

More men are crying: Here's why those tears are good for you

LIFESTYLES

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Burt Reynolds is a manly man, one of Hollywood's most macho stars — but he chokes up when he talks about what he loves.

At the Palm Beach Book Festival recently, Reynolds didn't bother holding back the tears when he explained how much he cherishes the hometown friends who have stood by him.

Last week, golfer Jim Herman burst into tears after winning his first PGA Tour victory and nabbing a spot at The Masters.

"I think it all just built up," he said, referring to his emotions over his nine years of working to make it on the tour, with a little financial bump from Donald Trump.

Actor Ray Romano recently had a crying scene in the HBO series "Vinyl," and he told NPR: "I'm at an age where crying is easier for me now. I like it. I can cry at a poignant commercial ... A good 'Star-Spangled Banner' can make me cry. I'm not kidding. I look them up on YouTube and I find the most emotional ones. And I like a good cry — it's cathartic; it's a release."



Burt Reynolds choking up at the Palm Beach Film Festival. Damon Higgins / The Palm Beach Post

Also last week, a story called “Teaching Men to be Emotionally Honest” in The New York Times became widely shared.

Its author: a college professor named Andrew Reiner who teaches a seminar called “Real Men Smile: The Changing Face of Masculinity.”

Reiner’s course is part of a trend to bust the mask of masculinity, to look at how men handle their feelings.



Ray Romano plays promotion manager and partner in a struggling record company in HBO's tale of the music industry of the ... [Read More](#)

Boys are taught it's not manly to cry or show vulnerability, Reiner writes in *The Times*, but "when they are immunized against this deeper emotional honesty, the results have far-reaching, often devastating consequences.

"Despite the emergence of the metrosexual and an increase in stay-at-home dads, tough-guy stereotypes die hard. As men continue to fall behind women in college, while outpacing them four to one in the suicide rate, some colleges are waking up to the fact that men may need to be taught to think beyond their own stereotypes."

And he asks the question: Isn't it better to be emotionally honest and cry if you want to, rather than swallow it or turn pain into anger just to earn a Man Card?



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Isn't it better to realize that men can be both nurturing and strong, the same way women can be both powerful and feminine?

'Something wonderful happens as we get older ...'

Vince Fazzi says real men cry all the time, and the older they get, the more they cry — because they don't give a damn about what anyone thinks.

Fazzi, a health and performance coach who lives in Jupiter and gives seminars to dispel myths about aging through his [Prime Time Life Performance](#) site, says, "Yes, you will see more older men crying than younger men, and the reasons may surprise you."

It's not because they have less testosterone, as some web sites claim, Fazzi says. And it's not because of depression and anxiety due to aging.

Those reasons "reinforce the existing negative stereotypes of aging," he says.

Here's Fazzi's take on men and emotion:

“Regardless what you may think and what men try to project, men in general are riddled with self-doubt and insecurity ... no more or less than women I might add ... just different.

“We are always worrying if we will live up to the cultural standards of being a man. Expressing that doubt and fear with tears, however, is not acceptable male behavior. Men risk diminishing their masculinity with tears ... just as women risk diminishing their femininity with strong, powerful, take-charge behavior.

“So men learn at a very early age not to let others see them cry! Young men cry more than you think ... but only to themselves or a very limited peer group.

“But something wonderful happens to many of us as we get older. We discover who we are. Self-aware men in the second half of life have no fear of public ridicule for tears shed for loved ones, comrades in arms, opportunities lost, opportunities seized, seeing one’s daughters get married, seeing one’s sons succeed, obstacles overcome, the birth of grandchildren, a well-played sporting event, courage, fear, rejection, love, death.

“Through the years, we have run the life course and gauntlet. We know who we are. We know the depths of our fears and the heights of our bravery. We know our success and mistakes and failures. We have received love and have lost love. We know we are not perfect. But we know we have grit. We know what it means to be the man we are.

“And at this stage of the game, It’s OK to cry if it makes me feel good.”

‘Tears are emotions that don’t have names’

How can parents and educators let young men know it’s OK to cry?

Reiner’s story in The New York Times quotes research: “From infancy through age 4 or 5, boys are more emotive than girls. One study out of Harvard Medical School and Boston Children’s Hospital in 1999 found that 6-month-old boys were more likely to show ‘facial expressions of anger, to fuss, to gesture to be picked up’ and ‘tended to cry more than girls.’”

But by the time boys reach 15 or 16, this vulnerability has been socialized out of them — leaving them feeling disconnected.

Director Jennifer Siebel Newsom calls this disconnection a “boy crisis.”

Her documentary about what it means to be a man, “The Mask You Live In,” premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival.

“We as a society are failing our boys, and I wanted to delve into the concept of ‘how do we create a culture that doesn’t leave them so lonely, isolated and in pain?’” Newsom told Variety.

Showing emotion helps both men and women heal, says Connie Ingram, a therapist who practices in Royal Palm Beach.

“Tears are emotions that don’t have names,” Ingram says. “For example, we may say we cry because we’re sad, but sad doesn’t cover exactly what we are experiencing; we just don’t know what to call it. Those tears are healing tears. Crying can improve mood, reduce tension and increase feelings of relief.”

She’s noticed a change in the “polarized gender thinking” that “boys don’t cry.”

“In my practice, I have seen more adult men cry and verbally express their feelings in the past 10 years,” she says. “Sometimes it is a challenge to help them put their feelings into ‘feeling’ words rather than cognitive words, but when they do, the realization is cleansing and liberating.”

She believes as men get older, they care less about maintaining a stoic posture and more about their passions and values.

“Older men have settled into themselves and no longer need ‘permission’ to cry. They no longer feel the need to separate emotions (including crying) from strength and resilience. Older men are now able to see and welcome the growth of compassion and warmth that they have traditionally had to keep at bay.”

Ingram suggests that older men are key to releasing younger men from emotional stereotypes.

“I hope that older, wiser men will help to influence boys in their social circles to live in a holistic way — and to see healthy masculinity as embracing their emotional side as much as they do their cognitive side.”