identify general emotional categories and specific situations/events within these categories.

We assumed that the new material should represent a broad spectrum of universal situations frequently occurring in social relations. We also wanted these situations to be diversified in terms of content so that the collected examples of reasons for crying would not be limited in a biased way (e.g., revolving around romantic situations). Instead, we assumed that they should relate to examples of everyday life situations shared by most people, including private emotional life, business life, and other everyday situations that can evoke specific emotions associated with crying.

STUDY 1

Participants

In Study 1, the sample comprised 60 participants (42 women and 18 men) aged 20 to 70 ($M = 23.50$, $SD = 3.54$). They were recruited online using a snowball technique, word-of-mouth advertising, and social media posts shared via Facebook and LinkedIn.

Procedure

Study 1 was conducted in 2020 in Poland, using a web-based application. Participants were informed about the purpose and anonymity of the survey and that they could withdraw at any time without giving a reason. All of them provided informed consent to participate in the study. As Study 1 was explorative—that is, our aim was to identify possible emotional situations associated with tears but we did not have any hypotheses regarding the number of emotional categories that these situations would fall within—we did not want to limit participants' responses in

any way. Therefore, the instruction was formulated in a general way. Specifically, participants were asked to think about possible circumstances that make tears appear on people's faces and write down six reasons that came to mind. They were directed not to strive for stylistic accuracy of the answers but only to list six situations or factors that could trigger tears.

Results

In the first step, we identified 360 potential reasons for crying (six reasons from each participant, including repetitions). There was a large discrepancy in terms of the degree of generality of these reasons: While some were very general (e.g., "sadness"), others described a specific situation (e.g., "death of a loved one"). Repeated reasons were related to death, goodbyes, breakups, loss of a loved one, the harm done, reunions, birth of a child, achieving success, feeling threatened, or feeling powerless. Participants also frequently mentioned physical/physiological reasons for crying (e.g., physical pain, spicy food, onion smell).

The next step was a qualitative analysis of the collected material in order to categorize it. Two independent judges (graduate psychology students) performed the categorization (see Supplementary Tables 1S and 2S). The judges were asked to identify any number of overarching categories based on how they would group the reasons for crying given by participants. Both judges listed categories of reasons for crying related to physical factors, positive factors, and negative/traumatic factors. One of the judges distinguished three categories within the negative-themed reasons: "sadness," "anger," and "fear." Moreover, they labelled the positively-themed reasons simply as "happiness." Additionally, they distinguished various separate categories such as "helplessness," "emotion," or "empathy." The second judge, on the other hand, identified a category called "negative affective states/emotions," in which they included all reasons relating to a particular emotion or state, such as "sadness," "anger," "rage," "powerlessness," and "frustration." Another category was called "interpersonal situations," in which they included reasons such as "yelling" or "arguing," and the "too general" category, consisting of reasons of the highest level of generality, e.g., "emotions," "people," "memories." Interestingly, reasons like "spiritual experiences" and "strong aesthetic experiences" were included in the "other" category by the second judge, whereas the first judge classified them as a part of the "happiness" category.

These results confirmed that among the basic emotions associated with experiencing tears, participants mentioned not only sadness but also other basic emotions, that is, happiness/joy, anger/rage, and fear. However, contrary to the assumptions

presented above, the data lacked examples of specific tear-evoking situations representative of these emotions because a large portion of the reasons given by participants was too general, i.e., pointing to a particular emotion (e.g., sadness or happiness), instead of naming a specific situation that could evoke the feeling of sadness or happiness, ultimately leading to tears. As a result, we found it impossible to create a sufficient number of situational vignettes describing specific situations or events that could serve as potential causes for crying. Therefore, we decided to expand the list created in the study by adding examples of specific situational vignettes depicting crying situations described in the literature.

Considering the reasons for crying categorized by the judges and the reasons retrieved from the literature, we decided to restructure the entire material. As a result, we collected additional reasons for crying that were less general, representing specific situations that, as initially assumed, could be attributed to one particular emotion that might arise when the said situation occurred, e.g., relationship problems or a breakup could be linked to the overarching emotion of sadness. The idea behind the restructuring mentioned above was to categorize the collected reasons for crying into emotions that arise from a specific situation or event (i.e., more general emotion categories).

Because the examples of specific situations (within each emotion category) were more or less general, the restructuring of the stimulus material was aimed to create “conceptual bundles” within each category (happiness, sadness, anger, fear) ranked in descending order of generality (Table 1). For example, the bundle of reasons for crying within the happiness category ranked from the most general to the most specific reason reads as follows: “spiritual experiences,” “religious practices,” “ceremonies,” and “wedding.” This procedure made it possible to extract reasons for crying, characterized by the lowest possible level of generality, presenting examples of specific situations that could evoke tears. However, the number of situations with a low level of generality was insufficient to create a universal base of situational vignettes. Additionally, there was a significant disparity in the number of reasons for crying within the listed categories. For example, the category of sadness contained the largest number of reasons for crying, while the category of anger turned out to be the least numerous and included examples that were too general compared to those in other categories. In addition, the material lacked specific situations related to fear (it only included general phrases indicating the occurrence of this emotion, such as “fear,” “insecurity, or “experience of threat”).

Table 1

Reasons for Crying Divided Into Conceptual Bundles, Ranging From Most General to Most Detailed Examples

Happiness	Sadness	Anger	Fear
reunion	relationship problems	hurt	fear
family reunion	saying goodbye	injustice	sense of threat
friends reunion	breakup	betrayal	lack of security
	feeling of loss	rejection	experience of threat
feeling touched/moved emotionally	loss of a loved one	embarrassment	
feeling moved by the beauty of nature/scenery	loss of a pet	humiliation	
beauty of art	job loss		
beauty of visual artworks			
beauty of literature	helplessness		
beauty of music	powerlessness		
listening to the national anthem	setback		
	when you can't put things together		
spiritual experiences	things not going the way I want it		
religious practices	relationship problems		
ceremonies	bad family situation		
award ceremonies	poor financial situation		
wedding ceremony	failure at school/work		
prayer	problems at college		
listening to prayers			
reading holy books	personal tragedy		
watching or listening to an authority figure	tragic accident		
	when a loved one is in hospital		
witnessing a touching scene	sickness		
a movie/TV program that ends well	death		
a happy song	death of a loved one		
a cabaret/stand-up comedy show	death of a pet		
	death of a character in a book/movie/TV series		
feeling of relief	funeral		
self-satisfaction—when we succeed	mourning		

succeeding	
achieving a long-term goal that did not come easily	suffering
welfare of others	other people's tears
when someone we care about succeeds	being with a person who is suffering greatly
tenderness of others	harm caused by others
strong feeling of being loved	mistreatment of animals
when someone does something important to me or someone else	human rights violations
happy memories of the past	criticism
	engaging in a conflict/argument
	experiencing someone's objection
birth of a child	hurtful words from a loved one
	hurtful behavior of a loved one
	scream
	when somebody else screams
	argument
	arguing with friends
	disappointment
	offense from a loved one
	when a loved one betrays our trust
	sad movie/TV show
	sad song
	feeling lonely
	rejection
	memories
	remembering deceased loved ones

Discussion

The results of Study 1 indicated that crying is commonly associated with emotions. While sadness proved to be the dominant emotion, other examples also associated crying with three additional basic emotions, i.e., joy/happiness, anger, and fear. Notably, as already mentioned, while the number of primary emotions is still debated, all four emotions listed above are a common core of most basic emotions classifications (see Kowalska & Wróbel, 2017).

The fact that most of the collected examples stemmed from sadness is consistent with the common association between crying and the potential reasons for crying, i.e., negative situations accompanied by sadness (Vingerhoets, 2013) and loss (Nesse, 1990). This belief is also supported by empirical research. For example, it has been found that tears appearing on the face enhance the observer's perceived sadness of the crier (Provine et al., 2009; Reed et al., 2015). Additionally, emotional tears have been shown to facilitate the recognition of sadness (Balsters et al., 2013), and in the absence of information regarding the context in which tears occur, their presence increases the intensity of perceived sadness (Ito et al., 2019).

The number of collected reasons for crying in the *happiness* category was lower than the in the *sadness* category. This can be explained by the fact that, in general, the frequency of positive tears is significantly lower than the frequency of negative tears (Zickfeld et al., 2020). In the material we collected, the "happy" reasons for crying were linked to close and mature friendships and romantic relationships as well as closeness, longing, or concern for loved ones. Thus, they described experiences from adult life, characterized by closer and more mature relationships. This may suggest that the so-called "happy tears" have a strong relational basis and are most often experienced with other (closest) people or are related to them. Moreover, a review by Zickfeld et al. (2020) indicates that the occurrence of positive tears seems to be associated with the age of the crier, i.e., the frequency of positive tears increases with one's age and maturity. Finally, research indicates that older adults generally experience more satisfying relationships than younger adults (Luong et al., 2010), which may increase the likelihood of tears being caused by relational experiences.

The reasons for crying associated with anger (based mainly on the literature review) were formulated on a high level of generality, i.e., they referred to a specific state but failed to indicate a particular situation describing that state. For example, "injustice" or "humiliation" describe a certain state that many conditions can trigger. Similarly, examples relating to fear were often not specific enough to be used in further analyses. Finally, although the analysis identified "fear" as a general reason for

crying, we did not collect enough examples of particular situations that could evoke this emotion. These challenges indicated a need for further exploration in this area.

Overall, Study 1 allowed for the collection of reasons for crying representative of four emotions listed in most basic emotions classifications, but these reasons were too general (that is, they often pointed to the emotion that may trigger crying rather than to specific tear-evoking situations or events). This pattern of results can be attributed to the instruction we used. As mentioned above, due to its explorative nature, Study 1 employed a very general instruction the aim of which was not to limit participants' responses. This instruction, however, turned out to be far too general. First, as we did not ask specifically about social situations, participants listed physical/physiological reasons for crying that could not be qualified as emotional tears triggers. Second, as we did not have any hypotheses regarding the number of emotion categories we would identify, we did not ask participants about particular emotions. As a result, participants were much more specific when providing examples in the sadness and happiness categories than anger and fear categories. Therefore, we were unable to create short descriptions of specific situations or events based on Study 1 findings. In Study 2, we thus aimed to overcome this limitation by modifying the procedure and thereby allowing for the identification of more specific tear-evoking events that could be categorized into four emotion categories identified in Study 1 (i.e., happiness, sadness, anger, and fear).

STUDY 2

Participants

We recruited 70 participants, including 42 women and 28 men aged 21 to 66 ($M = 28.95$, $SD = 8.18$). They were recruited online using a snowball technique, word-of-mouth advertising, and social media posts shared via Facebook and LinkedIn. All participants were based in Poland and provided informed consent to participate in the study.

Procedure

Study 2 was based on a similar procedure as Study 1 except that participants were presented with four boards on which they were asked to list specific situations or events that might make people cry while at the same time experiencing particular

emotions. Each board related to one of the four primary emotions associated with crying identified in Study 1, that is, happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. The order in which the boards appeared on the screen was randomized. Importantly, this time we used a more detailed instruction. Specifically, instead of asking participants about general reasons for crying, we asked them to list two specific tear-evoking situations or events associated with experiencing the emotion provided on the board. Situations/events were listed separately for each of the four emotions. Additionally, we asked participants if they thought any other emotions could cause crying (open-ended question). If yes, they were asked to provide examples of such emotions along with short descriptions of specific tear-evoking situations or events accompanied by these emotions.

Results

The collected responses allowed us to identify 560 potential reasons for crying (140 reasons within each emotion category: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, including repetitions). Importantly, compared to Study 1, the wording of the instructions for Study 2 enabled us to identify a much larger number of situations that could potentially trigger tears. The situations described were also at a lower level of generality. This time, they described specific circumstances that could trigger a particular emotion resulting in tears. Additionally, by modifying the instructions for Study 2 we were able to balance out the number of reasons for crying across all categories.

Reasons in the *happiness* category concerned close romantic relationships and events related to them (e.g., getting engaged, married or pregnant, or having a baby), reuniting with a loved one, succeeding or winning, or receiving positive health news. Participants also mentioned that laughing at a funny joke or a funny situation may result in tears of happiness. However, as such tears are not caused by a feeling of happiness but are a physiological reaction to excessive laughing triggered by a need to restore emotional homeostasis (Aragón et al., 2015), we decided not to include them in further analyses. Reasons collected in the *sadness* category included experiencing the death of a loved one, losing a job or a valuable item, a breakup, betrayal, feeling alone, longing, illness, or being hurt. Within the category of *anger*, the examples concerned feelings of powerlessness and helplessness (e.g., when facing obstacles one cannot control), accompanied by a sense of frustration. Moreover, they also addressed feelings of injustice and harm done by other people. Finally, the *fear* category included cases of accidents (e.g., car accident, sea storm), being a victim of an attack, being alone in a deserted place, not being able to get in contact with

a loved one, concern for the health of a loved one, or dangers of extreme sports (e.g., skydiving or bungee jumping).

We then grouped the collected reasons for crying thematically within each category (Supplementary Table 3S). For example, in the *sadness* category, we identified a subgroup of reasons describing illness/hurt, e.g., “child illness,” “harm done to children,” “harm done to animals,” “death of a pet,” “having to put a pet down,” or a subgroup related to loss: “defeat,” “job loss,” “loss of a valuable item.”

Based on the collected material, we developed items in the form of short, gender-neutral, declarative sentences, which presented a particular situation and indicated its emotional background. Each item begins with a description of the person described as happy, sad, angry, or scared, followed by a description of the specific situation that occurred. These situations are directly related to the person’s emotional state, such as: “They are happy because they have just become a parent” or “They are sad because they have just argued with a friend.”

These items were then evaluated by 14 independent judges (senior psychology students and alumni; 3 men and 11 women). Their task was to assess the extent to which it was likely that the described situations would evoke tears associated with different emotions. Each judge was given a set of 58 items, including 15 relating to happiness, 19 relating to sadness, 10 relating to anger, and 14 relating to fear. The number of items within each category corresponded with the number of examples of specific situations we were able to identify earlier. The items were presented in random order. Each was rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*this situation is unlikely to evoke tears*) to 10 (*this situation will surely evoke tears*). The level of agreement between judges, as estimated by the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), was high across all emotions ($ICC_{\text{happiness}} = .89$; $ICC_{\text{sadness}} = .92$; $ICC_{\text{anger}} = .88$; $ICC_{\text{fear}} = .94$). Descriptive statistics for each judged item are given in Table 2.

Table 2

Independent Judges’ Mean Ratings of the Likelihood That a Situation Will Elicit Tears Divided Into Four Categories (Happiness, Sadness, Anger, Fear)

	Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
HAPPINESS	They are happy because today is their engagement anniversary	3.07	1.86
	They are happy because they have just received a research grant	3.64	1.74
	They are happy because they have just received a job offer they have been dreaming of	3.79	2.04
	They are happy because they have just been promoted at work	3.86	2.25
	They are happy because they have just adopted a pet from a shelter	3.93	1.77
	They are happy because they have just defended their thesis	4.29	2.23
	They are happy because their friends threw a surprise party for them	4.36	1.74

	They are happy because they won a lot of money in a lottery	4.79	2.22
	They are happy because they and their partner are expecting a child	5.50	2.59
	They are happy because they have just picked up a long-lost friend from the airport	5.50	2.21
	They are happy because they have just welcomed their partner coming back from a long work trip	5.57	2.65
	They are happy because their close friend has just undergone successful surgery	6.21	2.39
	They are happy because their partner has just confessed love to them	6.21	1.37
	They are happy because they have just got married	6.57	1.74
	They are happy because they have just become a parent	7.64	1.28
SADNESS	They are sad because their boss criticized him	4.29	1.54
	They are sad because they have just argued with a friend	4.36	2.62
	They are sad because they miss their friend who lives far away	5.07	2.92
	They are sad because they have just heard a rude comment about their appearance	5.21	2.01
	They are sad because their boss has just yelled at them	5.21	1.80
	They are sad because they have just lost a lot of money	6.14	2.03
	They are sad because they are homesick	6.14	2.35
	They are sad because they have just argued with their partner	6.14	1.87
	They are sad because they have lost a family heirloom	6.79	2.66
	They are sad because they got rejected by a loved one	7.71	2.30
	They are sad because they have just lost a job	7.79	1.48
	They are sad because they have just learned about their friend's illness	7.79	2.36
	They are sad because their child is going to have surgery	7.93	2.23
	They are sad because they have just broken up with their partner	8.29	2.16
	They are sad because their pet died	8.64	1.55
	They are sad because they had to put their pet down	8.64	1.60
	They are sad because they have just learned about their ill friend's bad prognosis	8.64	2.10
They are sad because they were cheated on	9.36	0.74	
They are sad because they have just come back from a friend's funeral	9.57	0.85	
ANGER	They are angry because they will be late for work due to road work	2.57	1.40
	They are angry because their arguments have been ignored during a conversation	3.57	1.87
	They are angry because their new car has just been scratched	3.71	1.77
	They are angry because they want to help a friend in a tough situation, but they are unable to	3.79	2.36
	They are angry because they failed to calm down their child	4.07	2.53
	They are angry because the help they didn't get depended only on someone else's goodwill	4.57	2.90
	They are angry because they were treated unfairly at work	4.79	1.72
	They are angry because they have just caused a traffic collision	5.36	2.31
	They are angry because their partner has lied to them	6.36	2.37
They are angry because they have just been humiliated in public	6.64	2.31	

	They are scared because they are walking down the street alone at night	2.71	1.38
	They are scared because they have just witnessed a traffic accident	3.79	2.15
	They are scared because they have lost their documents	4.79	2.22
	They are scared because they are waiting for the results of an important medical examination	4.79	1.80
	They are scared because their partner has just lost consciousness unexpectedly	5.57	2.65
FEAR	They are scared because they have been unable to contact their partner for a long time	5.57	1.99
	They are scared because they've been getting threats via phone calls	5.71	2.13
	They are scared because they got stuck in an elevator	5.86	1.99
	They are scared because they are waiting for surgery	6.21	2.42
	They are scared because they were in a car accident	6.50	2.59
	They are scared because they got attacked in the street	7.21	1.85
	They are scared because their child was in an accident	8.43	1.55
	They are scared because they were abused sexually	8.86	1.29
	They are scared because they lost their possessions in a fire	9.07	1.14

Note. Probability was rated on a scale ranging from 1 to 10. A higher mean indicates a higher likelihood of a particular situation evoking tears. Items in bold were included in the final set of situational vignettes.

Considering that the judges evaluated each item on a 10-point scale, we decided to accept items of at least $M > 5.00$. Eventually, however, we removed the item “They are happy because they and their partner are expecting a child” because, although it met the criterion of $M > 5.00$, we found it to be similar in content to the higher-rated item “They are happy because they have just become a parent.” Similarly, the item “They are sad because they miss their friend who lives far away” was excluded from the final version as it concerns the longing for loved ones, just like the item “They are sad because they are homesick,” which had a higher rating. On the other hand, the item “They are angry because they were treated unfairly at work” was included in the final pool of vignettes, even though it was rated slightly lower than $M > 5.00$, as it describes a universal workplace-related occurrence. This reasoning was in line with our intention to maintain the universal and diverse nature of the items. Furthermore, the final pool of the situational vignettes did not include two items from the *fear* category that met the assumed criterion of $M < 5.00$. These items were: “They are scared because they were abused sexually” and “They are scared because they lost their possessions in a fire.” We rejected these items after a qualitative analysis of the entire material, finding them inadequate since they described situations of extreme/traumatic nature (that is, they did not represent frequently occurring experiences shared by most people). In the end, we selected 34 items, including 6 related to happiness, 16 related to sadness, 4 related to anger, and 8 related to fear (all marked in bold in Table 2).

Discussion

Our results showed that compiling a list of sample reasons for crying related to sadness was the least difficult. Relatively high ratings of the judges indicated that sadness-inducing situations are widely recognized as very likely to evoke tears (both by participants and later by the judges). These findings are in line with previous research indicating strong associations between sadness and the presence of tears (Balsters et al., 2013; Ito et al., 2019; Nesse, 1990; Provine et al., 2009; Reed et al., 2015; Vingerhoets, 2013). They also indicate a prevalence of tears triggered by negative events over tears triggered by positive events (Zickfeld et al., 2020). The reasons for crying we collected were associated with many different areas of everyday life, such as close romantic relationships, friendships, personal experiences, issues related to professional and financial life, and the perceived loss associated with these situations. Indeed, the literature suggests that sadness can be induced by a sense of loss, especially when the individual's attribution of the event indicates that the loss is random, i.e., not the fault of either the individual or another person(s) (Vingerhoets, 2013).

Collecting a wide range of reasons for happy crying was relatively more difficult than collecting reasons for crying evoked by sadness. It is worth noting though that the initial number of situational vignettes related to happiness was more extensive than its final version developed after considering the ratings given by the judges. Indeed, the vignettes concerning close relationships and related events or ceremonies were rated highest. Zickfeld and colleagues (2020) classified these types of situations as affection-related tears occurring when unexpected kindness or love is experienced, often associated with feelings of warmth and communion. For other vignettes, such as those related to the success of being promoted at work, defending a thesis, receiving a research grant, or winning the lottery, the judges' ratings were lower or less consistent. It may suggest that happy tears are primarily associated with mature experiences and experiencing uplifting moments with loved ones (Luong et al., 2010; Zickfeld et al., 2020)

The reasons for crying related to fear were of both social and individual nature (such as fear for the health or life of a loved one and fear for oneself, respectively). Furthermore, participants described them in a more extensive and detailed way than the other categories. Such descriptions may suggest that the reasons for crying triggered by fear may, apart from being of evolutionary nature (Cosmides & Tooby, 2005), have a more personal character, i.e., they may be related to personality dispositions, susceptibility to phobias, etc. (Woody et al., 2005). For example, the response (both emotional and behavioral) to a spider will be different for a person who has arachnophobia compared to a person who does not. Nevertheless, fear is

considered a strongly aversive emotion (Armfield, 2006), supporting survival from an evolutionary point of view (Olsson & Phelps, 2007). Therefore, among all potential reasons for crying triggered by fear, the highest-rated were those that might commonly be perceived as threatening (Vingerhoets, 2013).

Finding examples of situations for anger-induced tears turned out to be the biggest challenge: A significant portion of the items were linked to feelings of frustration, powerlessness, and loss of control. These results are in line with those found in the literature, suggesting that people feel anger in response to the violation of personally important issues (Litvak et al., 2010), or when the reality does not match their expectations (Graham et al., 2014). Moreover, when asked about anger triggers, people tend to point to external causes, which are usually a perceived intentional, personal, and controllable behavior of another person (Novaco, 2000), interpreted by the individual as unfair (Vingerhoets, 2013).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present study confirmed that emotional tears have both negative and positive causes (Zickfeld et al., 2021). Additionally, we were able to identify three types of tears of a negative character, i.e., tears triggered by sadness, anger, and fear, which indicated that tears might be accompanied by each of the four basic emotions that are most consistently listed in various classifications (Kowalska & Wróbel, 2017). Furthermore, the data collected in both Study 1 and Study 2 highlighted the fact that tears are primarily associated with negative events (Zickfeld et al., 2020), usually sadness (Balsters et al., 2013; Ito et al., 2019; Nesse, 1990; Provine et al., 2009; Reed et al., 2015; Vingerhoets, 2013) and perceived involuntary loss (Vingerhoets, 2013), which was reflected in the content of the created situational vignettes related to sadness. On the other hand, the so-called happy tears occur most often during profound events experienced in adulthood, which is when people prioritize social relationships and focus on the quality of these relationships rather than their quantity (Luong et al., 2010), which we also illustrated by the vignettes related to happiness. Moreover, the modified procedure of Study 2 made it possible for us to identify potential reasons for crying related to two other emotions, i.e., anger and fear. As supported by the literature, we observed that “angry tears” usually relate to feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, injustice, and externally directed frustration (Novaco, 2000; Vingerhoets, 2013). On the other hand, fear-related tears usually occur in situations commonly perceived as threatening (Olsson & Phelps, 2007; Vingerhoets, 2013).

The newly created set of vignettes can serve as stimulus material for the experimental manipulation of the emotional basis of tears. The use of this set may allow for the detailed investigation of the issue, moving away from its broadly understood negative and positive causes (Wróbel et al., 2022; Zickfeld et al., 2021) to emotions such as joy/happiness, sadness, anger, fear, that is, emotions that differ not only in valence but also in their social meaning (Fischer & Manstead, 2008). Moreover, it may indicate qualitative differences in reasons for crying dictated by different emotional backgrounds. The existence of these differences is supported by studies showing that anger, unlike sadness and fear, is an aversive emotion involving an active approach, while sadness and fear involve inhibition and withdrawal (Potegal & Stemmler, 2010). Moreover, sadness is often treated as a sign of powerlessness and a request for help, fear as an adaptive response to avoid danger, and anger as a desire to confront, gain and/or maintain status or control (Fischer & Manstead, 2008). The aforementioned qualitative differences characterizing each emotion suggest that the perception of tears may also vary across these emotions. For example, research has consistently shown that tears on other people's faces are considered a signal of helplessness and thus elicit support intentions (Zickfeld et al., 2021). Accordingly, one might suspect that this effect is highly likely to occur when tears are accompanied by sadness, which is consistent with the social message conveyed by the tears. However, it is possible that the effect of tears on the intention to help the crying individual will be weaker when the reason for crying is anger (which signals non-affiliative tendencies) or joy/happiness (which is an affiliative emotion but associated with relatively high agency; Jasielska & Rajchert, 2020). Thus, applying the created situational vignettes in experimental studies provides an opportunity to advance research on the specificity and meaning of emotional tears and their impact on social perception.

Although our findings extend and systematize the knowledge about factors triggering tears, our research is not without limitations. Most importantly, students and young people comprised the majority of both samples, which limits the generalizability of our findings. Although we are not aware of any study showing that reasons for crying vary with age, it is possible that a sample composed of older participants would allow for the identification of additional or even different reasons. At the same time, as our intention was to collect examples of specific situations that may apply to most people, we asked participants to think about situations that make people cry in general rather than situations that were based on their personal experiences. Therefore, participants referred to their general observations rather than situations or events that they participated in (e.g., they listed car accidents, surgery or losing a job even though they might not have gone through any of these situations themselves). Accordingly, we may assume that age did not modulate participants' responses to

a considerable extent. Nevertheless, future studies should address this issue directly by using more representative samples.

Relying on more representative samples seems important not only because of potential age differences but also because of cultural differences. For instance, some situations (e.g., rituals) may elicit tears in one culture but not in another (Vingerhoets, 2013). This suggests that the reasons we identified may not be easily generalized to other cultural contexts. At the same time, the observation that tears may be associated with basic emotions implies that tears, similar to basic emotions, may be elicited by universal triggering events (e.g., a loss is a universal antecedent for sadness and tears of sadness; feeling of injustice and harm done by another is a universal antecedent for anger and tears of anger). Of course, given that our research was conducted in a specific cultural context, we do not know to what extent the reasons we identified reflect this universality and, future studies are therefore needed to address this question.

Overall, our findings demonstrated that situations or events triggering tears can be associated with four basic emotions that are listed in most basic emotions classifications. We think that this systematization is important because the social meaning of different emotions may interact with the social meaning of tears, thereby jointly contributing to the overall perception of the crying person. We hope that future studies will address these potential joint effects of tears and their emotional basis and that the set of vignettes we created will help in this endeavor.

CRedit Author Statement

JULIA WĄGROWSKA (70%): conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, resources, writing (original draft, project administration, funding acquisition).

MONIKA WRÓBEL (30%): conceptualization, writing (review and editing), supervision.

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Supplementary Table 1S
Categorization of Reasons for Crying Based on the Qualitative Analysis Performed by the First Judge

Physiological/ physical	Negative/traumatic life events	Positive situations or emotions	Negative affective states/emotions	Too general	Interpersonal situations	Other
pain	farewells	self-satisfaction—	being moved/touched	emotions	argument	emotional scenes in
wind	loss of a loved one	when we succeed in	by something	accidents	scream	a movie
physical harm	death	something	scream	people	the tears of others	strong aesthetic
onion smell	memories of dece- ased loved ones	succeeding	sadness	memories	being with a person	experience
allergy	bad family and finan- cial situation	when someone we care about succeeds	longing	realizing something	who is suffering	crying in response to
sneezing	talking about traumas	joy	mental overwhelm	music		emotions (sadness, sorrow, being moved, joy)
disease	we haven't worked	happiness	disappointment	a video		
trauma (hard hit, fracture)	through	remiscing about the good past	despair	a photo		spiritual experiences
foreign body in the eye	death of a loved one/ animal	a feeling of being loved	depression	love		being moved by
bright sun	separation from a loved one	good emotions	regret			experiencing em- pathy or tenderness from others
	sense of loss	crying from laughter	powerlessness			
	sense of rejection	wedding	helplessness			
	separation from a loved one	birth	wrath			
	lie	celebrating someone else's success	anger			
	other people's unpleasant opinions, criticism	tears of happiness				
	betrayal	successful event				
	saying goodbye to a loved one					

Physiological/ physical	Negative/traumatic life events	Positive situations or emotions	Negative affective states/emotions	Too general	Interpersonal situations	Other
	receiving bad news	attending important,	frustration			
	family problems	memorable events in	fear			
	lack of love in life	someone's own life	overexcitement			
	funeral	or their loved ones'	nervousness			
	insecurity	lives: e.g., weddings,	stress			
	relationship problems	the birth of a child,	humiliation			
	misfortune	the defense of a ma-	exhaustion			
	tragic events	ster's thesis, etc.	fear, danger			
	job loss	weddings				
	grieving the loss of	achieving a long				
	a loved one	term goal that did not				
	disease	come easily				
	when someone goes	proposal				
	to the hospital	relief				
	failure					
	failure at school/ work					
	mourning					
	inability to handle an important matter despite efforts					
	offense from a loved one (unpleasant words, behavior)					
	tragedy					
	failure					
	loss of a pet					
	no plans for the future					

Physiological/ physical	Negative/traumatic life events	Positive situations or emotions	Negative affective states/emotions	Too general	Interpersonal situations	Other
	rejection disease receiving sad news loneliness emotional problems physical and/or psy- chological violence loneliness when someone close to us betrays our trust suffering (harm caused by others)					

Supplementary Table 2S
Categorization of Reasons for Crying Based on the Qualitative Analysis Performed by the Second Judge

Joy	Sadness	Anger	Fear/threat	Powerlessness	Empathy	Emotion
while watching a cabaret/stand up show	argument	argument	fear	powerlessness	tears of others	being moved by something
success	shout	shout	the experience of danger	helplessness	experiencing empathy, tenderness from others	
self-satisfaction—when we succeed at something	betrayal	betrayal	insecurity	when you don't know what to do at a given moment	others	animal abuse
achieving a long term goal that did not come easily	letdown	occupation	stress	inability to deal with an important matter despite efforts	harm to others	
birth	rejection	frustration		no plans for the future		
when someone we care about succeeds	farewell	anger		a lot of problems that overwhelm us		
welfare of others	parting	intense nervousness that cannot be released				
a strong sense of being loved	relationship problems					
wedding	pet loss					
remembering a pleasant past	job loss					
unbridled joy	failure					
joy, excitement	failure at school/work					
feeling of great happiness and joy	problems at university					
when someone makes us laugh	disappointment					
funny situations, conversations, events	regret					
	accident					
	disease					
	death					
	funeral					
	depression					
	loneliness					
	lack of love in life					

Joy	Sadness	Anger	Fear/threat	Powerlessness	Empathy	Emotion
crying from laughter strong aesthetic experience spiritual experiences	longing memories of de- ceased loved ones memories family problems bad family and finan- cial situation distress from a loved one (unpleasant words, behavior) mistreatment by parents criticism receiving sad news a video music					

Supplementary Table 3S
Reasons for Crying Grouped Into Categories: Happiness, Sadness, Anger, Fear

HAPPINESS

- wedding
- engagement
- proposal

- looking at someone you love and feeling grateful and happy
- having a loved one show love when you don't expect it

- when you see someone you care about after a long time
- meeting a person you missed very much
- seeing your boyfriend at the airport after a few months
- reunion after many years
- when I first saw my nephew

- success in life
- a success
- success of a loved one

- winning an important competition
- winning the first place
- child wins a contest

- master's thesis defense
- exam

- becoming pregnant
- birth of a child
- when a mother holds her baby for the first time
- kissing a baby
- finding a missing child
- child's play

- successful surgery of a loved one
- recovery from illness
- recovery of a loved one
- positive test results associated with a fatal disease
- a positive result of a medical examination

- upon receiving the good news
- receiving a nice message

- pride
- catharsis
- a unique experience

- fulfilling your dreams
- big cash win
- receiving the gift of your dreams
- material acquisition

-
- buying a new luxury car
 - good situational joke
 - funny situation that made me laugh
 - overcoming adversity, hardship, achieving a goal
 - success/receiving a medal, achievement award
 - a birthday surprise organized by friends
 - lottery win
 - cheerfulness
 - soldier's homecoming
 - acquittal of a convict after years
 - parent shares a difficult story with a child
 - pet adoption
 - success at work
 - long-awaited promotion
 - getting a dream job offer
 - an unexpected pleasant surprise from a loved one or friend
 - achieving something you have worked for a long time, a sense of pride, happiness and appreciation

SADNESS

- funeral
- mourning
- death of a loved one
- job loss
- loss
- loss of a valuable item
- parting
- solitude
- rejection by a loved one
- betrayal
- remembering parting moments
- lack of support/comfort from loved ones
- homesickness
- longing for a loved one
- longing for someone we love when an object, song, or place reminds us of that person
- children's disease
- harm done to children
- harm done to animals
- death of an animal
- the need to put the pet down
- scream

- argument with a loved one
- criticism
- hearing an unkind remark about yourself
- upsetting a loved one
- slurs and insults

- disease of a loved one
- poor prognosis of the disease

- looking at old photos and videos
- watching a movie
- listening to a sad story

- the accumulation of many problems at once, a sense of powerlessness, helplessness, loneliness
- powerlessness
- the feeling that everything you've aspired to is slipping away

- feeling of loneliness
- reflecting on your life, feeling sorry for yourself
- sad memories
- nostalgia, memories

- intolerance

- return from vacation

ANGER

- powerlessness
- helplessness
- powerlessness, helplessness, inability to do anything to improve the situation
- powerlessness over someone else's stupidity
- no control over a situation
- when anger is a result of frustration and helplessness, e.g., when we cannot help a seriously ill child
- when I want to help but don't know how
- frustration at finding yourself in a hopeless situation over which you have no direct control
- rushing to get somewhere while being confronted by adversities beyond our control
- when I'm dealing with someone who could use help and doesn't want to
- helplessness in a crisis
- frustration when practicing an instrument unsuccessfully
- loss of control
- when, as a drunk driver, we cause a fatal accident and are angry at our own stupidity
- disregard for important matters
- helpless anger when we see a solution but can't really do anything because it depends on the decision/goodwill of another person

- unfair treatment at school/work
- aggression
- when a person is powerless in an aggressive discussion
- when someone is lying
- when someone says unkind words that hurt me
- when someone yells at me
- being humiliated by somebody

-
- when someone speaks disrespectfully to another person
 - when a person tries to speak in public but their opinion is disregarded
 - when someone ignores what you say to them
 - when other people can't understand to leave the angry person alone
 - teasing
 - bullying
 - talking behind someone's back
 - cheating
 - crying after watching/reading about human abuse of animals
 - crying after betrayal
 - argument with a loved one
 - arguments with parents during adolescence
 - lack of argumentation when someone argues with you, and they can't understand what's going on and tears well up in your eyes because of anger and helplessness
 - when we are angry with someone for spoiling something or ruining our plans (e.g., argument with our partner)
 - when we have been working on something, making an effort, and we face a random obstacle (e.g., problems in our professional/educational life)
 - annoying boss
 - not being promoted at work
 - job loss
 - failed exam
 - heirloom loss
 - laptop data loss
 - unintentionally damaging a newly purchased TV
 - car falling from a hill
 - the moment when we are overwhelmed with things, we have a bad enough day at work, and as if that wasn't enough, our car breaks down in the middle of the road
 - car theft
 - when someone scratches your new car
 - inability to lose
 - poorly cooked food
 - when someone fails to calm down a child
 - trying to calm down an upset child
 - a dog that destroys new furniture and the house after renovations
 - a lot of responsibilities during the day that can make you cry out of anger
 - lack of understanding from those around you

FEAR

- when someone attacks you
- robbery
- running away from someone dangerous
- when a person is walking alone at night and is afraid of being attacked
- abandoned place at night

- losing your phone in the middle of the woods
- when I lose something (e.g., phone, card, documents)
- being robbed
- when I am in danger of losing something dear to me

- a child being in an accident
- car accident
- turbulence in an airplane
- storm at sea during a cruise
- storm on the lake, and me in the canoe
- being stuck in an elevator
- traffic accident

- fear of falling

- you or your loved one becoming ill
- diagnosis of a severe illness (in yourself/your relatives)
- waiting for test results
- loss of consciousness of a loved one
- suicide attempt by a loved one

- before surgery
- pulling a tooth at the dentist
- life-threatening circumstance

- fear of losing a loved one and the moment when you lose them
- trying to contact someone who is not answering the phone and there is no way to contact them
- when we are concerned for the health and lives of our loved ones
- loved one gone missing

- noise in a busy place in the city
- watching a horror movie

- harassment, harassment by phone, e-mail
- threat
- threats to life
- no way out of a dangerous situation

- skydiving/bungee jumping
- parachute jump
- roller coaster
- active shooter situation
- fear of heights
- during dangerous maneuvers on the road when you are a passenger with no control over the situation
- being dependent on someone
- panic attack

- powerlessness
- domestic violence
- arachnophobia
- when I don't know what's going to happen
- missing dog or child

- being a survivor of a natural disaster
 - fire
 - public speaking
 - getting fired
 - rape
 - being a victim of violence or sexual harassment
 - kidnapping
 - inertia
-