

# Emotion in Interaction

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# Emotion in Interaction



Edited by Anssi Peräkylä  
and  
Marja-Leena Sorjonen

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# Emotion in Interaction

## CHAPTER 9



## Crying and Crying Responses

ALEXA HEPBURN AND JONATHAN POTTER

While psychological approaches to emotion start with experience or physiology, conversation analysis (often abbreviated to CA) starts with emotion as a public and communicable object. Thus with crying, the initial focus is not on how it feels and how it is related to grief or loss but on how crying appears in human conduct and the elements that make it recognizable. How crying unfolds in interaction, and how it is responded to, becomes the focus for study. Analysis in this chapter will therefore highlight the profoundly public nature of such matters, how they can be recognized and normatively organized.

To begin with, we will (a) briefly review the existing literature on crying; (b) discuss the complex features of the conduct that is collected together under the vernacular category crying; and (c) address the delicate interactional challenges involved in recognizing and responding to crying. The chapter will draw on an extensive program of work on interaction in the UK National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) child-protection helpline (Hepburn, 2004; Hepburn & Potter, 2007, 2010) as well as other materials where crying is publically available for study.

## TRADITIONAL CRYING RESEARCH

Tom Lutz (2001) has produced an excellent overview of sociological, psychological, historical, and anthropological work on crying. He considers, for example, the representation of crying in paintings and literature and the social significance that is thereby revealed. Research exploring crying as it appears in talk-in-interaction is curiously absent. As Lutz notes, up to now most research on crying has been conducted from an individual psychological perspective. Hepburn (2004) surveyed several strands of work. One strand focused on the causes of crying in infancy and the effects of such crying on attachment (e.g., Barr, Hopkins, & Green, 2000). Most research has



used an instrument known as the Crying Patterns Questionnaire, developed by St. James-Roberts (1988), with no attempt to represent the nature or interactional organization of crying. Another strand of work has focused on adult crying. This work has typically used the Adult Crying Inventory (Vingerhoets & Becht, 1996). This is used, for example, to provide an overall score of the propensity to cry that can be related to cultural, national or gender variables (e.g., Peter, Vingerhoets, & Van Heck, 2001).

More recently, as is common across the social and behavioral sciences, there has been an interest in linking crying to evolutionary and neurological structures. For example, Sander and Scheich (2005) suggest that the auditory cortex, amygdala in the left hemisphere, and insula in the right hemisphere are particularly associated with the perception of both crying and laughing; indeed, they suggest that the right insula is a key structure involved with emotional self-awareness. Newman (2007) suggests crying is a universal mammalian trait associated with shared brain structures (the “cry circuit”). Elsewhere thematic analysis of open-ended interviews has been used to elicit peoples’ experiences of, for example, crying babies in a neonatal ward (Kurth et al., 2010).

What these varied studies have in common is that they treat crying as a unitary phenomenon (although with possible scalar properties) and they focus on an individual’s experience or perception of crying, accessed by questionnaire, interview, or brain scans. No interaction is enabled between participants, and perception rather than interaction is seen as fundamental and the primary route to cognitive processing.

### Crying in interaction

Prior to the current program of work, studies considering crying have been sparse. Manzo, Heath, and Blonder (1998) interviewed stroke patients and found crying in half of their interviews. They used this as a basis for considering crying as a feature of social interaction, but their work did not attempt the tricky task of representing crying; rather they showed the value of seeing emotions as socially constructed. They strongly emphasized the way crying is interactionally occasioned, although they did not go far beyond this general claim. In the other study Whalen and Zimmerman (1998) studied “hysteria” in 9-1-1 calls. Their study is striking for their attempt to capture some features of the caller’s distress rather than simply naming it. However, their main analytic focus was not on features of the caller’s distress but on the way the call-takers used the term “hysteria” in electronic records to account for the absence of information that is required for a complete form. Nevertheless, like Edwards (1997) they argue for treating “emotion” (in this case, “hysteria”) in interactional terms. As they put it:

rather than look “inward” at the internal states of the individual vehicle of expression, or “outward” to social institutions or culture, the study of the social construction of emotion is anchored in the interactional matrix in which the expression occurs: its form, its placement, its response and the organizational and interactional origins of its accountability (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1998, p. 158).

Our recent work on crying has been able to use Jefferson's (1985) work on laughing as a guide for developing a program of research. Prior to Jefferson's work, merely reporting that laughter had occurred was often treated as sufficient for research purposes. Jefferson's paper showed how a detailed transcription of the sounds that make up laughter could reveal previously unnoticed interactional properties, including a delicate coordination of elements of laughter with ongoing activities. Further research by Jefferson and others followed this through to highlight the involvement of laughter with different interactional tasks (for a summary of this work, see Glenn, 2003). This provided a template for considering crying.

Jefferson (1984b) noted that if we assume that laughter, like crying, is an uncontrolled bodily function—a “flooding out” that is therefore not part of the ongoing vocal interaction—we will be tempted to merely note that it occurred, rather than transcribe it in detail. This has happened in the majority of research in the area of crying. Jefferson took an example where laughter was originally presented in a transcript as “bubbling through” the talk, and showed that with a more detailed transcript the laughter was only present in that part of the talk that involved “the saying of an obscenity” (1985, p. 30) (see also Haakana, in this volume, chapter 8). A more developed transcript is therefore vital to any understanding of the variety of interactional features of laughter in different contexts. We will now consider what can be revealed by a more careful exploration of some of the interactional elements of crying.

### Features of crying

Some of the basic features of the transcription of crying are detailed below, using an example from the live transmission of the British reality television program *Pop Idol*, where aspiring musicians are having their singing performance evaluated by a panel of experts who give direct and often quite scathing feedback. This has the particular advantage that it can be reproduced as a web resource without the ethical issues that rule out other more sensitive materials.<sup>1</sup> Video material also allows some inspection of nonvocal aspects of the interaction. This extract comes after the contestant returns to join others who have been watching his performance and the judges' highly critical comments on his singing. Ant and Dec are the hosts, Cont is the contestant who has just performed.

Extract 1 [Pop Idol Crying 2005]

- 01 Cont: [((mouthing, shakes head, [smiling))  
 02 Dec: [((puts hand on  
 03 Dec: [ Cont's shoulder)) ]  
 04 Cont: [((thumb wiping eye)) ]  
 05 Cont: [°.snih°]  
 06 Dec: [Y'er [t. ]  
 07 Ant: [ (°↓ar]light.°)  
 08 (0.3)  
 09 Cont: ↑↑Yeah,

## CRYING AND CRYING RESPONSES (197)

- 10 [ (1.2) ]  
 11 [ ((thumb stays on eye, looking down)) ]  
 12 Cont: °.hh° (.).SHHHI  
 13 Ant: Take ye time there don't worry.  
 14 (0.4)  
 15 Cont: I' [ve ↑never ] ↑had that e- in my life  
 16 Dec: [don' worry.]  
 17 Ant: [(a'↓right.) ]  
 18 Cont: performin.=I've gone on sta:ge ((touches eye))  
 19 (.). bin character ((touches nose)) ~all that  
 20 sorta stuff an~ (.)  
 21 Dec: Mm.  
 22 Cont: A've- it's ~↑weir:d °↑it's ↑↑weird an°~  
 23 [ ((camera pans to other Cont wiping her eye))]  
 24 [ (0.7) ]  
 25 Dec: An you've worked har:d fer this haven't you.  
 26 Up- up to this point [ah mean] you know: ye've  
 27 Cont: [Hhh.h ]  
 28 (0.4)  
 29 Cont: ~THAt wasn' #ma best.#~ That wus the one  
 30 thing ah ~wanted to #do,~ (.)  
 31 Cont: [ ((touches eyes, faces camera) hand down))  
 32 Cont: [ .h[h h]HHh (0.2) HHHh ]  
 33 Cont: ~If you'n understan this ad 'ome,~  
 34 (0.6)  
 36 Cont: ~Er:m~ (0.3) I- I wanted to sa:y (.). a c'd (.).  
 37 >~cum out an say a couldna done any better,~<  
 38 [~↑↑budda coulda↑↑↑↑done~]

We will consider features of crying roughly in the order that they appear in the extract(s), first noting how they will appear in transcript.

*Silence* is represented with timed pauses, and one of the features of crying is often extensive silence where it would not be normatively expected—extended pauses, missing uptake, and unfilled places in adjacency pairs. Under certain interactional conditions (especially phone calls where there are no visible indications) silence can be treated by recipients as suggestive that the speaker is seriously upset. Note, for example line 11 where the recipient might have been expected to offer more, but does not; the “take your time” from the presenter on 14 orients precisely to the failure to speak in a relevant slot.

*Sniffs* come with varying degrees of volume and stretch, represented as inhalation, with the addition of various voiced vowels and consonants, caused by nasal or

“wet” sounds: for example, Extract 1, lines 5 and 13, “.snih” and “.SHHIIH.” One role for sniffing can be to signal the incipience of the crier’s next turn, which can give it a floor-holding role in the interaction that is similar to a hearable inbreath (Hepburn, 2004), for example, see Extract 2 below, line 6. It can also be a hearable display (combined in Extract 1 with silence) that the speaker would speak if they were not so upset, or that a bout of more disruptive sobbing has not completely passed.

*Elevated pitch* occurs when the speaker is continuing through a crying episode, probably caused by muscle constriction in the throat and vocal chords. In Extract 1, the speaker struggles with delivery of the description of his problems with singing, becoming increasingly high pitched on line 16 and lines 23 and 39. This extreme pitch shift (marked with upward arrows), typically accompanies talk that begins to break down into sobbing. Here the speaker’s upset inflects a description where a reason for being upset is offered.

*Tremulous* or wobbly delivery is represented by enclosing the talk in tildes (~) (e.g., Extract 1, lines 20–21, 31, and 35). This can be less disruptive than sniffs, sobs, or high-pitched delivery, as speakers can continue speaking in a tremulous manner for extended periods. As with many of the elements of upset, tremulous delivery alone can be treated by recipients as a sign of emotional or psychological distress (Hepburn, 2004).

*Aspiration* during words has been represented by one or more *hs*. As with laughter, parentheses (*h*) are used to represent plosive breathing; outside of parentheses the *h* represents a more “breathy” sound. It is different from sobbing in that the aspiration occurs during or directly before or after speech.

Like tremulous voicing and high pitch, aspiration is a feature of speakers’ attempts to talk through a crying episode. This can be seen in Extract 2, below, in line 8. Aspiration of this kind, like tremulous delivery, can be the first cue to recipients that there is upset of some kind. This kind of aspiration may sound very similar to laughter (a difficulty also found with sobs). In line with the policy of trying to have the transcript embody the least analytic presupposition, the aspiration is not marked as crying as opposed to laughing. One reason for this is that the difference between the two is generally obvious from the context in which it occurs, and where it isn’t obvious, this difference may be a problem for participants.

*Sobbing* is represented with normal in- and outbreaths, often but not always including “voiced vowels,” which can be elevated in pitch. When they are sharply inhaled, exhaled, or spasm-like this is represented by enclosing them in reversed angled brackets (>huh huh<) which borrows from Jefferson’s use of them as an indication of a faster pace. Sobbing is probably the most familiar and recognizable feature of crying, and is usually the most disruptive to ongoing interaction. However, in the corpus of adult crying that we have worked with, full-scale bouts of sobbing are rare. Extract 2 provides an example (e.g., lines 1, 3, and 4).

Further problems with delivery are evidenced by *mouthed* (Example 1, line 1) or *whispered* talk, enclosed between double degree symbols (°). Both may result in talk that can be very difficult to hear, and may arise due to physiological changes in the muscles around the vocal chords. In the following extract from the NSPCC child-protection helpline, where sobbing is already in progress, we can see whispered talk in line 8. (CPO stands for child protection officer.)

## CRYING AND CRYING RESPONSES (199)

Extract 2 [JK Distraught dad 29.4.01]

- 01 Cal: >.Hhjh.hhjh<  
 02 CPO: D'you want- d'y'wann'ave [a break for a ] moment.=  
 03 Cal: [Hhjh >.hjh<]  
 04 =>hhjh hhjh<  
 05 (0.6)  
 06 Cal: .shjh  
 07 (0.3)  
 08 Cal: °°khjh°°  
 09 (1.8)  
 10 Cal: .shjh >hhjh hhjh[h]<

Additional features of voice quality may be part of recognizable upset, such as creaky delivery (represented by #) or staccato delivery (represented with the iteration of a “cut off” symbol (e.g., “it-is-cut-off”). Activities such as swallowing and throat-clearing may also accompany upset.

*Visual features* of upset may include trembling face and/or hands; tears; touching eyes or face; looking down or hiding one's face, or turning away; combined with more characteristic facial features of screwed-up eyes; downturned mouth with eyebrows drooping down from the middle of the face; flushed appearance, especially around the eyes and nose.

Examination of *interactional features* suggests that crying rarely switches on in full form; rather, various signs of possible distress can accumulate, sometimes with considerable subtlety. These may appear as an inflection of one or more elements of crying into the ongoing interaction without disrupting it, at least initially. Crying can also involve sequences of talk that break away from ongoing activities and are instead occupied with the crying itself, such as apologies from the crying party, soothing, reassuring, sympathetic, empathetic, and diagnostic moves from the crying recipient (e.g., Extract 1, lines 2, 3, 7, 8, 14; Extract 2, line 2). The crying recipient can continue to orient to the ongoing talk, or can orient to the disruption of the talk (in an institutional setting like the NSPCC: “take your times” are common (Hepburn, 2004; Hepburn & Potter, 2007, and see Example 1, line 14) or they can respond more directly to the upset evidenced by the speaker (e.g., Extract 3, line 17, below). Our corpus of crying calls is at present not sufficient to allow distinctions between these and further options in collecting and analyzing uptake to crying, as we continue to further explore some of the interactional dimensions of upset in the rest of this chapter.

## RESPONSES TO CRYING IN MUNDANE AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

This section will apply our understanding of features of crying and actions of crying recipients, developed in earlier research on child-protection helpline data (e.g., Hepburn & Potter, 2007, 2010), to a call between two middle-aged sisters living in Australia. In doing so, we consider the relevance of recent discussions about empathy

and epistemic access (e.g., Heritage, 2011) and discuss the value of analytic distinctions between empathy and sympathy (Hepburn & Potter, 2007). As we work through this section we should note that there is a tension between decomposing “crying” into a range of different elements and discussing “responses to crying,” suggesting that crying can be considered as a unitary phenomenon. In what follows we will use “crying responses” as a catch-all for activities coordinated in relation to specific features, or collections of features, of crying, as described above.

### Crying and sympathy

In earlier work, we suggested a distinction between empathic and sympathetic turns, reserving the term empathy for “on the record” claims of, or displays of, understanding of the other’s perspective (Hepburn & Potter, 2007). By contrast, we suggested that sympathy tokens are not propositional; they do not explicitly specify the nature or cause of what is being addressed sympathetically, nor formulate the speaker’s understanding of the emotional state of the party who is evidencing distress. Rather, as noted by Hepburn (2004), they are mainly identified by the prosodic delivery of the turn—usually stretched, sometimes with elevated or rising–falling pitch and/or creaky delivery, sometimes explicitly involving some kind of token such as “oh” or “aw,” sometimes with softened volume and increased “breathiness” or aspiration. Although they can mirror prosodic elements of crying, sympathetic turns are hearably specific to the action of sympathizing or soothing. We discuss the appearance and import of sympathetic turns in our extended analysis of the example below.

In the following call, Jill is phoning her sister Kerry; the initial business for Jill is to thank Kerry for a lunch invitation but decline it, the account for refusal being work commitments. Kerry asks her about a weekend trip and Jill reports having fun, but notes the absence of various parties who might have been expected to spend time with her. Jill’s listing of why others could not attend, combined with her somewhat abrupt delivery, leads Kerry to identify possible trouble, as we see in line 1.

Extract 3 [TS 0.58]

- 01 Kerry: You a’ [ri:ght? ]  
 02 Jill: [That’s a]beoud it. Hh  
 03 (.)  
 04 Jil: Aoh yeh?  
 05 (0.2)  
 06 Jil: >Spose ↑so<  
 07 (.)  
 08 Ker: Tch Yeah?  
 09 (0.3)  
 10 Ker: °↓Yeh.  
 11 (1.2)  
 12 Ker: Bit of a loose end?=Did you have a lot’ve  
 13 time ↑off?=or:

## CRYING AND CRYING RESPONSES (201)

- 14 (2.0)  
 15 Jil: ~↑N::u:h.  
 16 (1.4)  
 17 Ker: #O::aw::,=a'y'hev'n a hard ti:me,  
 18 (1.0)  
 19 Jil: ~Mm::,  
 20 (.)

Kerry's enquiry on line 1 gets two fairly minimal, delayed, and equivocal responses from Jill on lines 4 and 6 (note that line 2 is a somewhat delayed conclusion to her summary narrative of her weekend). In line 8 Kerry pursues elaboration on Jill's answer, and in its absence on line 9, offers a quiet "yeh," with downward intonation, that sounds like it is closing off this pursuit. This may be part of what Hepburn and Potter (2010) have suggested is a general attentiveness by crying recipients that they avoid initiating actions with which the crying party will have difficulty. This also suggests that Kerry is already hearing trouble, despite the absence of any actual elements of upset (apart from slightly extended transitions and lack of elaboration of talk from Jill). In her next attempt, rather than seeking elaboration of how Jill is feeling, Kerry offers for confirmation a candidate gloss on Jill's emotional state ("Bit of a loose end?"<sup>2</sup>, line 12). As a contracted "yes / no interrogative"<sup>3</sup> (hereafter YNI; see Raymond, 2003) this makes more of the conversational running than "yeah" and immediately offers a possible reason for that feeling—Jill has had "a lot've time off" also offered as a YNI for confirmation. Jill's delayed response in line 15 ("~↑N::u:h.") displays upset—her negative answer is delivered with elevated pitch, and is clipped,<sup>4</sup> tremulous, and stretched, and is followed by silence where elaboration might have been expected. Although a "type conforming" response (Raymond, 2003) "no" rejects the assumptions in Kerry's question. It is useful to note here that crying or upset is not delivered as an action as such, or as a turn with propositional content, but rather as something that inflects or leaks into the talk, even interfering with its progressivity.

The delivery and delay are then treated by Kerry as diagnostic of upset,<sup>5</sup> and her extended sympathy token combines a "change of state" token, "oh" (Heritage, 1984b), with a "sympathy" token, "aw," which, as Hepburn (2004) noted, tends to be conveyed largely in features of the delivery of the response—here creaky and stretched, with gently rising intonation. This type of token, combined with varying calibrations of sympathetic prosody, can be especially useful in institutional environments, for example in our helpline calls, where maintaining appropriate institutional neutrality, especially where the caller is still offering important information, can be more important than more "on the record" empathizing with the caller's difficulties. Extract 4 below offers an example of this from our child-protection helpline interaction:

## Extract 4 [HC Boy in Attic]

- 01 Caller: ~I'M ON mahh~.h((ihh (0.2) ~I(h)'m des((perate((  
 02 ah really am~ (((hhu[hh(( .hh)  
 03 CPO: [Mm::,]

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- 04 Call: ~Somebody doesn't do something soon ah'm gonna  
 05 e~ (0.2) >.h((ihh< (0.5) ~>↑AH dunno waddam  
 06 gonna do.=I'll die anyway.<~ °a-↑a-° >i[huhhh<  
 07 CPO: [↑M: m];;=.hh  
 08 Call: .H↑↑uih (.) °shih°  
 09 (0.4)  
 10 Call: °°h↑↑i: [h°°]  
 11 CPO: [So] maybe life is very very f[rightening.]  
 12 Call: [~'E doesn't]  
 13 take- the- the p'lice

Here the caller is reporting her worries about the house she lives in, and the lack of support from the police in reporting a crime. As she builds to the summary of the report, she shows increasing signs of upset, culminating in her turn on lines 1–6. On lines 3 and 7 the CPO's continuers, "Mm," are increasingly strongly inflected with "sympathetic" gently rising and falling contours. These turns acknowledge the feelings of the caller and validate her upset, while on line 11 the CPO starts to gently build a course of action that runs counter to the caller's formulation of the police as the problem, allowing a return to helpline business. A more elaborate (and less common) version of sympathy in our helpline interaction can be seen in the call below:

Extract 5 [NSPCC AD Grandson black eye]

- 01 Caller: An she won't ~answer my phone or anythin' and  
 02 I'm jh's s(h)↑o whorri [ed th't some'ing c'd]  
 03 CPO: [ °Q h: m y °]  
 04 ↑hhappen [↑to ↑↑'im >.HH<] h  
 05 CPO: [ °g o: s h: ]  
 06 CPO: #Oh: go:s [h#]  
 07 Call: [°.S]hih°  
 08 (0.5)  
 09 CPO: .HHhh  
 10 (0.5)  
 11 Call: °.Shih°=  
 12 CPO: =I mean is your relationship with her normally-  
 13 is it (.) e-normally okay,=or is it normally  
 14 a bit (.) rocky anywa:y.

The child protection officer's response ("oh my gosh" lines 3, 5) to an emotionally delivered problem presentation by the caller is in the form of a combined news receipt and marker of surprise, which also acknowledges that something untoward has been described. The CPO's turn is stretched, quieter than normal (perhaps in acknowledgment that it is persisting in overlap across the caller's turn), and repeated with creaky delivery on line 6.



This type of sympathetically inflected turn acknowledges the feelings of the other, without topicalizing them or going on the record with propositional content. It therefore allows CPOs to acknowledge and validate the upset without explicitly aligning with the caller's project in the call—here the caller is complaining about her daughter-in-law. As we see in lines 12–14, not topicalizing the upset allows a speedy return to helpline business. Responses such as the CPO's “#Oh: go:sh#,” that break out of the more standard institutional pattern, are less common on the helpline. Yet, as Hepburn (2004) showed, failure to attend to a caller's distress can lead to interactional trouble. We consider the role of “empathic” responses in the following section.

### Crying and empathy

In our understanding, empathy involves “on the record” claims of, or displays of, understanding of the other's perspective (Hepburn & Potter, 2007). Unlike sympathy tokens, displays of empathy are propositional.

We rejoin Extract 3 with some overlap, having left Kerry's turn after the sympathetic token “#O::aw::” on line 17. The sympathy token is followed by a display of empathy.

Extract 6 [TS 1:09]

- 12 Ker: Bit of a loose end?=Did you have a lot've  
 13 time ↑off?=or:  
 14 (2.0)  
 15 Jil: ~↑N::u:h.  
 16 (1.4)  
 17 Ker: #O::aw::,=a'y'hev'n a hard ti:me,  
 18 (1.0)  
 19 Jil: ~Mm::,  
 20 (.)  
 21 Ker: #Aoh:: ↑Jill:\_  
 22 (0.2)  
 23 Ker: .Hhllh ((inbreath through tongue/teeth))  
 24 (0.2)  
 25 Ker: ↑Poor old gir:l, hh  
 26 (0.8)  
 27 Ker: °Oh dee:ya, hh  
 28 (0.4)  
 29 Ker: .shh  
 30 Jil: .tdh[h h h]

Kerry latches a further polar question onto her sympathy token, presenting a more propositional display of Jill's current state (“having a hard time”) for confirmation. The effect is to move the sequence away from where it started—whether Jill has been at a “loose end”—into a new sequence occupied with dealing more explicitly with the nature and cause of Jill's upset.

We can see the value of Kerry's move to *yes / no* interrogative turns in this context, in that the interrogative frame builds Jill as having the primary right to her own experiences, but at the same time constrains the terms of a response (Raymond, 2003). This type of constraint may be useful for a recipient having difficulty in producing a response; it could be as small as one word—*yes* or *no*. The idiomatic constructions—“at a loose end” and “having a hard time”—are fitted to building a normalized and generalized version of events that would perhaps be comforting, in the sense that it makes the upset more understandable<sup>6</sup>. All of this contributes to providing an empathic reaction to Jill's upset without requiring her to elaborate on that upset, other than projecting agreement.

Jill's turn on 19 is fitted to both the action and format of Kerry's YNI, which projects agreement. In addition to confirming that she is indeed having a hard time, the delivery of Jill's turn displays her emotional state. “Mm” can be a minimal form of confirmation that doesn't involve much in the way of oral or vocal effort, and is therefore useful for a speaker having difficulties with both. By stretching and emphasizing the turn, Jill may be compensating for not producing a more elaborate response, as well as providing a clear display through the extended tremulous delivery, that she is upset. From line 21 onward, Kerry's contributions take again a sympathetic rather than empathic form. In line 21 she issues a sympathy token (“#Aoh:”) and an address term which seems to orient to Jill's vulnerability. On lines 25 and 27 Kerry offers two further idiomatic formulations of sympathy (“↑Poor old gir:l,” and “Oh dee:ya,”). All of these turns share some of the general features of “sympathy” discussed above—elevated pitch, increased breathiness, stretched and creaky delivery. This set of turns also illustrates another feature that we found in helpline crying sequences; the noncrying party, in this case Kerry, keeps the interaction moving by producing and sometimes recycling a series of turns. Each is spaced to give a more extended transition space for the crying party to contribute, but the delay is not so long as to leave them with responsibility for an uncomfortably long silence if they do not. A similar series of turns can be seen on lines 8–18 of Extract 3.

### **Crying in mundane and institutional environments**

This chapter begins to extend our studies of crying in interaction from institutional materials to more mundane settings. Although we can't do a systematic comparison with one call, we can start to speculate on possible differences, while also indicating directions for future study.

One interesting point of comparison relates to the types of questions that are formulated. As we've noted up to now in our mundane example, *yes / no* interrogatives are an important resource for recipients of upset. Elsewhere (Hepburn & Potter, 2010) we have noted that a particular form of YNI, a “turn medial” tag question, is a common feature of responses to upset in helpline interaction. By “turn medial tag question” we mean an utterance containing some kind of declarative statement which is tag formatted, typically a negative interrogative is tagged on at the end.

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Having issued a tag question, sometimes speakers can continue by adding more, as in line 5 of Extract 7 below, where a caller has been disclosing abuse he suffered as a child:

Extract 7 [JX male survivor]

- 01 Caller: >°↑Ghhd- al- like↑°°< (0.2) °°↑↑i°° (1.4)  
 02 °°↑↑bleedin ↑↑k: id°°  
 03 (1.9)  
 04 Call: °°Ghho' I'm a °°↑↑grow:n man↑↑°°  
 05 (1.7)  
 06 Call: K.HHhh Hh[h]  
 07 CPO: [Th]ere's:: a bit of the child in ↑all  
 08 of us an- (0.7) an [that's the h(h)urt chi(h)ld ]  
 09 Call: [ .H h h h H h h h ]  
 10 CPO: there is↑un' it. with you at the moment.  
 11 Call: °.Hhhhh° >hh< >h< >h<  
 12 (3.5)  
 13 CPO: ↑Don't worry, °th- i-° take your ti:me.  
 14 (1.4)

In our helpline corpus, turn medial tag questions are recurrent both in advice and crying sequences, while being relatively rare elsewhere. We suggested that such formatting manages the problem of providing a formulation of the other person's state or business, where they may not yet have offered such a thing. This is done by treating the recipient as being in a position to confirm the adequacy of the formulation, while either filling the transition space or continuing after it. In Extract 7 above, the CPO's tag formatted turn responds to the caller's prior self-deprecating turn (lines 1–4), that he is acting like a “bleedin kid” by getting so upset. The turn generalizes and normalizes the caller's actions (“there's a bit of the child in all of us”) and tag formats precisely the part of her turn that claims the most understanding of the caller's state—“that's the hurt child there.” This combined with their turn medial position, which gives these tag questions a weakened response requirement (Hepburn & Potter, 2010) means that they are an ideal interrogative in an environment where the recipient may not respond but that lack of response should not appear too problematic.

A typical example of a turn medial tag question can be found in Extract 1, lines 22–3, reproduced here:

Extract 9 [from Extract 1: Pop Idol]

- 22 Cont: A've- it's ~↑weir:d °↑it's ↑↑weird an°~  
 23 [ ((camera pans to other Cont wiping her eye)) ]  
 24 [ (0.7) ]  
 25 Dec: An you've worked har:d fer this haven't you.  
 26 Up- up to this point [ah mean] you know: ye've

Here the presenter, Dec, offers a description that emphasizes that the crying contestant has worked hard; that is, he has done the all the right things to get to where he is. Dec thereby displays empathic insight into the crying contestant's situation, which also provides reassurance by countering the suggestion that the problem causing distress is caused by the contestant's own neglect of practice and preparation. As we've suggested, this type of affirming description of the crying party's business is a common feature of declarative components of tag questions in crying sequences. It's interesting to note that this practice is not peculiar to institutional environments:

Extract 10 [TS 1:27]

- 45 Ker: .TCH=°Haw:h dear.°  
 46 Jil: °>Huh huh huh hu[h<°]  
 47 Ker [ I ]t's frustrating  
 48 Ker: [isn'tit.]=too [∴. Because nothing happens∴.  
 49 Jil: [°huh huh°] [M m∴∴∴ ]  
 50 (.)  
 51 Jil: °U- Yea:h.  
 52 Ker: .Shh (0.2) uHHHhh an ye just kinda left in  
 53 limbo.=really,=aren't you.  
 54 Jil: u- ~Y∴:↑ep  
 55 (0.3)

Kerry's two tag questions in lines 47–8 and 52–3 present a formulation of Jill's emotional condition for agreement—in a state of frustration, left in limbo. We have described explicitly propositional constructions of the recipient's emotional state such as these as empathic (as opposed to sympathetic) responses to upset (Hepburn & Potter, 2007). They therefore issue a turn that can be agreed or disagreed with, in a way that sympathetic responses don't.

One key difference between the NSPCC examples and our mundane crying example is that Kerry is adopting a more personal stance toward Jill—addressing her by first name in Extract 6 line 21, and using an idiomatic term of endearment on line 25—“↑Poor old gir;l;”. Note that “old girl” is listed in various internet dictionaries of slang as an affectionate Australian idiom for a woman, wife, or mother. It is suggestive of a close relationality that would be inappropriate on the helpline. This phrase is notable as it both acknowledges Jill's upset, and claims entitlement to tell her about her “poor” condition. In doing so it also warrants the accountability of the upset; it shows that Kerry can see that Jill is not needlessly crying, but is a victim of circumstances.

Another key difference is in the lack of turns in this mundane material that license the disruption to ongoing business—the “take your times” common in our helpline corpus. Instead, accounting for crying appears in a more subtle form, in the declarative structures of tag questions presented for agreement. All of these features suggest that adult crying, and perhaps especially the disruption it causes to the progressivity of sequences, may be accountable, and that displaying sympathy and/or empathy can involve the recipient doing the accounting for the interactionally disabled crier.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has reviewed a range of features of crying, and argued for the value of detailed transcription of both crying and the various responses to crying. Careful transcription allows us to understand crying as a collection of loosely associated and sometimes escalating practices, and opens it up, like laughter, for more specific interactional analysis. The complex interactional nature of crying then starts to become evident. Our analyses across a range of projects suggest that crying is something that typically inflects talk, sometimes interferes with, dramatizes, or underscores talk, and sometimes replaces talk, rather than appearing as an action or set of actions in its own right. This makes its uptake particularly complex—it involves orientating to something that is displayed or to the manner of its delivery, rather than to an action, claim, or proposition. The manner in which crying appears in adults, and the sense of it as something to be accounted for, especially in institutional environments, can also make it seem that the crier is unwilling for their state to become part of public discourse—and this can create tricky problems in responding.

We have started to document the delicate interactional challenges involved in recognizing and responding to crying. We focused in particular on a call between two sisters, which enabled a number of comparisons with our helpline data. This has involved close attention to (a) the participants, for example, their prior relationship, what access they have to the ongoing events in one another's life; and (b) the type of data and whether there is some ongoing institutional task being performed, such as a game show, a helpline call, two sisters or two friends talking.

One obvious point of comparison is with actions that orient to the crying as disruptive of progressivity. For example we found that turns such as “it's alright” and “take your time” are common in our child-protection helpline data, and also in the television game show data. However no such turns were found in the call between the two sisters. This suggests their role as actions that license the disruption of interaction, which makes them of particular use in institutional talk, where the empathic responder is engaged in some kind of institutional role, which is disrupted by the upset party. Such issues related to institutional specificity are very important but await further studies to develop them fully.

By contrast, some responsive actions were recurrent in both types of data, notably sympathy tokens, continuers, or news receipts with sympathetic inflection. These are often followed by actions that orient to the upset as normal in the circumstances, and responses that license the crier's upset as having an appropriate cause, such as “having a difficult or hard time.” These types of responses therefore seem to cut across other issues such as how well the interlocutors know one another, and relate instead to the intensity of the emotional experience.

We also sought to engage with and extend findings from existing literature. Manzo, Heath, and Blonder (1998) have argued that understanding how emotion is “socially constructed” may be a useful starting place to allow insights into how patients may be “pathologized” in clinical encounters. This study has implications for the development of this line of research by starting to detail normative responses to crying in everyday interaction, and therefore what may be “missing” in clinical or other institutional contexts.

Recently, Heritage (2011) has discussed empathy in ways that are partially overlapping and partially divergent from our understanding of empathy. For Heritage, the (empathizing) recipient's access to interlocutor's experience is a key issue. He suggests that it is important to distinguish between the different levels of access the (would-be empathic) recipient has to whatever events, sensations, or activities are under way, as this will be reflected in their entitlement to offer their own comments or evaluations. On this view, crying could be something that raises the "problem of experience," as the more intense the emotion, the greater the moral obligation to respond empathically and yet also the more difficult this will be, given that "the experiencer has primary, sole and definitive epistemic access" to it (2011, MS p. 3).

There are a number of differences between our findings and Heritage's more recent paper. Our previous work examining issues of empathy and sympathy in responses to crying has been based solely on helpline interaction, which adds a layer of complexity to the kinds of issues of epistemics and access that Heritage discusses; child-protection officers are nearly always speaking to a caller whom they have never talked to before. Another difference from the type of data examined by Heritage is that callers are not simply making empathic turns relevant by recalling emotional experiences, rather by displaying upset during interaction, a speaker gives fairly immediate and direct access to how they feel.

In line with Heritage's (2011) recent work on empathic responses, we paid particular attention to the sense in which prosodic inflection can show attentiveness to the upset party's emotional state, and thereby display some kind of empathy. Where responses to crying in helpline interaction are concerned, we have found it useful to distinguish between sympathetic and empathic responses. We offered an analysis of Extract 6, in which the CPO acknowledges upset through the use of sympathetic tokens ("my gosh") but subsequently moves the topic on without providing the propositional content that would have made her response to the caller's upset more "empathic." Clearly, this discussion is partly semantic—however, distinguishing between these two terms allows something to be marked that also seems to be marked interactionally. In particular, because propositional examples go "on the record" in the way that the less propositional ones do not, they require more attention to epistemic matters, and can start a course of action occupied with topicalizing the upset itself, rather than resuming ongoing projects.

As Heritage (2011) would predict, strong emotions may present the recipient with a profound intersubjective dilemma. On the one hand, strongly expressed emotions place increased response demands on the recipient; on the other hand, they are typically harder to access. We could argue that in some ways the reverse is true with crying, where recipients have a fairly unequivocal display of the crying party's emotional state, though perhaps not its causes. As our analysis suggests, even among people who know one another well, like Kerry and Jill, descriptions of troubles can be precisely calibrated to mark out causal factors and what is currently at issue, for example whether issues of blame or accountability have become more acute. As both Buttny (1983) and Edwards (1997, 1999) have noted, formulations of emotional states are precisely calibrated to support particular actions. This calibration is likely to be hard to achieve on behalf of another speaker. It follows that, in a normative

sense at least, speakers have primary rights to describe their own emotional states, and so doing it for them will be marked in various ways to show this, such as through interrogative formatting.

Our findings also show the value of using a more procedural definition of empathy, building on earlier research (Hepburn & Potter, 2007, 2010; see also Ruusuvuori, 2005). We have suggested that empathic actions are typically formed from two key elements: (a) a formulation of the crying party's business or emotional state (poor thing, frustrated, hurt); and (b) some kind of epistemic marking of the contingency or source of that formulation, for example by using yes / no interrogatives, constructions such as "I guess," or by tag formatting. In this way, the crying recipient can claim some access to this type of experience while deferring to the rights of the upset party to define the nature of their troubles.

The study of crying as an interactional phenomenon has only just started. One of the consequences of decomposing "crying" as a simple vernacular category into a range of different phenomena is that it allows a much more fine-grained interactional understanding of the way "upset" and "distress" can emerge and be consequential in interaction. Our discussion above is indicative of some of the relevant analytic avenues that are opened up, but many questions are dependent on the collection of further materials, in particular more mundane materials and ones from different settings (within and outwith established relationships, in the context of "bullying" or criticism, and so on). Of particular interest is interaction where there is no outright sobbing and disruption to the progressivity of talk, and yet there are elements such as croaky or tremulous voice, increased delay, and so on. Moreover, there are a range of institutional issues to be addressed, such as the way crying is managed in "therapeutic" environments and environments of heightened conflict, such as hostile cross-examinations and relationship disputes. There are also important developmental issues, in particular questions of how crying emerges and is managed in families with young people and infants (see Wootton, this volume, chapter 3), and whether interaction in such environments can be seen as laying down a template that is consequential for what comes later.

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#### NOTES

1. See [http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/centres/darg/Hepburn\\_1.htm](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/centres/darg/Hepburn_1.htm)
2. That is, feeling unsettled or that things are incomplete.

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3. “Bit of a loose end” is a contraction of the idiomatic “are you at a bit of a loose end” where the interrogative syntax is replaced by interrogative intonational contour. It nevertheless projects a yes or no response, although like many polar questions, a simple yes or no response would seem insufficient.
4. “Clipped” refers to a formulation of “no” that avoids the “oh” sound, leaving the speaker with “uh,” which can sometimes be more elaborately clipped by a “p,” as in “nup.” Such responses often seem to display the redundancy of the eliciting turn.
5. As Hepburn (2004) noted, in the right situation the mere presence of one or two elements of crying can be treated as indicative of upset.
6. Hepburn and Potter (2007) found a similar pattern of idiomatic constructions with yes and no interrogatives in responses to upset in their helpline data.