



## **An Introduction to Social Psychology**

### *Four Interrogative Themes*

#### **Wendy Hollway:**

Think of the claim that's very common. Boys don't cry. How does it make sense to step back and think of it in terms of individual social dualism to start with? Is it that boys don't cry because boys are male, they've been born male, there's that biological individual and really that's the answer, as if well, of course boys don't cry, they're boys, end of story.

Or, on the other side, the social explanation would be: well boys learn not to cry, they're surrounded by social pressures which say it's not manly, it's not a good way to grow up as a boy. And also the kinds of social practises which mean that if you cry, you get bullied. So we want it to be not one or the other of those things. We want to see ways in which that has effect on boys, the way they come to think about being boys, their masculinity. In terms of agency structure dualism, it's quite important because can they choose not to cry? Can they choose to cry perhaps? On the one hand crying is an emotion and it's questionable how in control a boy might be of his crying. But if it's true and certainly some boys, men will say that they can't remember the last time they cried, they haven't cried for decades, they regard it as something they only did when they were a baby and then they grew out of and they're proud cos it's part of their masculinity that they don't cry. So is it a choice? How are they in control of it? And if it's a choice, how do they choose when there are all these pressures, so that if you did cry, as a boy or a man, you might feel that you might get punished for it?

Let's go on then and think about in what sense that claim, boys don't cry, is a situated knowledge. For a start, it's not a claim that every society, either, either in the past or the present, would, would make. So it's situated in certain cultures at certain times. And in fact, it might even be changing in many contemporary societies at the moment. Maybe it's less prohibited that boys cry than it was say in the 1950s. And so that claim is situated knowledge. And the, where you are situated as a boy will affect how you actually live with that experience of that particular claim. And it's also very clear in this example I think, is how power relations are actually implicated in this claim, boys don't cry. Because the power involved has an awful lot of quite, quite serious, quite profound effects. So for example, if you're a boy and you learn not to cry very early and you're proud of your masculinity as a result, it, it constructs you as a certain kind of a male who's in control of your emotions. Who's invested in that kind of a claim? What makes it something that boys will, some boys, many boys will strive to be?

What do they get out of it? Well one of the things they get is that the claim boys don't cry necessarily positions girls as the one who do. And if boys can be proud of not crying then they can pour scorn on girls for being the ones who are weak enough to cry. So it has this effect on gender relations where it actually sets up boys as being superior in terms of controlling emotions, and girls are the weaker sex. But it also has power effects on whether men are capable of expressing their emotions. And certainly in the last couple of decades one of the kind of complaints certainly of many women and some men, is that men are too controlled in their emotions and that it actually hampers them, that it makes them certainly less good to have a relationship with or less good as a colleague. So we can see how any simple example like that you can take, you can step back and you can use any one or all four of those interrogative themes and actually put it in a perspective rather than just take it as read and not question it or not be critical of where it came from.