

CRYING AT THE HAPPY ENDING

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Certain individuals cry at the happy ending of a movie rather than, as one would expect, at the sad situation that preceded it. Such people, for instance, are not moved to tears when the lovers separate, but save their tears until the time when they are happily reunited. The grief and the impulse to cry are repressed until the situation no longer merits this reaction. Then, at the happy ending, there is no longer any need for the grief to be repressed. When the inhibition is lifted the energy that is used to maintain it is unnecessary, and may be discharged, causing pleasure and allowing for the expression of grief.

Numerous common examples could be given of this mechanism. The individual who has worked hard all his life to gain recognition cries at his testimonial dinner. Or the immigrant cries when he sees the Statue of Liberty.

This delay of the affect must occur particularly in individuals who would be threatened to feel their grief at the time it is appropriate. A patient who covered up her underlying feelings of hopelessness with a "chin up" attitude could not cry until in therapy she began to feel more hopeful. Another patient had such conflicts with her mother that she felt little emotion in her mother's presence. When she was alone she would frequently fantasy situations with her mother. In some of these fantasies her mother was disapproving of her ; in others her mother loved her. She would cry only when she was fantasizing a pleasant relationship with her mother.

In both these situations the crying could occur only when the situation was relatively "happy, " so that the grief was more endurable. This formulation describes only one factor out of many that could operate in a specific situation, and ignores symbolic elements and other dynamic factors that might be present.

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