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**Abstract.**
All relevant sources agree that weeping is a human universal. There is disagreement, though, as to whether tears experienced during episodes of happiness or joy derive from the experience of joy itself, or whether such tears result merely from incidental physical constriction of the lacrimal gland (Darwin [1872]) or from a “sadness rebound” induced by anticipated loss of the source of joy (Feldman [1956]; Katz [1999]). It is argued here that adult weeping does not exclusively express suffering but rather is an emotional and physical register of changes in self, both positive and negative. In outlining the argument concerning weeping the paper also presents an account of the registration and consolidation of changes in self-identity and self-feelings, and therefore provides an account of the internal process of transformation of self.

**Introduction.**
There is an argument about crying, or more correctly weeping – I’m referring to shedding tears not to crying out – that is established in the biological and evolutionary literatures, defended in psychological and psychoanalytic sources, and recently advocated from a sociological perspective. This is the idea that while weeping expresses sadness or suffering, there are no authentic or unambiguous tears of joy. Jerome Neu succinctly summarizes the issue, well known in the relevant sources:

> While the physiological mechanism that produces tears when a person laughs violently may be the same that produces tears when a person wails in grief, in the latter case we regard the tears as an expression of the grief but in the former (when a person laughs to tears) we do not say the tears express amusement. In that case we regard the physiological mechanism as merely a mechanism (Neu 2000, p. 31).

In itself this may appear to be a matter of limited interest. But a critical review of the conventional understanding of the difference between sad and happy weeping raises fundamental questions concerning experiences of self and the emotional dynamics of self-formation, especially those associated with changes in a person’s self-concept. In particular, in demonstrating that weeping may be expressive of joy as well as of sadness it will be shown that weeping is a form of internal communication in which the self is engaged when registering transformations or changes in the self.

The concept of self is widely used in social psychology, sociology and related disciplines, even though elusive and in many ways unresolved. As a first approximation the notion of “self” refers to the sense or awareness a person has of their own existence as an object. In this sense “self” includes a process involving an interaction or exchange between the subject and object of experience classically summarized as the “I” and the “Me” respectively, through which an individual structures and regulates their activities or conduct and identity, necessarily involving a consciousness of self. Self-consciousness is not only cognitive but also affective or emotional as in self-feelings. The interaction internal to the self and coterminous with self-consciousness is understood in the tradition of Cooley and Mead to be structured by or formed through feelings provoked by the subject’s suppositions regarding
other’s judgments of them. Selfhood thus involves emergent awareness or consciousness about a state of being that, while not necessarily continuous is typically experienced as biographically coherent. In this sense the conception of self that a person has is ever revisable, in order to remain singular, and therefore over time and through changes of circumstance and situation relates to the same self. Changes in or transformations of self, then, are ever likely, frequently although not necessarily incremental, and possibly things with which individuals must come to terms.

Weeping has many sources: grit in the eye, sympathy for the situation of another, emotional blackmail, infant reflex, and so on. The present discussion is concerned only with emotional not reflex or irritant weeping; with adult not infant weeping nor with pathological weeping due to frontal lobe damage through stoke or other injury frequently associated with aging. Neither are we concerned with the feigned, forced or strategic tears shed to manipulate others. Finally, we are not concerned with the vicarious tears shed over the circumstance of fictional characters. We are concerned with those internal dynamics of self-processes that constitute weeping for oneself.

The relationship between emotions and their physical aspects, which must include weeping, has not frequently drawn the attention of sociologists. This is largely because, as Arlie Hochschild, for instance, has it, “it is enough to say that emotion always involves some biological component” but what that component is does not impinge on the interactional formation, management and meaning of emotion (Hochschild 1983: 205; emphasis in original). Indeed, the physical or biological component of emotion is arguably itself subject to social influence rather than being a fixed condition (Freund 1988; 1990; see also Barchas 1976; Mauss 1934/1973; Kiritz and Moos 1974). The present paper shows that the physical event of weeping is socially induced in the processes of self-transformation. Where sociological accounts typically regard physical processes as unnecessary for an exposition of salient relations, it is shown here, however, that the physical process of weeping plays a signal role in harmonizing or reintegrating a person’s self-concept after events that have disrupted a prior self-image and self-feelings. The argument is not that all changes in self require weeping, but that when it occurs weeping for oneself is implicated in the changes of the self-concept as a facilitating mechanism.

**Weeping and suffering.**

As a human universal, weeping has attracted thoughtful reflection since at least classical times. The ancient Greeks, for instance, regarded tears as a form of life in so far as living flesh was thought to contain a liquid or liquefiable element, as in the “melting of the flesh” in tears. This led to an association of tears not only with grief but also sexual longing and conjugal relations in general (Onians 1951, pp. 201-5). By the seventeenth century in England it was held that tears arise through separation from other bodily substances, “either from the blood brought thither by the arteries … or from the Nutritive juice brought by nerves” – an anatomical view coterminous with the suggestion that tears were “stored in Glandules … named Lacrymales” (Charleton 1674, pp. 154-5). The author of this assessment, the physician Walter Charleton, also held the more modern view, that while “the occasions of weeping” are varied “tears are frequently both an effect and testimony of sorrow” (Charleton 1674, pp. 153), even though weeping may be associated with other emotions, for there is also “shedding of tears for joy” (Charleton 1674, p. 157). Age plays a part in determining which emotion is correspondingly associated with weeping, according to Charleton,
because the quality of blood varies with age (Charleton 1674, p. 158), a matter of concern for humoural theories of emotions up to the eighteenth century.

A pivotal modern account of weeping is in Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872/1998). In chapter 6 of *Expression*, “Special expressions of man: suffering and weeping”, Darwin argues: “Weeping seems to be the primary and natural expression … of suffering of any kind, whether bodily pain short of extreme agony or mental distress” (Darwin 1872/1998, pp. 157-8). Darwin is not unaware that weeping occurs during episodes of joy (Darwin 1872/1998, pp. 174-5) and that in excited children weeping can suddenly turn to laughter (Darwin 1872/1998, p. 197), but this does not lead to modification of the idea that weeping expresses only suffering. For while tears follow “loud laughter … with rapid and violent spasmodic expirations”, Darwin explains that these tears are not expressions of joy, as they would be of suffering, but are contingently produced tears achieved mechanically by the physical squeezing of the lacrimal gland through contraction of the orbicular muscles, much as with violent coughing (Darwin 1872/1998, p. 166; see also pp. 205, 207-8).

The idea that tears express suffering, central to Darwin’s account, was given a neurological form by Silvan Tomkins (1982). Tomkins argues that suffering, or distress, is activated by a “general continuing level of non-optimal neural stimulation” (Tomkins 1982, p. 367). On this basis it is possible to: account for the fact that such a variety of stimuli, from both internal and external sources, can produce the cry of distress … This variety ranges from the low-level pains of fatigue, hunger, cold, wetness, loud sounds, and overly bright lights … (Tomkins 1982, p. 367).

And yet Tomkins’ neurological development of the idea that weeping signifies distress tends to undermine a core aspect of Darwin’s account.

It is important to note that Tomkins does not employ the original Darwinian form, namely that weeping expresses distress, but argues instead that the “general biological function of crying is … to communicate to the organism itself and to others that all is not well” (Tomkins 1982, p. 367: emphasis added). This revision is accepted in the present account, for reasons that will become clear below. It must also be noted, however, that Tomkins does not wish to revise Darwin’s general idea that weeping is functionally associated with suffering but not with joy. In moving beyond this latter position, accepted by both Darwin and Tomkins, it is necessary to review the veracity of the neurological formulation, represented here by Tomkins.

Tomkins’ account of the communicative function of weeping is in the context of consideration of infant tears. His account could not apply to adult weeping because a merely neurological account of it leaves out the phenomenological dimension of meaningfulness, necessary in normal adult weeping, as Darwin observed. No doubt adults frequently experience Tomkins’ “non-optimal neural stimulation”, but it is unlikely that they would weep from merely doing so. Something else is required. Elsewhere Tomkins has shown why adult weeping is infrequently encountered (Tomkins 1963, pp. 56-65) but this is not the issue here. Properly understood, fatigue associated with adult weeping is a fatigue experienced against the expectation of being rested, just as the hunger associated with adult weeping is hunger against the expectation of being fed, and so on. Adult experience of tear-inducing distress or suffering, then, is not the result only of “non-optimal neural stimulation”, which is a quantitative deficit state, but of a qualitative comparative state in which the relevant distress has a particular meaning.
A simply neurological account of weeping, as in Tomkins’ statement, therefore fails to appreciate the necessary relational or comparative dimension of tear-inducing suffering. I do not weep because I am cold. I weep because I am cold when I am used to being or expect to be warm. Weeping follows suffering that registers meaningful loss of opportunity or condition. To invoke the concept of “meaningfulness” here is important because it permits the connection of the physical process of weeping with the social process of selfhood. It is therefore loss of a self-meaningful condition or opportunity or, to put it more generally, a negative change in the condition of self, which tears express. Reference to meaning here restores an element of Darwin’s account lost in Tomkins’, namely that thought or will and not only physical processes may lead to weeping, as when sympathy with another’s suffering provokes one’s own tears (Darwin 1872/1998, pp. 174, 215-6).

Sadness rebound in joy.

Darwin’s argument, that while suffering and joy may both produce tears, tears express only suffering, is given a psychoanalytic form that comes to the same conclusion, namely that there are ultimately no tears of joy, only tears of sorrow (Feldman 1956). In an aptly titled article, “Crying at the happy ending”, Sandor Feldman inquires whether a person who is happy and “full of joy”, but who nevertheless wept, “cried because he was happy or for some other reason which was stirred up at the occasion of the happy ending” (Feldman 1956, p. 478: emphasis in original). After consideration of a number of cases Feldman concludes that they demonstrate “crying at the happy ending is due to a ‘delay of affect’; to sad events the memories of which are stirred up by the happy ending; to guilt” (Feldman 1956, p. 484). In more general terms he says:

When something makes us happy, especially when a sad and painful situation turns out well making us joyous and happy, the fundamental knowledge and feeling that this is only temporary and not lasting breaks into our mind and makes us cry (Feldman 1956, p. 484).

The paper ends with the statement: “There are no tears of joy, only tears of sorrow” (Feldman 1956, p. 485).

There is no doubt that happy experiences can alert the subject to what they have to loose, and thereby promote feelings of vulnerability and even sadness. Indeed, anything can provoke a thought of its opposite. But there is no necessity that they do so. Indeed, a claim such as Feldman’s, that joyous occasions stir up other things that make us weep, simply confuses two distinct reactions, joyous emotion and relief from anxious tension (Koestler 1964, p. 276). To conflate these, as Feldman implicitly does, prevents proper consideration of the nature of joyful weeping. And yet Feldman is not alone in forcing joy apart from its tears.

More recently Jack Katz has presented a sociological version of Feldman’s psychoanalytic claim, but without referring to it. Katz’s discussion of weeping is rich and extensive (Katz 1999, pp. 175-308). Our concern here, however, is only with his argument that tears of joy necessarily contain implicit sadness, and it is the sadness that is expressed in the tears. He says, for instance, “Many joyful crying experiences have a bittersweet character because they celebrate a sense of relief at overcoming something terrible” (Katz 1999, p. 188). Underlying this claim is another, namely that weeping is a form of relief and release, quite literally a discharge – not just of fluid but energy (see also Darwin 1872/1998, p. 197; Koestler 1964, p. 271). Katz provides the examples of a student opening a letter advising that she has been accepted by a college of her choice; a man told by his wife’s doctor that her cancer surgery went
Joy, according to this argument, itself introduces the possibility of its negation. Joyful weeping captures or expresses that possibility. The weeping that comes with experience of joy does not express the joy, rather joy provokes sorrow and the weeping expresses that sorrow or sadness. This can be represented figuratively:

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

What is discharged in weeping, according to Katz, is an image of self that is not tolerable. For this reason weeping could not express joy: joy can only provoke a sense of the obverse of joy, of what one could loose, and therefore sadness, and it is the sadness that is expressed by weeping. Thus while weeping in suffering “offers positive rewards in the form of relief that may be found in dissolving and washing away a spoiled self-image” (Katz 1999, p. 186), in joyful weeping, Katz continues, “Crying is a means of responding to beauty, the sacred, inspirational music, etc, because in the face of such positive forces, crying is an appropriate figurative negation of self” (Katz 1999, p. 189). Katz goes on to say:

Often there will be real fear, suffering, loss, or pain in the background of joyful crying. But even when there is no memory of the negative in the background, the awareness of metamorphosis itself is bittersweet. Births, weddings, sexual ecstasies must be gone through, passed, let go of, in order to be lived. Sunsets and eclipses are evocative by capturing the idea precisely. It is not just philosophers or poets who agonize over the realization that every great step forward in life is a step closer to death (Katz 1999, p. 191).

Katz suggests here, as Feldman had also claimed (Feldman 1956, p. 484), that realization of the immanence of death is somehow necessary in experience of significant personal change, and therefore that inherent in joyful weeping under such circumstances is existential angst. But this view is entirely forced.

The argument, that inherent in beauty, the sacred, and intense physical pleasure is a sense of self-negation simply misunderstands the nature of self-transcendence and the accompanying emotional experience of raptness. Aesthetic, religious and intimate physical pleasures are more likely to affirm the self than to negate it. Persons feel rather more real, more powerful, more grounded in experiencing the self-transcending joy or raptness of beauty (in nature or culture), religious experience or profound love. In these experiences a person partakes of a reality larger than themselves, and they typically experience augmentation not depletion by such contact. Durkheim (1912/1995), for instance, makes much of the fact in his account of religion which holds that individuals are brought into contact with the creative power of society through participation in religious ritual. He says, for instance:

Simply by being collective, religious ceremonies raise the vital tone. When one feels life in oneself – in the form of painful anger or joyful enthusiasm – one does not believe in death; one is reassured, one takes greater courage, and, subjectively, everything happens as if the rite really had set aside the danger that was feared (Durkheim 1912/1995, p. 411).

A similar point is made in William James’ psychology of religion, in which “connection with the higher powers” rather than depleting an individual corrects a deficit they would otherwise experience (James 1902, p. 508). From the opposite end
of intellectual traditions a similar point is made with regard to the expansive consequences for the individual of contact with secular culture (Marcuse 1968).

There is nothing contradictory, then, in holding that tears may express the joy of being more of a self. Indeed, such grounds of joyful weeping register a positive transformation of self, just as tears of suffering register loss as a negative transformation of self. Weeping, then, can be regarded as essentially expressing transformation of self both positive and negative, rather than expressing only suffering or loss. When the transformation of self is expansive, tears of joy express it, when it is depletive it is expressed by tears of sadness.

Weeping, emotions, and transformations of self.

It has been argued that tears of sadness express a negative transformation of self and that tears of joy express a positive transformation of self. It is therefore possible to conclude that weeping is a somatic or bodily expression that registers transformations of self. This idea is already contained in Tomkins’ notion mentioned above that the “general biological function of crying is ... to communicate to the organism itself ... that all is not well” (Tomkins 1982, p. 367) and in Katz’s idea that weeping “dissolv[es] and wash[es] away a spoiled self-image” (Katz 1999, p. 186). In amplifying and rectifying these statements it will be shown how weeping communicates to self and also what is the significance of weeping in transformations of self. But first it is necessary to consider more closely the emotional bases of weeping in transformations of self.

It has already been indicated that tearful distress registers a felt experience of loss significant to the self, and that tearful joy registers a felt experience of an enhancement or augmentation of self: each is a transformation of self. A model of the self useful for the purpose of developing further this general proposition is William James’ account of the empirical self comprising three elements or component parts: the material component of self comprises the body, its adornments and extensions; the social component of self forms through the recognition one gets from others; and the spiritual component of self is made up of concrete manifestations of a person’s psychic faculties and disposition, essentially how a person regards him- or herself (James 1892, pp. 176-81). Five generic causes of weeping, which can conveniently form the basis of a typology of forms of emotional weeping, have been identified by Arthur Koestler, namely: raptness, mourning, relief, sympathy, and self-pity (Koestler 1964, pp 273-80). Together with the Jamesian model of self these types of emotional weeping can be developed to illustrate the correspondence of weeping and changes in selfhood.

James’ purpose is not ours and it is therefore necessary to clearly specify his model of the empirical self in elaborating the argument here. The first thing to indicate is that the distinction between the material, social and spiritual components of the empirical self should not be taken to imply that the material and spiritual components are without social relevance and may not be socially conditioned, in the form of Weber’s analogous distinction between “economic”, “economically relevant” and “economically conditioned” phenomena (Weber 1904/1949, pp. 64-66).

The body that is “the innermost part of the material me in each of us” (James 1892, p. 177) is no less socially relevant for being physical. The material self significantly refers to the deportment, for instance, as well as the adornment of the body, the way persons carry themselves as well as how they dress. This is an aspect of the body that constitutes the material self and expresses self-feelings of various sorts. The material self exists in a social context and is in turn expressive of that context.
(see Foucault 1979; Mauss 1934/1973; Reich 1972). Similarly, extensions of the body and therefore elements of the material self incorporate family members (James 1892, p. 178) including putative and fictive family members, persons of affective significance for the subject. Thus while love, for instance, is an emotion directed to an appealing other, and thus clearly socially relevant and conditioned, in the present context, and as James has it, it additionally relates to the material self in so far as loss of a loved one, for example, is an injury to a person’s material self, as when a bereaved person describes how they feel as though they have lost a part of themselves. Similarly, the joy of satisfaction in having a book published, for example, relates not just to the social self but importantly to the material self as the joy expresses a feeling of self joining with others in a literary community such that not only is the community expanded by the addition of a new member but also the new member’s self is materially augmented by now being attached to or more properly a part of a literary community. Similar considerations must be given for how the other components of the Jamesian self are to be understood here.

Specification of the emotions of weeping will indicate how they relate to the component parts of selfhood. Raptness can be understood as a change in the material self through connection to a larger whole, as resulting from the augmentation of self through contact with a self-enhancing experience in aesthetic, religious or intimate personal experiences, as discussed above. Associated emotions are joy, love, bliss, devotion, exaltation and those associated with conversion experiences. Mourning, on the other hand, or grief, is an emotional experience typically expressed through weeping that registers loss of a significant other and therefore loss of an extension of one’s being and thus of the material self. Raptness and mourning are in this sense associated with positive and negative transformations respectively of the material self, as represented in Table 1.

Relief, the third emotion of weeping mentioned by Koestler, is the emotional experience of removal or relaxation of distress; it is pleasure that an undesirable outcome has been disconfirmed. Expression of relief frequently includes weeping. As relief relates to transformation of a person’s prospects it can be regarded as a positive change of the spiritual self in James’ sense, in the way that persons think of or, more appropriately, feel about themselves. Thus relief appears in Table 1 to indicate positive transformation of the spiritual self. Sympathy with another’s distress, or pleasure, is an emotional apprehension of change in the recognition of another and can therefore be seen as expression of positive transformation of the social self, which accounts for its particular location in Table 1.

Self-pity, the final emotion of weeping mentioned by Koestler, is an emotional apprehension of failure to attain an expected condition or opportunity. It includes a perception of one’s own impotence, and resignation about and unwillingness to be

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1 The issue of what particular emotions are associated with weeping episodes is in individual cases more complex than schematic presentation here. Mourning, for example, and the tears that may express it, can involve in addition to feelings of loss, relief from the burden of care, pride in overcoming various adversities, gratitude for those who provided support, and so on. Nevertheless, emotions of loss are central to mourning and the particular complexities of individual experiences, through which other emotions are variously implicated, do not remove tearful mourning as a social phenomenon from the general category of weeping out of loss. The distinction in this sense between individual-level experience and social process is developed in Durkheim’s account of mourning (Durkheim 1912/1995: 393-406).
involved with the source of the pity. Self-pity thus spans two emotion types: one concerns sorrow about a pain the subject experiences, and the misery of that pain; the other, in which the feelings of impotence and hopelessness have higher salience, is the self-pity of shame. Self-pity can therefore be understood to express two distinct and different emotional experiences. Self-pity may represent a change in the way one perceives oneself, as suffering unavoidable pain. In this sense self-pity registers transformation of the spiritual self. Self-pity can also be an aspect of an experience of shame, which relates to a person’s standing in the perception of others and can therefore take the form of a negative transformation of social self. These alternate phenomenologies of self-pity are each also represented in Table 1.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

It is possible, therefore, to think of each of the component parts of the self as capable of subjection to transformation, positive and negative. The particular generic emotional causes of weeping can each be identified with distinct corresponding transformations of the self. The emotional element or value of the tears involved will depend on whether the transformation is experienced as a loss or augmentation relative to one or other of the component parts of self. Particularly relevant in James’ account of the self is his point that persons know themselves through the emotions provoked by the component parts of self (James 1892, p. 177). Weeping does indeed register the relevant emotions through direct physical engagement of self in the shedding of tears. This is a process of communication of transformation or change in self through weeping.

Weeping and communication with self.

The problem to which we now turn is the role of weeping in self-referential communication. If weeping is an expression of transformation of self, then the expressive function of emotional weeping requires further explication. The dominant discussion of the self in sociological social psychology, which has continuing relevance and arguably broad comprehensiveness is the approach associated with the writings of William James, Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead (Leary 1990, pp. 120-4). This tradition focuses on trans-subjectivity as means to the formation of self, which occurs principally through a sense of the awareness and especially the evaluations of others. Cooley, for instance, captures this notion by referring to the fact that persons “liv[e] in the minds of others without knowing it, just as we daily walk the solid ground without thinking how it bears us up” (Cooley 1922/1964, p. 208). In order to indicate the significance of the idea that weeping is a form of communication with the self, it is useful to briefly rehearse a genealogy of pragmatic social psychology.

The notion of the looking-glass self in Cooley (1922/1964, pp. 184-5), for instance, in which an individual’s self evaluation and self feeling derives from their apprehension of how others perceive and assess them, develops James’ notion of the social self as a component part of the empirical self or Me (James 1892, pp. 179-81). The idea of self monitoring, that is central to Cooley’s looking-glass self, is elaborated in Mead’s notion of role taking in which the self has social agency through a capacity to anticipate the intentions of others (Mead 1934, p. 254). A difference between Cooley and Mead, though, is that whereas Cooley explicitly develops the emotional dimensions of the efficacious mechanisms, Mead neglects them – indeed rejects them – and emphasizes instead the cognitive dimensions of self (Mead 1934,
p. 173). In all of this the social sources of self are paramount and self’s relation to the other is integral to self-formation. While Mead may underplay emotion in self-formation he does add a crucial dimension to these considerations in so far as he understands that the self that is interior to the individual person is also a social process with its own internal dynamics. His argument is that the impulsive tendency, the “I”, exchanges or communicates with the analytically distinct part or phases of the self, the “Me”, in which socially sourced attitudes and understandings reside (Mead 1934, pp. 173-8). This internal conversation of self has the form of “inner speech” for Mead (quoted in Joas 1980, p. 111), replete with cognitive imagery and symbols that he regards as necessary for communication (Mead 1934, p. 175).

Mead’s emphasis on cognition and symbol is appropriate perhaps for making sense of inner speech, for speech conveys overtly cognitive information, among other things: there are implicit affective cues and signals throughout, but speech nevertheless functions in terms of language and the communication of publicly intelligible meanings. Mead points to an essentially important process in acknowledging the internal conversation of self, but in focussing only on its cognitive and symbolic form he fails to recognise the affective and somatic internal conversation that is weeping. In an important sense weeping cannot be “inner speech” because weeping is a compromise of speech, indeed weeping appears as a negation of speech in the stark sense that weeping physically prevents speech. This is crucial: weeping is expression of self-located and self-significant emotional meanings in place of the cognitive and symbolic staples of speech. Weeping, rather, is a predominantly physical engagement of a self that is involved in non-symbolic interior communication. This formulation both endorses and exceeds Meadian social psychology.

Recent developments in a strand of this tradition offer clues concerning the processes of self’s internal communication, even though there is no reference to weeping in the relevant discussion. Identity theory, as a self-conscious elaboration of the Meadian project, focuses on “parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies” (Stryker and Burke 2000, p. 284). In this context identity is the cognitive component of the self-concept that forms through reflected appraisal processes and therefore refers to what it means to have membership in a group or to take on a social role. According to this theory, the relationship between self-identity on the one hand, and self-feeling or the affective or emotional component of the self-concept, on the other, is interactive. A person’s emotional experience not only signals their state to others but also to self (Stryker and Burke 2000, p. 288) and emotions are therefore messages to the self about “the relative salience of their identities” (Stryker 2004, p. 8).

The idea, that the internal dynamics of self-processes include not only internalized conversations between self and others but also “internal conversations … involving alternative selves, either earlier or later” (Stryker 2004, p. 6), opens the possibility of conceptualizing the role of weeping within this process. Stryker adds a further insight when he notes that “intense … [and] persistent discrepant emotional experiences are less likely to be accommodated by homeostatic processes, thus are more likely to change the self by altering the relative salience of identities contained in self” (Stryker 2004, p. 15). Although directed to another purpose this formulation goes some way toward explicating the role of weeping in transformations of self.

Most changes of self, both cognitive in self-identity and affective in self-feeling, typically involve internal dynamics of self-processes that are achieved
through individual agency and experienced as exercise of choice and negotiation of circumstances and relationships. Some changes of identity or self-feeling, on the other hand, may be experienced as a “shock to the system” that cannot be readily assimilated and even resisted by an immediately prior state of selfhood. These are likely to be experienced as intense and discrepant emotions, the discharge of which involves the whole person in accommodation to the emergent new self. Weeping is implicated in this process as a physical mechanism in the achievement of self-acquiescence in an otherwise difficult-to-accept change of self.

To understand this process of assimilation of resisted emergent changes in self-image and self-feeling, and the role of weeping in it, requires articulation of certain aspects of the relationship between emotions, weeping, and transformations of self. Before indicating what these relationships might be it is necessary to clarify two further aspects of weeping. First, weeping does not express the emotions associated with it in the way that certain facial changes, for instance, express fear, say, or anger. Second, weeping does not merely arise out of emotional experience but serves to direct the way in which the emotions are understood and resolved by the person who has them.

In a classical phenomenological study of laughing and crying Helmuth Plessner, for instance, observes that while the expressive movement of an emotion may symbolically represent the emotion, the expressive form of weeping (and laughing) “remains opaque and … is largely fixed in its course … [like] blushing, vomiting, coughing, sneezing, and other vegetative processes” (Plessner 1941/1970, p. 24). The expressive aspect of emotion typically serves to communicate to others the subjective feelings of the emoting person. With weeping, though, as Plessner suggests, the communicative or expressive aspect is secondary or incidental. The expressive aspect of emotion typically serves to orient the other to the emoting subject and in doing so the expressed emotion is maintained, intensified, moderated or displaced through the interaction and the reciprocal emotional expression of the other. Weeping as an expression of emotion, though, is “opaque” – the other cannot so readily read the emotions expressed by the weeping subject – and a “vegetative process” – not primarily orientated to external communication but literally concerned with the subject’s growth and development. Weeping, then, as emotional expression is not primarily communicative to others and the emotional experiences associated with it are largely confined to their unassailable role in processes that only make sense in terms of self-augmentation, cultivation and growth, according to Plessner.

Second, as Plessner notes, weeping is “not [a] mere reaction to the actual situation” but directs itself to that situation (Plessner 1941/1970, p. 24). Thus, and this is the point, weeping has a particular facilitating role in the way in which an emotion associated with it is actually experienced, which normal emotional expression does not provide. This is to say that ostensibly the same emotion will be understood differently by the emoting subject relative to the presence or absence of accompanying weeping, and similarly the resolution of the emotion will be correspondingly different. We shall see that these two qualifications regarding weeping refer respectively to the way in which emotional energy is discharged in weeping and also the importance of experience of self-surrender in episodes of weeping. Each of these aspects of weeping is crucial in the internal dynamics of selfhood, as indicated below.

Let us return to the notion that certain changes of self-feeling may be experienced as a shock to the system that cannot be integrated or assimilated into an immediately prior state of selfhood. Experience of raptness, or relief, or shame, and so
on, is possibly had as intense and discrepant emotion that is not necessarily assimilated into self-processes: “What I’m experiencing is not me. This is not who I am”. Any failure of assimilation of changes of self leads to a discharge of emotional energy that frequently takes the form of tears. The experience of weeping then displaces and disrupts ongoing cognitive-affective activities, and at the same time heightens the salience of the relevant emotions associated with the episode of weeping by physically highlighting and drawing self-attention to them and their objects. In this way emotional information is assimilated through the intervention of bodily processes that otherwise would not be involved.

A crucial aspect of this process almost uniquely understood by Plessner is that weeping involves an act of self-surrender to the force of the relevant emotion, a yielding or inner capitulation and, to that degree, a loss of self-control (Plessner 1941/1970, pp. 116-7, 126, 137). Without the physical act of weeping, involving both self-surrender and the consequent discharge of emotional energy in the form of tears, the changes in self that are signified by the emotions associated with them could not be assimilated into the self-forming processes. A key element of this is captured in a comment of the nineteenth century philosopher and essayist, William Hazlitt: “Tears … [are] the natural and involuntary resource of the mind overcome by sudden and violent emotion, before it has had time to reconcile its feelings to the change of circumstances” (Hazlitt 1818/1930, p. 411). The temptation is to represent the processes indicated above as sequential, as in Figure 2, and it is important to appreciate their inter-causal relations. But the experience of self-surrender, for instance, is likely to continue while other aspects of the process proceed, and a feeling of simultaneity of occurrence of distinct aspects of the process is likely. Also, the feeling of the instigating emotion is likely to endure throughout.

Because Plessner’s focus is the interplay of persons and their bodies and especially the dialectic of having and being a body, the question of loss of self-control in weeping has a different significance in his account than it has in the present discussion. The idea that weeping is an abreaction resulting from loss of control, implicit in Plessner’s statement (1941/1970, pp. 148-9) can readily but misleadingly be taken to imply that weeping only involves “expressive movements indicating the dissolution of the subjective capability for reaction itself … signalling personal crisis” (Honneth and Joas 1988, p. 82). Such a claim, from the point of view of a focus on the body, indicates that in the self-surrender of weeping a person ceases to experience him- or her-self as having a body, as possessing an object that can be controlled by its subject, but rather has the experience of being a body, of being no more than a physical subject susceptible to forces beyond control, such as weeping, and, in that latter sense, of losing control. Such an assessment does not follow from the perspective of the self-concept, however.

This is because Plessner’s raw account fails to emphasize the significance of weeping in self-communication, which actually becomes lost in his concern with the problem of the switch from having to being a body, and connectedly, weeping as loss of self-control in Plessner’s account can too easily be seen as the end of a process – dissolution of the subjective capacity for reaction – rather than a key phase in a self-meaningful transformation of self, positive as well as negative. Indeed, the joy of perfect control – as when striking a well-defended goal or beautifully playing a difficult piece of music – can produce weeping as much as collapse on the sporting
field or in a concert hall. The self-surrender of such joyful weeping is not principally to loss of composure but to the realization of an attained ideal so typically unachieved that self-identity otherwise would continue to resist its assimilation: “I can’t believe I did that. It’s too difficult, it’s not possible. I couldn’t possibly have done that”.

**Conclusion.**

The argument above is that weeping is not simply expressive of sadness in the manner of writers from Darwin to Katz. Rather, weeping expresses a somatic-emotional realization of transformations of self that includes both positive (joyful) and negative (sad) forms. Weeping, therefore, may express joy as much as it expresses sorrow or sadness. The account presented here corrects some well-known explanations of weeping. While weeping may have no function or purpose outside of the subjective experience of one’s own self, in the processes of individual selfhood it communicates a transformation of self-concept and self-feeling without which the maintenance of self-integrity or self-unity would not be possible.

The function of weeping, to communicate to the self an incident of transformation of self, can be confirmed by reference to a larger physical process with which weeping is connected, namely its association with the parasympathetic nervous system. Whereas the sympathetic nervous system places the body in a state of excitation or readiness for action, the parasympathetic nervous system returns the body to normal once the need for readiness has passed. It is possible to say, then, that weeping registers and communicates a transformation or change that self has undergone. In his summary of this process McNaughton captures many of the points indicated above:

> Th[e] view of the function of tears, as a means of returning the body to normal after emotional disturbance, fits with the fact that tears are controlled by the parasympathetic rather than the sympathetic nervous system. It also accounts for the observation of tears of joy as well as tears of sadness – any arousing of emotion whatever its affective sign could require a chemical mopping up operation. The pattern of occurrence of tears is also consistent with this theory – tears occur during recovery from emotion rather than at the peak of arousal (McNaughton 1989, p. 148).

Weeping is not simply a discharge of energy, a comforting release, it is part of a return to a new stasis subsequent upon systemic change.

A further point related to weeping and communication of transformations of self is an aspect of the argument of both Feldman and Katz rejected above but nevertheless in need of final consideration. This is the claim, difficult to simply dismiss, that there is a sense or feeling of sadness experienced in certain episodes of joyful weeping. It may well be, as Katz indicates, that “something negative is appreciated in joyful crying, but it is not necessarily a prior negative experience or anxiety” (Katz 1999, p. 189). In making sense of this type of experience it is important to acknowledge that the act of weeping may itself be regarded by the person undergoing it as “childish”, “weak” or simply discordant or inappropriate. Thus tears of joy may indeed carry a negative or sad affect with them. That is to say, following Scheff (1988, p. 400), for instance, that we are ashamed of weeping, whatever its source, be it sadness or joy. In this sense the sadness of joyful tears is a second-order sadness, not arising from the joy – as claimed by those discussed above – but rather arising from the tears that express the joy. The sadness of joyful weeping is in that sense a nested emotion. This can be represented figuratively:
This paper has addressed the way in which tears of joy have been treated in the relevant literatures and has proposed an alternative way of conceptualizing such tears and the differences between what are loosely called tears of joy and tears of sadness or suffering. In doing so some suggestions regarding processes of self, especially its internal dynamics, and the relevance of weeping to processes of self-communication and self-transformation have been outlined. It is not argued that all transformations of self are registered in tears or weeping, or that all episodes of suffering or sadness any more than all joyous experiences are necessarily expressed through weeping. Nevertheless, the function of weeping is best understood as an essential part of processes of changes in self and associated emotional dynamics, as outlined in discussion above.
Figure 1: Tearful Joy in a Sadness Rebound

JOY → THOUGHT OF LOSS → WEEPING

Table 1: Weeping Emotions and Transformations of Components of Self

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>EMOTIONS OF POSITIVE TRANSFORMATIONS OF SELF</th>
<th>EMOTIONS OF NEGATIVE TRANSFORMATIONS OF SELF</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MATERIAL SELF</td>
<td>RAPTNESS</td>
<td>MOURNING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL SELF</td>
<td>SYMPATHY</td>
<td>SELF PITY (AS A CONSEQUENCE OF SHAME)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPIRITUAL SELF</td>
<td>RELIEF</td>
<td>SELF PITY (AS A SELF NARRATIVE)</td>
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</table>
Figure 2: Weeping and Internal Dynamics of Self

ASSIMILATION OF TRANSFORMATION OF SELF

INCREASED SALIENCE OF EMOTION

INTERUPTION OF ONGOING ACTIVITY

DISCHARGE OF EMOTIONAL ENERGY AS TEARS

SELF SURRENDER

FAILURE OF ASSIMILATION OF TRANSFORMATION OF SELF

EMOTION OF SELF TRANSFORMATION
Figure 3: Tearful Joy and Second-order Sadness

JOY → WEEPING → SADNESS
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