



A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Exploration of Feeling Joyful

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Abstract

This paper discusses our use of a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to explore the lived experience of feeling joyful. Semi-structured interviews were used to discuss two contrasting experiences of joy for each participant. Analysis was informed by van Manen's human science method, facilitated by King's template analysis. Our findings suggest that joy was a profoundly meaningful sense of positivity. Sometimes this feeling was fleeting, at other times it was described as a longer lasting experience. Regardless of duration, joy involved a desire to relinquish control which could be expressed as a freedom of movement, and could be enabled by the security that significant others provided. We discuss our findings in relation to distinctions previously drawn in the literature between happiness and joy and argue that, despite differences in experiences, the participants' accounts support an understanding of joy as a meaningful and social phenomenon which, though often unexpected, requires intentional engagement.

Keywords: joy, human science method, happiness, emotion

A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Exploration of Feeling Joyful

Paradoxically, some of the emotional experiences that we value most have been given least attention within academic psychology. The development of positive psychology (e.g. Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) has sought to rectify this but, with the exception of Maslow's work (e.g. 1964) on peak experiences, joy has received relatively little attention from researchers. This paper explores the value of a phenomenological approach for investigating the subjective experience and meaning of feeling joyful.

Our approach to emotion

Although emotions are recognised as a fundamental part of what it means to be human (Barbalet, 2006; Slaby 2008), psychologists have not always agreed about the nature of emotion and hence the best ways to investigate emotional phenomena (Barrett, 2006). An objectivist approach to emotion has dominated much of the psychological literature, with the aims of defining emotion categories, proposing underlying cognitive and neurobiological mechanisms and looking for cause and effect relationships between emotion-related phenomena, often with the further aim of developing methods for modifying negative emotional experiences. However, other emotion theorists and researchers have argued for the value of approaches to researching emotion which foreground the lived experience of emotion and explore the personal meaning and social significance of emotional experiences (e.g. Frijda, 2005; Eatough & Smith, 2006). In relation to positive psychology, Rich (2017) has recently proposed a corrective shift towards more frequent use of methods which enable the complexity and context of positive emotional experiences to be captured, by collecting participant narratives. In exploring experiences of joy, we take this first

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3 person lived approach in the hope that this will develop understanding of the nature and
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5 significance of feeling joyful.
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8 Sartre (1939/1971) was one of the first to argue against the value of examining emotions
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10 as decontextualized phenomena which could be reduced to their component parts. For him, such
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12 an approach misses what is most human and significant about emotional experiences. Instead,
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14 Sartre argued, emotion should be understood as a way-of-being in the world that has meaning for
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16 the individual. Drawing on Husserl's (1925/1962) notion of intentionality, Sartre noted that
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18 emotion is always *about* something in the world and argued that becoming emotional involves a
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20 transformation of one's relationship to, and awareness of, the world and a change in our way of
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22 responding to the world. Moreover, for Sartre, emotion was something we *do* rather than
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24 something that happens to us. This suggests not only the value of researching emotion from a
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26 first-person perspective, but also the value of investigating emotion as a contextualised
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28 phenomenon, in a manner which does not divorce the feeling, acting subject and the object of
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30 emotion. This has certainly been the understanding of several psychological theorists who have
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32 argued that becoming emotional is not simply a changed internal state but part of meaningful
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34 social interaction and that it is useful to investigate emotion as such. For example, Averill
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36 (1982) characterises emotion as the enactment of a transitory social role, while Parkinson (1996)
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38 argues that becoming emotional involves making identity claims, whether to an internal or
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40 external audience.
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48 Conceiving of emotion as, at least in part, a form of action further underscores the value
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50 of a holistic approach which does not assume a simple cause-and-effect relationship between
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52 internal states and emotional behaviour. Merleau Ponty (1945/1962) argued strongly that
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54 emotional behaviour should not be viewed as separate from emotion but as an embodiment *of* the
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3 emotion. It is through the body that we experience and understand the world and also act on the
4 world. Similarly, Parkinson, Fischer & Manstead (2005) characterise emotions as ‘embodied
5 actions and reactions’ (p.16), rather than a cause of such actions, and Frijda (2005) argues that
6 action readiness is part *of* emotional experiences, shaping our orientation to and understanding of
7 the world. Therefore, following this body of work on the integrated nature of emotional
8 experiences, this article investigates experiences of feeling joyful from a first-person holistic
9 perspective.
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20 **Research on joy**

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22 Despite there being no universally agreed-upon definition of joy (Cottrell, 2016), there is now a
23 small body of research which has explored the phenomenon of joy holistically and experientially
24 or through self-report measures. We can, therefore, begin to understand a little of what it feels
25 like to be joyful. In line with Close’s (1981) suggestion that joy resembles Maslow’s (1964)
26 notion of peak experience, Hoffman, Kaneshiro & Compton (2012) examined peak experiences
27 by asking middle-aged Americans to reflect on a recent joyful experience. They found that joy
28 was most commonly experienced with loved ones, identifying the feeling of joy as one that is
29 often experienced socially. Both Cottrell’s (2016) concept analysis and Robbin’s (2006)
30 phenomenological study support this idea. They found that joy is often an experience that
31 involves a deeper connection to others or the world and also a sense of awareness and fulfilment,
32 and playful movement such as dancing or clapping. Additionally, both studies indicate that joy is
33 short-lived and often experienced as unintentional. As a result, Cottrell (2016) claims that joy is
34 fundamentally different from happiness. Unlike happiness, joy is not a state of mind that
35 individuals work towards, but rather it is accidental (Cottrell, 2016). Furthermore, in the moment
36 of feeling joyful, participants in Robbin’s (2006) study described a feeling of freedom in the self,
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3 which resulted from the complete absence of stress or worry. In a recent self-report study of joy
4 and gratitude, Watkins, Emmons, Greaves & Bell (2017) carried out a factor analysis of self-
5 report measures of joy and other positive emotions, suggesting that joy should be considered a
6 distinct positive emotion. Together this limited body of research suggests that Joy, might be
7 viewed as a more intense and heightened feeling of positivity than happiness (Sloan, 2011).
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15 Some researchers argue that there is similarity between the feeling of joy and
16 Csikszentmihalyis's (1991) idea of flow (Cottrell, 2016; Robbins, 2005/6). In the experience of
17 flow and joy, the individual is immersed in a specific task or moment and feels a sense of
18 fulfilment in what they are doing, without any focus on reaching goals or seeking achievement.
19 In contrast, van Deurzen (1997) and Sartre (1939/1971) have both suggested that an individual
20 feels joyful when they become one with something they have deeply desired and that has become
21 a reality. Although these two views are not entirely incompatible, they suggest differing
22 expectations regarding the extent to which joy is likely to be part of purposeful activity. This
23 could be explained by there being different experiences of joy. In support of this suggestion,
24 Watkins, Emmons, Greaves & Bell(2017) found some evidence to suggest that joy may be
25 either a momentary or an enduring feeling, though further research is required to explore the
26 nature of experiences of joy which are temporally varied.
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44 Sartre's and van Deurzen's view, in line with the general approach to emotion outlined
45 above, indicates that joy is about something that is personally meaningful to an individual.
46 However, the few studies with an explicit focus on understanding experiences of joy, for
47 example Robbins (2006) and Watkins, Emmons, Greaves & Bell (2017) have not included
48 exploration of what, in particular, the individual feels joyful about. Sloan (2011) emphasises the
49 importance of examining the object of joy, because in doing so it may help to clarify or shed
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3 light on the meaning of this phenomenon. For phenomenology, the intentional nature of
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5 experience means that in seeking to understand it as researchers we must always consider both
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7 the “what” and the “how”. Therefore, in order to enable a contextualised understanding of an
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9 emotional experience it is essential to explore the relationship between the feeling and object of
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11 the feeling (Sartre, 1939/1971). In this study, therefore, we chose to explore the experience of
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13 feeling joyful by collecting accounts of joy which enabled us to examine the context and focus of
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15 the experience and the participants’ interpretations of feeling joyful.
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20 **Methodology and methods**

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22 Phenomenology was the overarching methodological approach taken to investigate the
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24 experience of feeling joyful. Within this, we chose to adopt a hermeneutic position. Hermeneutic
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26 phenomenology, as outlined by Heidegger and developed as a research approach by scholars
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28 such as van Manen (2016), aims to understand and describe an experience through interpretation
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30 (Finlay, 2012). The hermeneutic phenomenology methodological approach recognises that
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32 description of an experiences is inevitably embedded with one’s interpretation of it (Finlay,
33
34 2012). In contrast to this, descriptive phenomenology asserts that each phenomenon holds a
35
36 universal essence or structure that can be discovered via removing one’s preconceptions (Giorgi,
37
38 1985). Although Our methodological approach did include bracketing of preconceptions to get
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40 closer to the lived experience, we maintained a reflexive approach on the understanding that this
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42 can never be completely achieved, thus focusing on interpretation and reflexive engagement of
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44 the participants’ lifeworld as a way to reveal meaning about the lived experience of feeling
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46 joyful.
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53 Van Manen’s (2016) work was drawn upon to inform our method as his approach is in
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55 accordance with our chosen methodological position. His human science method to studying
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3 human experience suggests six methodological activities [table 1 here]; these provide guidance
4 throughout the whole research process, from the choice of research topic, to data collection,
5 analysis and writing up of the findings, and are inherently tailored to the underpinnings of
6 hermeneutic phenomenology. Through the process of bracketing and interpretation, van Manen
7 (2016) encourages researchers to identify qualities that make the phenomenon what it is – he
8 describes these as “essential themes”. Nonetheless, he recognises that the structure of the
9 phenomenon may vary across time and context.

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20 Phenomenological research puts a premium on exploring specific examples of lived
21 experience in depth, rather than seeking to identify commonalities across a larger number of
22 cases. It is therefore appropriate to work with small samples, often in single figures Robinson,
23 2015; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Following ethical approval two men and two women
24 (ages 21-22) [table 2 here] were invited through personal contact to take part in individual semi-
25 structured interviews. Prior to the interview, participants were asked to identify two contrasting
26 examples of a time they felt joyful that they were comfortable to discuss in some detail. During
27 the interview they were then prompted to explore and describe their concrete and real-life
28 experiences of feeling joyful. This was in keeping with van Manen’s recommendation that
29 experience is investigated ‘as it is lived rather than conceptualised’ (van Manen, 2016, p. 30).
30 The interviews were then transcribed for analysis, where all names have been replaced with a
31 pseudonym.

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48 In order to facilitate van Manen’s proposed methodological activity of ‘reflecting on
49 essential themes’ (van Manen, 2016, p. 32), Template Analysis (TA) was used to assist in the
50 identification and organisation of initial themes and sub-themes (King, 2012). TA offers
51 researchers flexibility, thus is in keeping with van Manen’s approach as it enables modification
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3 to the analytical procedure according to the needs of the study. For example, an initial
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5 hierarchical template of a thematic structure was constructed rather than using a priori themes
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7 from existing literature. We did this via inductive coding of one of the two accounts of feeling
8
9 joyful provided by each of the participants. This initial template was then used to code the
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11 second set of participant examples. The template was then modified and extended until the
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13 themes and sub-themes were judged by the first and second authors to capture the key features of
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15 all the transcripts.
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20 A more in-depth analysis and discussion of the template was then carried out. Through
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22 the ‘art of writing and rewriting’ (van Manen, 2016, p. 32) the finalised template was used to
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24 explore and reflect on themes until top-level themes were developed that were felt to characterise
25
26 the essential structure of the participants’ accounts of feeling joyful. Analysis of these themes by
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28 all three authors took place alongside reflection on existing psychological literature on joy to
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30 ensure a balance of both ‘parts and whole’ (van Manen, 2016, p. 33) of the phenomenon and
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32 research context.
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36 Analysis

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39 The participants reported a range of different contexts in which they felt joyful. Some of these
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41 were connected to a specific event such as a musical performance or a holiday. Joy was also
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43 experienced when something impacted the participant’s life in a much wider sense, for example
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45 changing course at university, a newfound perspective and a wish list coming true. Analysis of
46
47 these joyful experiences resulted in the formulation of three main themes: *Object of Joy as*
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49 *Personally Meaningful*, *Wilful Loss of Control* and *Interpersonal Joy*, these are explored more
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51 closely below.
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9 *Object of Joy as Personally Meaningful.* Despite there being some variation in the
10 context in which joy was experienced, the object of joy was always personally meaningful and
11 important to the individual. The experience of joy, therefore, relied greatly upon the participant's
12 subjective interpretation and meaning making. Additionally, some variation was found in the
13 experience of feeling joyful, particularly regarding the duration, with some experiences being
14 short-lived e.g. seeing a rock band perform and spending a weekend with friends while others
15 were long lasting e.g. changing course at university and a new-found perception of growing old.
16 When the object of joy was short-lived, the participants described an intense and consuming
17 feeling of positivity. In that moment of joy, any unpleasantness or worry disappeared. Similarly,
18 when the object of joy was long-lived, the participants reported an intense feeling of positivity.
19 However, these experiences differed slightly in that joy was directed towards a hopefulness for
20 the future rather than being solely a feeling of positivity in that moment.
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37 Many of the participants described a profound connection with the object or event that
38 evoked their feeling of joyfulness. For Mia, the experience of being in the presence of a rock
39 band that held such significance to her was so powerful that it transformed feelings of irritation
40 and discomfort to feelings of liberation and positivity.
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47 *They are quite depressing but somehow their music means a lot and I'm not sure how but*
48 *erm that's why I felt so like entranced and I forgot where everything was around me and*
49 *it's because like it was DEEP. There was a connection and I was in a Coldplay bubble*
50 *(laughs). Also, BEING annoyed standing in the rain to being embracing it when he was*
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3 *singing and then you were actually loving the rain. We were soaked, frozen, but it flips it*
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5 *because of the atmosphere and the setting became positive.*
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8 As seen in Mia's quote above, she and many of the other participants identified a feeling
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10 of mesmerisation and being entranced when joyful. This occurred particularly during short-lived
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12 experiences of joy at a specific event, thus revealing that temporary experiences of joy are often
13
14 connected to a specific moment in space and time. In contrast, this was not necessarily the case
15
16 when joy was a longer lasting experience as it did not seem to involve a specific physical
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18 context. Instead, the feeling of joyfulness derived from a realisation, new understanding or
19
20 outlook. As a result it appeared to be a transformative and expanding feeling of joyfulness.
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25 *Realising that I had actually done most of the things on my list changed my outlook on*
26
27 *life because I felt that when I stopped trying to do them that's when I accomplished them.*
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29 *I kind of changed my perspective as well because I have always been worried about the*
30
31 *future after university but now I'm still worried a little bit but I am not as worried*
32
33 *because I think that some things do happen for a reason. I don't mean that things are set*
34
35 *out for us but that life gives us opportunities and choices, and I'll either reject it or get a*
36
37 *new one or I'll take it and go down that direction in life. I think I felt joyful the most*
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39 *because things were finally falling into synch and place, it was like the perfect balance in*
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41 *life.*
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46 In the quote above, Frank reflects on his experience of realising that he had achieved a lot
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48 of his deepest desires. This realisation changed his outlook on life in a way that made him more
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50 hopeful and less anxious for the future. When asked about the context of this joyful experience
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52 Frank reported that it was a "mental context" that was "on-going". The joyfulness Frank felt,
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54 therefore, appeared available to him whenever he happened to reflect on this realisation and
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3 newfound perspective. For Frank and many of the other participants, the experience of joy as
4 something that is long lasting was thus connected to a sense of personal growth. It is important to
5 recognise that Frank had initially begun to work towards the things that he desired but over time
6 he became less proactive or forceful in achieving his dreams. When they came true, therefore, it
7 was somewhat unexpected, which appeared to intensify the feeling of positivity.
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15 Despite there being differences in the context in which participants felt joyful and the
16 duration of this, there was always an overwhelming feeling of positivity. This experience of
17 positivity was personal to the individual and what they perceived as important and enjoyable.
18 This uncovered an important quality of the feeling of joyfulness for our participants; joy was the
19 feeling of pure positivity and an absence of anything emotionally unpleasant or painful. In the
20 moment of joy, everything in life felt magical, safe and positive, and this feeling could be
21 momentary or it could be extended and expanding.
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32 *Willful Loss of Control.* When feeling joyful, there was a desire or an impulse to be
33 moving, and for some there was a struggle to remain still. Whether they were jumping, clapping
34 or tapping a foot, the accounts suggested that a joyful individual is animated and lively. An all-
35 encompassing feeling of positivity and goodness in the participant's world created a profound
36 sense of freedom and liberation, and they were compelled to move merrily throughout the space
37 surrounding them. Embedded within this movement was a wilful and desired loss of control.
38 According to the participants' accounts, a joyful individual wishes to move spontaneously,
39 instinctively and without restriction or control. This unconstrained and uninhibited movement
40 was an embodiment of the freedom and delight that was experienced when feeling joyful.
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53 Both Margot and Jack described their experience of being joyful as childlike and playful.
54 This captured their hyperactivity but also their lack of seriousness, concern or worry.
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3 *I guess I turned into a little kid, skipping and holding onto my boyfriend's hand. I had the*
4 *biggest grin on my face, and when I am happy and joyful I always wiggle my head*
5 **wiggles head* and turn into a child just like "LA LA LAAA", laughs.*
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10 *I was very hyper (laughs) I suppose I was kind of acting like the boss, giving everyone*
11 *instructions on what to do. I was just laughing and smiling, really just enjoying life. I was*
12 *coming up with lots of silly ideas but I do that anyway so. I was being silly, jumping on*
13 *the waterslide, being really playful, we were like little boys again.*
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21 In the act of skipping, smiling, laughing and jumping, both Margot and Jack shared a
22 similar experience of feeling carefree when joyful. They were immersed in the present moment,
23 unaware or careless of what others might think of their jolly spirit. The notion of being a child
24 again, reveals a relaxed and stress-free nature, thus, in the moment of joy there was no demand
25 for them to act in a manner than might be considered formal or mature. They could let go of the
26 seriousness of life, and for a moment they felt young and untroubled. This highlights the sense of
27 freedom, to say, be or act in whatever way feels natural when joyful. In that moment of joy there
28 was no sense of restriction, both Margot and Jack as a result, actively and wilfully gave in to the
29 feeling of no limit, moving and behaving freely with little regard of their appearance. Their
30 engagement with the present feeling of joy was a complete mind-body experience.
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44 In the quote below, Margot reflects on the difficulties she faced regarding the experience
45 of joy during her musical performance. The expectation for her to be professional meant not
46 interacting with her colleagues, moving freely or expressing any emotion.
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51 *Yeah that would have ruined it [the experience of joy], if I had to constrain it too much. If*
52 *you constrain things you lose because joy is a free thing isn't it, if you put so many rules*
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3 *on it you are stamping it out really. It stamps out the fun. I needed to have a wiggle, not*
4 *being able to turn around and smile at my friends when they played well put a damper on*
5 *things. I had to control myself and I don't think joy should be controlled I think it should*
6 *be free. When you are sad and you cry you can't stop yourself from crying and so when*
7 *you are happy and you wiggle, you are going to wiggle, that's what I think. [Giggles].*

15 Margot identifies a difficulty experiencing joy fully as a result of not being able to move
16 or act freely during her performance. She also expresses displeasure in having to regulate her
17 behaviour and argues that joy should not be restricted. Margot compares crying as a natural part
18 of sadness to wiggling and movement as natural components of joy. This suggests that
19 movement and freedom are essential to her full experience of being joyful. If there are
20 restrictions or the perception that a childlike and playful nature is not acceptable in the given
21 context, the experience of joy could be hindered. Margot's account also indicates a sense of
22 choice as to whether or not she 'gave in' to joy. The experience of joy, therefore, was the feeling
23 and embodiment of pure positivity and freedom, where the individual embraced the opportunity
24 to exist in the present moment without the need for control.

38 When joy was long lasting, the participants still reported a wilful loss of control however
39 this was not confined to a specific sensory environment. Instead, the participants experienced a
40 sense of going with the flow, and trusting the nature of what happens in their lives. In this way,
41 the desire to move freely was about letting go of the worries or anxieties that limit their
42 experience of being, thus opening themselves up to the opportunities that appear as a result.

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3 *Joy as Interpersonal.* Although joy was meaningful in a very personal way for
4 participants, the presence of others appeared to add an additional layer of meaning. Many
5 of the participants suggested that being in the company of loved ones or interacting with
6 them influenced their experience of joy in a way that either deepened their connection
7 with those individuals or amplified their feeling of joyfulness. As briefly discussed in the
8 analysis of *Wilful Loss of Control*, Margot's inability to interact with her colleagues, due
9 to the pressure to be professional during her performance, restricted her experience of
10 joy. This highlighted the importance that others can have in an individual's experience of
11 being joyful.
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25 In the quote below, Mia explores how the process of sharing a joyful experience with a
26 loved one influenced her feelings for that individual:
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31 *It was nice being there with my brother because me and my brother have grown up*
32 *listening to them [Coldplay] so maybe it was a bond thing between me and him, we are*
33 *not that close but we kind of looked at each other and were like OH MY GOD and I felt*
34 *closer to him then.*
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41 The concert that Mia and her brother attended was of a band they both equally adored.
42 Mia explained that her and her brother did not necessarily have a close relationship. However,
43 sharing a positive experience increased the connection and closeness that she felt towards him.
44 Mia's account demonstrates the impact that shared experiences of being joyful can have on an
45 individual's relationships. Alternatively, in the quotes below, Margot explores how being in the
46 presence of a loved one, intensified her feeling of joy. This uncovers an interconnectedness
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3 between the feeling of joy and relationships with others, as each appears to have a positive
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5 influence on the other.
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8 For Margot, having her boyfriend there with her when she finally got to go to London to
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10 see the musical that she dreamed of seeing for so long was a pivotal part of her experience of
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12 joy:
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16 *I started talking to my boyfriend again, we started comparing our best bits, even though*
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18 *we had the same experience we saw it from a different view so we were talking about that*
19
20 *and he saw things differently to me and we shared it with each other as we were walking*
21
22 *back. I remember it being freezing cold but it was fun though, it was a good end to the*
23
24 *day.*
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28 Through reflecting on the musical with her significant other, Margot identified that she
29
30 could further experience the joy that she felt “*I got all excited again about all the best bits*”.
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32 Being able to talk to a loved one about the object of joy gave Margot the opportunity to explore
33
34 and process her joyful experience. This discussion, as a result, appeared to reinforce the reality
35
36 that her wish to see the musical had come true. Having her loved one with her, therefore,
37
38 heightened her experience of joy because the discussion and interaction made it feel real. The
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40 influence that others appear to have thus indicates that, for the participants, joy was quite often a
41
42 shared, social and interactive experience.
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47 When reflecting on her experiences of joy, Margot recognised the importance of others in
48
49 her ability to feel joyful:
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53 *When I am joyful I feel safe and loved. When you feel happy you are in your safe place*
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55 *with people you love. If you are stranded and lost you are not going to be happy are you?*
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3 *I think you have to be safe to be happy because happiness is so free you have to have the*
4 *safety, you have to feel safe and loved before you can feel happy.*
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8 In the quote above, Margot explains that in order to feel positive, an individual needs to
9 feel safe. One way in which emotional safety is created is through the presence of loved ones
10 along with the feeling that we are supported and cared for. The emotional security that loved
11 ones provide, thus, creates an environment in which an individual can feel free. This freedom of
12 being, in turn enables the pure and wholesome feeling that is joy. In this way, others provide the
13 safety to enable giving in to loss of control and freedom of expression.
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23 **Discussion**

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26 Analysis of the participants' accounts showed that often the experience of feeling joyful
27 was one that included ascription of significant meaning to the object of joy, free movement of
28 the self and interaction with others. Past research has tended to characterise joy as something that
29 is temporary and not striven for (Cottrell, 2016). For the most part, the participants' descriptions
30 of joy were in accordance with the finding that joy is fleeting. However, on some occasions joy
31 was also described as continuous and expanding, thus supporting the previous finding that joy
32 may be experienced in the moment but also for a longer duration (Watkins, Emmons, Greaves &
33 Bell, 2017). Findings from the current study also revealed that when the feeling of joy was short-
34 lived, it was experienced as unintentional. The participants did not necessarily work towards it,
35 thus is happened somewhat randomly. It is important to recognise though that despite the
36 participants not appearing to make any conscious effort towards achieving a goal, there was
37 some sense of intentionally losing themselves in the experience as the participants wilfully
38 celebrated the feeling of joy via clapping, skipping and so on. When the feeling of being joyful
39 was long-lived the participants did appear to have put in some effort to achieving something they
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3 deeply desired. This supports Volf's (2015) proposal that joy is experienced in response to news
4 or an event that indicates the individual's life is, in their view, going well. In both short-lived and
5 long-lived experiences of joy, the participants did not strictly set out to feel a particular emotion.
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7 However, in long-lived experiences of joy there was some degree of the individual trying to
8 achieve a personal goal, but this was not the case when the feeling of joy was short-lived. These
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10 findings further suggest that there is some variation in the duration of feeling joyful, thus
11 uncovering complexity in the experience of this phenomenon, particularly concerning the
12 person's intentions prior to and during the feeling of joy.
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22 Typically, past studies have found that a less intense experience of positivity, which
23 occurs when an individual has accomplished something they have worked towards, has been
24 labelled by research participants as "happiness" (Cottrell, 2016). At first glance, it might seem as
25 though the long-lived experiences of joy provided by the current participants, closely resemble
26 these experiences of "happiness" and that similar experiences are being labelled differently by
27 research participants in different studies. However, by taking a closer look at the present
28 findings, we can see that despite the participants putting in effort to achieve something that they
29 desired, the perceived probability of this happening was low. Thus, similarly to the short-lived
30 experiences of joy, long-lived experiences of joy were also unexpected. This notion of
31 unexpectedness is not something past research has identified in the feeling of happiness, and may
32 be partly what distinguishes experiences of joy. Both long and short-lived experiences of joy
33 were absent of any worry, stress or sadness. These findings suggest that the intense positivity and
34 freedom that participants experienced when joyful may be influenced by the unexpectedness of
35 the feeling. Therefore, the findings support existing research that suggests there is some
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3 distinction between experiences labelled as joyfulness and experiences labelled as happiness
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5 (Sloan, 2011).
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8 In line with Hoffman, Kaneshiro & Compton (2012)'s research, loved ones appeared to
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10 play a crucial role in the feeling of being joyful for the majority of the experiences of joy
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12 explored by the participants in the current study. This contrasts with what Holmes (2015)
13
14 identifies as the typical understanding of emotion as an internally generated phenomenon. Our
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16 findings instead support the viewpoint that emotions are often produced interactively with others
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18 (Burkitt, 2014), in keeping with Baumeister & Leary's (1995) view of humans as fundamentally
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20 social beings. However, this is not to suggest that joy could not be experienced when alone.
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25 **Limitations and Future Research**

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28 The participants within this study were all young people of a similar age. It is important
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30 to recognise that experiences of joy may vary across culture, age, gender identification,
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32 occupation and time, as do other emotional experiences (Parkinson, Fischer & Manstead, 2005).
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34 In consideration of this, it might be valuable for future qualitative research on the experience of
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36 joy to include samples of participants from varying demographic variables. This will help to
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38 further provide a contextualised understanding of feeling joyful, thus, shedding light on what it
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40 means to experience joy.
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45 Phenomenological research does not claim, or indeed seek, generalizability in the sense
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47 used in quantitative research. What it can offer, though, is insights that may shed new light on a
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49 topic that can enrich theoretical thinking for other types of research (Brooks & King, 2017).
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51 Thus the main findings of this study could help quantitative researchers to refine how they
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3 examine the concept of joy – for example, by distinguishing between short and long-term types
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5 of experience.
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8 **Conclusion** 9

10 Movement, a sense of freedom and interaction with loved ones appeared pivotal to the
11 experience of joy for the four participants in this study. The analysis uncovered an
12 interconnection across these aspects of joy. For example, being in the company of loved ones
13 created an environment of emotional safety enabling the feeling of freedom and desire to act
14 playfully. Existing studies have found similar qualities of joy but not necessarily identified their
15 interaction with one another. The present study is original in its detailed examination of the
16 nature of joyful experiences, with a strong focus on how the feeling of joy is related to its object.
17 In so doing, it offers fresh insights that add to our understanding of the phenomenon and provide
18 an impetus for further research.
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31 **Tables**

32 *Table 1. van Manen's Methodological Activities*
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35 1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.
36 2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than conceptualise it.
37 3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon.
38 4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
39 5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.
40 6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.
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Table 2. Participant Details

Pseudonym and Age	Example 1	Example 2
1. Mia (21)	Going to a Coldplay concert with her brother	Changing course at university
2. Frank (21)	Change in perception regarding old age at his grandmother's 80 th birthday party	Achieving bucket list
3. Margot (22)	Seeing the performance "Les Miserables" with her	Taking part in a musical performance

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	partner	
4. Jack (21)	Weekend spent with friends during summer	Holiday with friends

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