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Let there be joy!

Can joy be cultivated as a strength in Aotearoa New Zealand?

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in Social Work

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Abstract

This thesis presents a challenge to social workers, to bring joy to the world.

Through exploring how joy helps in hard times, this research contributes to emerging interest in the field of joy. It provides evidence that joy is a powerful strength that enhances lives, can be cultivated, accessed when required, and shared with positive effect for individuals and communities.

Eight participants in this qualitative research saw joy as the essence of life, strongly associated with purpose. Joy made hard times more tolerable and increased resilience. They made a compelling argument for the power of joy to change lives, and its ability to be attained through choice and practice.

With belief and commitment, the participants had confidence that joy can be experienced by all. Practical suggestions are provided in this thesis of how joy can be nurtured for transformational individual and societal change. Social work is a profession well placed to advocate for, and implement joy as a protective factor, an intervention, and a lifestyle. Joy can alter our experience of the world, shift us from actors to change makers, and counter many of the issues people face in their ecological systems.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Background	1
Aim of the research.....	2
Researcher’s location in topic.....	2
Thesis structure.....	3
Chapter Two: Literature Review	5
Introduction	5
What joy is	6
Joy that helps in hard times.....	7
Joy as a positive emotion	8
Dispositional Joy.....	9
Spiritual Joy	9
Radical Joy.....	11
Virtuous Joy.....	11
Cultivation of Joy for Individuals.....	12
Joy and social work	12
Social work theories and joy	14
How joy can be implemented for individuals	16
Joy and Systems	18
Chapter summary	20
Chapter Three: Methods and Methodology.....	21
Research Design.....	21
Criteria for participation	22
Recruitment	22
Data collection	23
Analysis	25
Ethics.....	26
Limitations:	29

Quality of research.....	30
Credibility	30
Transferability	32
Auditability	32
Confirmability.....	32
Chapter Summary	33
Chapter Four: Findings	34
Participants	34
Joy and Individuals.....	36
Unique experience	36
Enhances mental and physical health.....	39
Confidence	41
Brings a different perspective.....	41
Takes commitment	42
Evolves, changes over time	44
Joy and Connection.....	45
Spirituality	45
Nature	47
Other people	48
Joy and society	49
Current state	49
Contagion	50
Political Impact on joy.....	51
Workplaces	52
Schools	53
Media	54
Future state.....	54
Chapter Summary	55
Chapter Five: Discussion	57
The typology of joy that helped in hard times.....	57
Spirituality and Joy	57
Dispositional Joy.....	59
Radical Joy.....	60

Virtuous Joy.....	61
Joy as a strength in hard times	61
Joy as a strength that can be cultivated	62
Joy for individuals	63
Cultivation of joy for individuals	65
Joy and relationships.....	67
Joy and societal structures.....	70
Structural cultivation of joy.....	71
Chapter Summary	74
Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	76
Research Aim	76
Summary of key findings.....	76
Social workers can facilitate joy cultivation.....	78
Researcher’s reflections on this joy journey.....	79
Let there be joy!.....	81
References	82
Appendices.....	90
Appendix 1: Recruitment Poster.....	90
Appendix 2: Information Sheet.....	91
Appendix 3: Consent Form.....	93
Appendix 4: Interview Guide	95
Appendix 5: Ethics approval.....	97
Appendix 6: Joy Actions for participants	98

List of Tables

Table 1: Hard times experienced by participants35

Table 2: Joy for participants36

Chapter One: Introduction

While the power of joy to transform lives sees emerging global interest in the disciplines of psychology and theology (Johnson, 2020; Yale Centre for Faith and Culture, n.d), this topic has not yet been academically explored from an Aotearoa New Zealand, social work perspective. Beginning with the premise that joy helps, and through exploring participant narratives of how it has helped them through difficulties, this study provides insight and suggestions for how joy can be nurtured as a strength to promote wellbeing, and support transformative, positive engagement in society. This chapter introduces the topic of joy and its relevance for the social work profession. It presents some background on the subject matter, outlines the aims of the research, locates the researcher's positioning on the topic, and concludes with a brief outline of the thesis chapters.

The cultivation of joy is believed to have exciting implications for strengthening human coping abilities (Johnson, 2020), promoting positive mental health (Sturm et al., 2020), increasing active participation in the world, advancing social justice (Dunn et al., 2021), unleashing creativity (Adams, 2020), and power (Greco & Stenner, 2013). Although there is no agreed universal definition of joy, the literature describes different types of joy and often, intentionally, distinguishes joy from happiness (Emmons, 2020; Johnson, 2020).

As the social work profession embraces models and theories from a range of disciplines to work with people and systems to overcome life's challenges, joy's benefits for individuals and the worlds in which they live is of relevance. Understanding joy also benefits social work practitioners, and their practice across fields, as it supports strength-based, social justice, and anti-oppressive practice and can be applied at both micro and macro levels.

Background

The 21st century has seen wellbeing become a global priority with support from influential bodies such as the World Health Organisation and United Nations (United Nations, 2015; World Health Organisation, 2004). While joy has been largely overlooked, a special edition of the *Journal of Positive Psychology* in 2020 advocated for more research to be done on joy as it is essential for human wellbeing and flourishing (Emmons, 2020). Emerging research demonstrates that joy enhances quality of life (Haugen et al., 2020; Watkins et al., 2018), provides strength to address systemic injustice, and inspires remedial actions (Dunn et al., 2021). How joy is experienced in hardship was highlighted as a specific area

requiring more research (Underwood, 2019; Watkins et al., 2018) to support resilience, mental health, and assist in challenging oppressive structures to advocate for equity and inclusion (Dick-Neiderhauser, 2009; Dunn et al., 2021). Most importantly, joy can be learned (Banks, 2018; Cacioppo, 2020). Exploring how joy is obtained, nurtured, experienced and used will be examined in this thesis, contributing to the existing body of knowledge on joy, and joy cultivation.

Aim of the research

The aims of this research were to:

- Understand how joy has helped people through hard times, and explore if it can be nurtured as a strength to promote wellbeing, and support transformative, positive engagement in society.
- Contribute knowledge to the emerging field of joy which academics believe can support and sustain people through difficult times (Johnson 2020), can be cultivated (Cacioppo, 2020; Dick-Neiderhauser, 2009), and should be further researched (Underwood, 2019).
- Demonstrate the relevance of joy for social work and how it can be incorporated into existing social work theories and models of practice.

Researcher's location in topic

Undertaking the topic of joy for my master's thesis allowed me to build on previous work looking more generally at joy, and refine my research to an area I believed would have great benefit for people in all stages of life. The initial catalyst for my interest in joy was concern about the wellbeing of my Nana's and daughter's generations. Both generations have high dependence on institutions. Visits to my Nana in an aged care facility bore witness to loneliness, boredom, and futility for many residents. For my daughter, the transition to college made me acutely aware of the high number of mental health issues our teenagers are experiencing, resulting in cynicism and escapism. In a progressive society, it was concerning to me that we were failing people at important times of their lives; how they leave this world, and how they start their futures. Not to mention in my generation, the number of suicides and people who have so much to offer but appear to have lost hope. As a social worker who transitioned to team leader during the period of this research, I became increasingly aware of the numbers of people who are unhappy in their work and the negative effect this has on those around them.

The COVID-19 pandemic arrived shortly after my initial decision to focus on joy as a topic. This brought global hard times due to fatalities, sickness, lock-downs, financial stress; fear and uncertainty ensued. The relevance and appropriateness of this subject was reflected on frequently throughout my thesis

journey given the emerging context it was being written in as I did not want to minimise the impact of the hard times we were all experiencing. However, given the participants in this research made the decision to volunteer in the midst of the pandemic, this served to strengthen the premise that joy can help in hard times.

I position myself as an outsider in this topic as I do not identify with joy helping me in hard times although my upbringing in a Christian household gave me some understanding of how joy related to the Christian faith. The right for all to have an awareness of, and opportunities to develop joy became increasingly important to me as I learned more about the topic and it seemed logical that I advocate for this given my commitment to social justice and human rights, particularly for those disadvantaged by restrictive systems. Completing this thesis has provided the opportunity to explore how this might be done to achieve wide ranging positive outcomes for our people and communities.

Thesis structure

The structure of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic of joy, its relevance for the social work profession, provides some background on the topic, states the research aim, and the researcher's positioning and motivation for choosing the topic.

Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter considers the literature available on the topic of joy in hard times, and its intersection with social work practice. It discusses what joy is, examines the types of joy that are recognised as helping through difficulties, and considers the relevance of the thesis aim in pursuing the cultivation of joy at individual and system levels.

Chapter Three: Methods and Methodology

This chapter explains the research design, sampling, recruitment and data collection stages of the project. It describes the steps taken in data analysis and discusses the ethics, limitations, and quality indicators of this thesis.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter explores the themes and subthemes that emerged in interviews with participants on their experience of joy. It groups these findings as; joy for individuals, joy and connections, and joy and society.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Bringing together the findings and literature, this chapter critically discusses the types of joy that helps in hard times, further examines joy for individuals, connections, and society, and how joy can be cultivated in line with the research aims.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This chapter presents the findings and recommendations related to joy cultivation, and the social work profession's role in supporting this. It concludes with a reflection on the joy research journey.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The aim of this project is to understand whether joy can be cultivated as a strength for individuals and society through exploring how joy helps in hard times. The study fills an identified gap in the current research on joy (Watkins et al., 2018; Underwood, 2019), aiming to provide knowledge to enhance wellbeing in individuals and societies. As joy is an emerging topic, there was a scarcity of literature on social work and joy when this review was undertaken.

The first section of this chapter gives an overview of what joy is, followed by the types of joy that help in hard times. The next section examines joy for individuals, followed by joy and connections with others. The final section considers joy's relationship with wider systems and structures. The relevance of joy for the social work profession is woven throughout these themes.

The majority of literature reviewed was located in 2021 through searches on Massey University's library database and Google Scholar using the terms "'joy' & 'hard times'", "'joy' & 'social work'", "'hard times' & 'social work nz'". Other materials were found using references from these articles, and previous searches (for other coursework) on the more general topic of joy. References were placed into an Excel spreadsheet and evaluated according to their relevance on how joy helps in hard times, and how joy might be cultivated. Themes which emerged from the literature were placed into another spreadsheet which assisted with identifying patterns in the literature, for example "what joy brings" was used as a heading and listed under it the different items from the literature along with the number of times each was mentioned. Following analysis from the interviews with participants, further searches applicable to themes from the research data were made, and incorporated into this chapter in the final stages of writing.

The literature critiqued in this chapter includes a combination of academic journal articles, research, published theses and books relevant to the topics of joy, hard times and social work along with government documents and statistical material. Literature focussing specially on joy were selected with those that appear to blur joy and happiness being omitted given the vast majority of scholars make a clear distinction between the two. Towards the end of completing this thesis, it was discovered that further relevant research had been published since this review was completed. Time did not permit further review of this more recent literature.

While no results emerged from a literature search using the combined terms 'social work', 'joy' and 'hard times' or 'difficult times', eight international qualitative studies were located on social work and joy which were relevant to the project aims. Five of these were interviews with social workers (Murray, 2015; Pooler et al., a&b., 2014; Smith 2014; Watson & Hoefler, 2016), two with leaders and educators (Harrar, 2020; Mapp & Boutte-Queen, 2021), and the other with clients (AlMakhamreh, 2019).

What joy is

Joy has no universal definition in the literature with this lack of consensus contributing to an absence of systematic research on the topic (Watkins et al., 2018). While it is suggested by Johnson (2020) that there may be no language to articulate joy, Underwood (2019) recommends this barrier be removed by researchers examining the experiences of those who identify as having joy to see what themes emerge rather than focusing on an agreed definition.

A documented challenge when pursuing studies on joy is its relationship with the words 'happiness' and 'wellbeing' which some scholars use interchangeably (Dick-Niederhauser, 2009; Farhud et al 2014; Rinnan et al., 2018), or see them as related emotional states (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Watkins et al. (2018), have suggested that this may offer another explanation for the study of joy being largely overlooked.

Much of the literature makes clear distinctions between joy and happiness (Ackerman, 2020; Watkins et al., 2018), which is important as the study of joy is futile if it is not able to be treated independently (Emmons, 2020). Joy is distinguished from happiness in the literature as something deeper and durable, with more substance (Banks, 2018; Berkeley, 2020; Volf, 2019). On the other hand, happiness is described as transactional (Mathewes, 2020), a by-product of possessions and goods which one habituates to, then requires a constant stream of new stimulants to maintain (Johnson, 2020).

Greco and Stenner (2013), differentiate happiness and joy, linking joy with power, an *"increase in one's powers to affect things, coupled with an increase in one's powers to be affected"* (p. 4). They find joy to be a product of active engagement in the world and contrast happiness as a subjective internal feeling. Their essay talks about a politicised economy driven by happiness and wellbeing narratives and states the *"happiness agenda"* (p. 14) distracts people from addressing oppressive structures and systems by encouraging them instead to take responsibility for their own emotional wellbeing, to manage feelings of pessimism and neuroticism, which are by products of neoliberalism. Similarly, historian Rob Boddice (2020), discusses the *"dangerous politics of the happiness industry"* (p. 133) referencing the work of Nicole Eustace (2020). Eustace (2020), article focusses on the relationship culture and power have with

happiness, providing examples of how property and slave ownership personified happiness in the United States of America (USA) in the 1700's. These criticisms about happiness elevate joy as more desirable, untainted by cynicism or accused of sinister agendas.

On the other hand, Rinnan et al. (2018) found joy and flourishing align well with subjective wellbeing. Their research on the 'joy of life' for people in nursing homes showed the five dimensions of Seligman's wellbeing theory; positive emotions, engagement, positive relations, meaning and accomplishments, to be essential for joy in older people.

Johnson (2020), discusses the possibility of joy cultivation although states no standard stimuli for inducing joy is known to date. Understanding how to cultivate joy for benefit is encouraged in the literature (Emmons, 2020; Johnson, 2020; Underwood, 2019). Studies undertaken by Hagen et al., (2019), and Watkins et al., (2018), show that joy is measurable and it is possible to design interventions to target and develop it in individuals and groups. While the majority of authors reviewed on the topic of joy cultivation believe joy can be nurtured (Dick-Niederhauser, 2009; Johnson, 2020; King, 2020; Watkins et al., 2018), it should be noted that this is not unanimous. Prior to the dawn of the positive psychology movement, Izard, a professor of psychology (1977), wrote that joy cannot be taught or successfully pursued, rather obstacles to joy may be removed. Similarly, Brown (2013) claims many scholars do not believe joy can be obtained by effort, rather, intentionally enhanced. Examples of joy that cannot be learned or deliberately cultivated in the literature include joy resulting from; unexpected findings (Whitaker, 2012); being in the right place at the right time (Murray, 2015); and being blessed (Johnson, 2020). Genetic coding is also significant to the experience of joy and quite separate from wilful practice (Bartels et al., 2010; Dsouza et al., 2020; Rimer, 2011).

As joy has varying meanings and cultural nuances in experience and expression (Johnson, 2020; Shin, 2020), it is critical for the purposes of this research to identify and define in an Aotearoa New Zealand context the type of joy can be cultivated, learnt and multiplied for positive individual and societal outcomes.

Joy that helps in hard times

Understanding more about how to nurture joy opens up the potential to help people experiencing trauma or distress (Underwood, 2019), helps people flourish (Johnson, 2020; Rinnan et al., 2018), and increases resilience to address life's challenges (Johnson, 2020). A definition of hard times is "*a period of difficulties or hardship*" (Collins Dictionary, 2022, online definition) which is subjective and variable. Watkins et al., (2018) found that joyful people were able to experience joy in difficult situations with

recommendations that this be further explored. The hard times featured in this literature review ranged from individual struggles, to community and systematic oppression. While there are many different types of joy referred to in the literature, the types connected with hard times are quite specific; joy as a positive emotion, dispositional joy, spiritual joy, radical joy and virtuous joy.

Joy as a positive emotion

Joy as a positive emotion is a common type of joy associated with hard times (Gorell, 2021; Johnson, 2020). This type of joy may enhance coping, promote positive mental health (AlMakhamreh, 2019) and deter mental illness, bringing healing, relief and balance (Damon, 2003; Dick-Niederhauser, 2009). Frederickson's (2004) Broaden and Build theory, proposes that positive emotions can be cultivated to broaden people's thinking, counter negative feelings and support resilience through building internal resources. This theory suggests that positive emotions create upward spirals supporting emotional wellbeing, countering downward spirals, and facilitate the broadening of thoughts and actions to enhance resilience (Cuncic, 2021; Fredrickson, 2004). This theory links joy closely with creativity and play. When experiencing joy, the playfulness that results would see others engage positively, thereby reinforcing the emotion as positive, building social resources, and broadening thought/action responses (Celestine, 2016). Pooler et al., (2014 b) found joy to be a mutually reinforcing process for social workers with upward spirals from connections with others, making a difference, and gaining a sense of purpose, all of which motivate further connections.

Joy can bring balance for individuals by supporting the recognition of negative emotions, and overcoming negative mental states such as anxiety and depression. It is not unusual for joy to be understood in relation to "*structural opposites*" such as sorrow, depression or *acedia* (apathy, indifference of good) (Johnson, 2020, p. 20). Joy actively counters despair, the belief there is no goodness, no truth and a feeling of being isolated (Gorrell, 2021). Joy is the feeling experienced when goodness, meaning, truth, beauty, and human connection are recognised (Gorrell, 2021; Harrar, 2020; Whitaker, 2013). Joy is described as a modifiable emotion and while not dependent on sorrow, Gorrell (2021) believes only those who have travelled through hardship understand that joy can be restorative, redemptive, sobering and bring healing.

Exceptions exist in the literature where instead of creating positive emotions, joy may in fact cause mental distress. Foreboding joy, for example, is described by Brown (2013) as fear which immediately follows joy through thinking that the object one delights in may be taken away. When discussing

instructions in the bible for believers to be joyful, Stock (2009) ponders the anxiety that joylessness may cause these people.

There is a divide in the academic field of positive emotions on whether these are cognitive processes or reactive responses, which is significant for this project's aim of joy cultivation (Griffiths, 2013). The profile of joy as a cognitive process is supported by; the appraisal involved (Watkins et al., 2018), the complexity of processing, involving desires, beliefs, culture, and sustenance over time (Leys, 2018), and the ability a person has to prepare for joy (Casioppo, 2020). The non-cognitivist viewpoint refers to basic emotions, controlled by the amygdala, operating independently from cognition (Griffiths, 2013) contradicting Gallagher's (1996), findings that the amygdala links cognition and affect. A middle ground proposed by Griffiths (2013), separates basic voluntary emotions, from higher emotions which involve a cognitive process. If joy's different types range between basic and higher emotion categories, this may explain the extreme variances of joy in Johnson (2020), where joy is experienced as ecstatic or serene, temporary or enduring, and uncontrollable or deliberate.

Dispositional Joy

Dispositional Joy is where an individual has a low threshold to experience the emotional aspects of joy, and experiences this frequently across many varied experiences (Johnson, 2020). Watkins et al.'s (2017) USA study on joy's relationship with subjective wellbeing found that people who experience joy in hard times have high affective trait joy. These people experience joy in a range of situations, including times of sorrow and pain. Watkins et al. (2018) results showed dispositional joy to be more important to flourishing than isolated experiences of joy and they developed a dispositional joy scale to measure state and trait joy and recommended more research be devoted to *how* joy is experienced in hard times. Theologian Volf, stresses the importance of cultivating dispositional joy, a joy that can be found in a variety of situations, independent of mood (Banks, 2018). People with intrapsychic resources (character strengths and virtues), which social workers often facilitate access to, are also more likely to experience life satisfaction despite adversity (Dick-Niederhauser, 2009).

Spiritual Joy

Joy's connection with spirituality, faith and/or religion is often associated with hard times in the literature (Bryant, 1982; Damon, 2003; Emmons, 2020; Johnson, 2020). Spiritual joy is described as something given by God to facilitate hope¹, can be accessed in all situations², and provides believers

¹ Romans 15:13

² Philippians 4:4 – 8

with a confidence that even in difficult times, God's ultimate plan is for eternal joy³ (Bible Study Tools, 2020). Gorrell (2021), used the term 'futuristic joy' as surety that the current situation will change and certainty in God that all things will work out for good. The bible also refers to joy as something which follows grief (Psalm 30:5; John 16:22). Smith (2014), describes the spiritual aspect of joy as "*positive orientations of the heart and mind*" (p. 28) that are connected to faith, hope and love. Joy and hope are the product of faithfulness to just and loving convictions according to Bryant (1982), which provide strength in hard times. He provides the example of Jesus enduring the cross for the "*joy that was set before him*" (p. 25). Joy's ability to strengthen and sustain also features in Dunn et al. (2021), who uses joy as a metaphor for the heartbeat of those "*that continue to fight in spite of pain*" (p. 214).

Watkins et al. (2018), suggested that while more understanding of the spiritual dynamic of joy is required, there is clearly a spiritual dimension, often related to purpose and longing. Research on spirituality and positive emotions found that spirituality lends itself towards the experience of more pro-social emotions that linger and "*transcend egoistic interests*" (Tong, 2016, p. 79). De Cruz (2021) pondered on religious joy as a combination of awe and wonder which counteracts complacency and allows one to find aspects of marvel in different environments. This article frequently refers to work by Glucklich (2020, as cited in De Cruz, 2021) which describes joy as a higher form of pleasure that often involves giving up hedonistic pleasure and can be cultivated through mastering the mind. While this may involve sacrifice and pain, it "*helps us to channel pleasure in a way we would not gain without that religious framework...oftentimes best described as novelty/replenishment pleasure*" (De Cruz, 2021, p. 196).

The ancient religions have joy embedded in their practice and writings. Emmons (2020), noted that Christian and Jewish theologians have been studying joy for over 2000 years. In a social work study on older refugees in Jordan, religion was identified as a strength which brought joy. Researcher Al Makhamreh (2019) articulated the importance of religious literacy for social workers as part of cultural competency and understanding the strengths and values of its client base. The Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work Association Code of Ethics (2019) instructs social workers to "*inform ourselves about established cultural practices important to the people with whom we work and engage with these in respectful ways*" (p. 12).

Joy is seen as a natural state in Buddhism (Lama et al., 2016). The Dalai Lama believes that shifting focus from one's own pain and suffering, to a place of compassion for another can reduce pain and that

³ John 16:22, Isaiah 35:10

helping others is said to be the way to “*discover your own joy and to have a happy life...wise selfishness*” (Lama et al., 2016, p. 48).

Despite spirituality being mandated into the New Zealand education curriculum in 1999, an increased focus on spirituality over religion has resulted in a vacuum or emptiness according to a high-profile Youth Court Judge and former Mental Health Commissioner (Spirituality and Wellbeing, 2014). This discussion piece holds the view that the essence of spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand appears to be misunderstood. The significance of spirituality for Māori is recognised in Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1985), and connecting Māori to ancestral beliefs has seen breakthroughs in treating and understanding mental illness (Kopua, 2019). While no studies focusing specifically on joy experienced by Māori could be located, research on themes of happiness found spirituality featuring as a theme which was described as a collective phenomenon (De Thierry, 2012). While joy does not always involve spirituality, Watkins et al. (2017), show it is greatly enhanced by this.

Radical Joy

Radical joy is a movement founded by Trebbe Johnson (Whitaker, 2013) which seeks to bring healing to environments damaged by disasters through acknowledging them, being present, and finding beauty. Dunn et al. (2021), also discussed radical joy in relation to racist educational structures in the USA highlighting how joy potentiates action, which can only be found in pain and oppression bringing a realisation of what is important. Joy as a catalyst for active engagement by individuals in their societies features in Greco et al. (2014), and there is consistency in the literature about the powerful potential joy has to help individuals flourish for their own, and communal benefit (Emmons, 2020; Johnson, 2020; Rinnan et al., 2018).

Virtuous Joy

The virtuous form of joy discussed in King (2020), is characterised by goodness which helps people find purpose in their lives. In this article joy is seen as a virtue which involves prioritisation of what matters most for positive effect. This requires adapting one’s environment to prioritise joy and the individual morals that support this. Living compatibly with self (what matters), ethics (sustaining these) and others (mutually benefiting relationships) are critical areas for virtuous joy (King, 2020).

Virtuous joy is contrasted in the literature with *schadenfreude*, a selfish joy one takes in another’s failure, thought to stem from competitiveness. Johnson (2020), writes that this kind of joy is warned against in biblical verses and can cause hard times to others by creating outgroups and exclusion.

The virtuous nature of social work practice relevant to joy cultivation can be seen in Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (2019), through manaakitanga; acting with respect, compassion and kindness to others, and through the use of maataatoa; acting with moral courage. Virtuous social work practice supports the use of self to pursue good objectives, requiring courage and integrity to serve the people they are working with (Pawer et al., 2017). Alongside this, social workers encourage clients to contribute meaningfully to their communities, focussing on enabling them to develop positive relationships and to access positive developmental opportunities (Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019).

Cultivation of Joy for Individuals

This section explains the relevance joy cultivation has for social workers and clients, and provides some practical steps to support the acquisition of joy for self and others.

Joy and social work

Social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand support clients who are having hard times in areas such as child abuse neglect, troubled teens, parenting issues, mental illness and addiction (Staniforth et al., 2016). Estimates show nearly a quarter of New Zealanders experience poor mental health at some point in their lives (Statistics New Zealand, 2019). At a micro level, social workers work with clients to enhance and empower their wellbeing (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019). At both macro and micro levels, social workers work to address inequities caused by colonisation, discrimination, disability, exploitation and violence (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019). The social work role in hard times, applicable to joy cultivation, is underpinned in the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Work Code of Ethics as a profession which: “*engages people and structures to address life’s challenges and enhance wellbeing*” (International Federation of Social Workers, 2023).

Joy’s potential to help through hard times is also pertinent for individual social workers who may experience their own hard times. The five research papers on joy featuring interviews with social workers were motivated by the desire to bring joy into the profession to help remedy high levels of documented stress and burnout (Murray, 2015; Pooler et al., 2014a & b; Smith, 2014; Watson & Hoefler, 2016). Findings from these studies show the benefits from encouraging joy for social workers would support sustainability of the profession through increased job satisfaction, improved professional relationships, and enhance the ability to embed joy as a strength for clients (Murray, 2015; Pooler et al., a & b 2014; Smith, 2014).

Murray's (2015) research with hospice and palliative care social workers considers how the joy experienced by social workers affects the ability they have to facilitate joy for clients who are experiencing challenges. It raises questions about the ethical care provided by social workers who are impacted significantly by negative work experiences and stress which may put clients at risk, recommending social workers increase their own wellbeing to ensure provision of ethical care. This is consistent with the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) Code of Conduct which states social workers must "*take responsibility for your own emotional, mental, and physical health, and practise appropriate selfcare – seeking help if your performance, practice, or judgement is affected by health concerns*" (Social Workers Registration Board, 2016, p. 12).

Social workers living with joy make positive contributions to client and workplace wellbeing, and the social work profession should prioritise joy in its workforce (Pooler et al., 2014a). Smith (2014), found a link between joy, job satisfaction and staff retention for social workers. Social workers interviewed in Murray's (2015) research found joy to be energising, motivating, bringing balance to an otherwise heavy field of work. The findings demonstrated that joy energises, motivates, brings balance and "*fills you up*" (Murray, 2015, p. 44). Collaborative relationships with colleagues were found to be a source of joy (Murray, 2015; Pooler et al., 2014a & b; Smith, 2014), demonstrating a logical connection between the cultivation of joy and the social work role given relationships are the core of social work practice. Managers also have an impact on joy as social workers with supportive managers (Smith, 2014), quality supervision, and mentoring programmes to stimulate learning (Pooler et al., 2014a), are more likely to find joy in their work environments.

A consistent theme in the social work specific research was that social workers do find joy in their work. These sources of joy included making a difference (Pooler et al., 2014a & b; Smith, 2014; Watson & Hoefler, 2016); giving a voice to disempowered people (Smith, 2014); being engaged in policy discussion and decision making (Smith, 2014); helping clients achieve positive outcomes; working through challenges (Smith, 2014); bearing witness to client fulfilment; and being present in moments of transition (Murray, 2015). The literature evidences that social workers also find joy in being able to help relieve client distress in hard times (Pooler et al., 2014b). Using their skills to serve people who are experiencing hard times is meaningful as social workers also find joy when they recognise the "*deep significance of their work*" (Pooler et al., 2014a, p. 216).

Social work leaders interviewed in research conducted by Mapp & Boutté-Queen (2021), and Watson & Hoefler (2016), found joy in these roles despite challenges. All the administrators (managers)

interviewed by Watson & Hoefler (2016), found joy from knowing they made a difference in people's lives. Mentoring staff and seeing them succeed brought joy, as did finding meaning in their work, advocacy, and giving and receiving recognition. Social work programme directors experienced joy through improving programmes and applying creativity, innovation, and leadership to help achieve their vision. Being able to understand systems to help students and advocate for those marginalised to succeed also brought joy along with collegial relationships and representing the profession in the community (Mapp & Boutté-Queen, 2021).

All the social work research made recommendations for how joy could be increased for social workers, starting with education providers. Finding one's fit or niche (Murray, 2015; Pooler et al., 2014a & b) in social work was identified as critical to experiencing joy. Murray (2015) noted the role social work education could play in supporting the emerging workforce to find the right field of practice. Watson & Hoefler (2016) recommended that programmes heavy with course material on the challenges that exists for social work administrators (managers), be balanced with joy stories to attract graduates to those roles. Murray's (2015) findings recommended narratives of joyful experiences, alongside challenges, being discussed in the classroom. Murray (2015) also suggested a focus on joy in learning stages would normalise the awareness of joy, promote the contagious effect of joy, and potentially allow joy to be cultivated in the formation of new peer and professional relationships. Observations by interviewers in Watson's & Hoefler's (2016) study found joy for both researchers and participants during the process, commenting they could see physical changes in countenance, face lighting up or passion in eyes, when administrators were asked about what brought them joy.

Social work theories and joy

Social work as a profession supports wellbeing, prevention, care and support. Its integrative nature takes a whole of system approach to address individual, whānau, and community needs to deliver positive outcomes, drawing on all available resources to promote strengths to achieve this (Cooper, 2017). Social work historically draws from many other disciplines to support human wellbeing, for example, sociology, psychology, medicine, history, law, philosophy, and economics (Kishan, 2022). For joy cultivation, narrative therapy and strengths-based approach were the most common modalities cited in the literature (Murray, 2015; Pooler et al., 2014a, 2014b; Smith, 2014). This section will also include holistic practice, and touch on emotional theory.

Narrative therapy

Understanding the narratives of joy is essential to identifying joy in individuals and how people can nurture and cultivate this (King, 2020; Murray, 2015). Narrative approaches are often used with clients by social workers and Pooler's (2014 a & b) research on joy with social workers showed that sharing joy stories brought joy not only to the person sharing, but also to those listening. This then sparked more sharing of joy stories and operated in its own upward spiral. The contagious nature of joy is confirmed throughout many of the articles reviewed (Brown, 2013; Johnson, 2020; Murray, 2015; Pooler et al., 2014 a & b).

Strength based practice

Strength based practice is classed as a social work meta theory underpinning many social work theories and interventions (Simmons et al., 2016). It acknowledges that while hard times can be disadvantageous for clients, they also provide an opportunity for growth (Pomeroy & Garcia, 2016). Strengths, refer to aspects of one's life that can be built on to foster resilience and help difficult situations become more manageable (Munford & Sanders, 2007). Strengthening relationships at all levels is foundational for social work practitioners (Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019). Recognition of joy as a strength fits well with the commitment of social work practice to enhance wellbeing and engage people and structures to address life's challenges (International Federation of Social Workers, 2023). Understanding how joy enhances the lives of both clients and practitioners will have a positive and significant effect on wellbeing.

Holistic practice

Holistic practice is fundamental for social workers. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Whare Tapa Whā is a common holistic framework consisting of interconnected pillars to support health and wellbeing, all of which are relevant for joy; Te taha wairua (spiritual), Te taha hinengaro (mental), Te taha tinana (physical) and Te taha whānau (Durie, 1985). The Person In Environment (PIE) classification model also lists factors ranging from environment to health which are useful for social workers to understand when assessing where best to target interventions, such as joy (Drisko & Grady, 2012). Ecological systems theory is relevant to social work's understanding of the impact different relational and environmental aspects have on individuals and is applicable to assessing where joy as a strength might have the most benefits for individuals (Garbarino, 2017). Other holistic theories relevant for building joy are relational theory which emphasises context for understanding people in their environments, and transpersonal theory where social workers and clients aim for inward and outward growth to reach full potential

(Murray, 2015). A whole person and system approach using a bio-psycho-social-spiritual lens was also included in Murray (2015) research responses as important for joy.

How joy can be implemented for individuals

The literature reviewed shows it is possible for individuals to deliberately foster and live with joy. These steps include; a sense of purpose and meaning, cognitive awareness, mindfulness, choice and hard work, along with connections with others.

Purpose and meaning

Many scholars have identified a positive connection between purpose and joy for individuals (Damon, 2003; Dunn et al., 2020; Eiss, 1997; Harrar, 2020; Pooler et al., 2014a & b). Damon (2003) proposed that people are created with unique strengths the world needs, which once recognised, create purpose. The action of using these skills for good, brings fulfilment to their lives, resulting in ultimate joy and satisfaction. As touched on above, assigning meaning is also important to the experience of joy in hard times (Murray, 2015; Pooler et al., 2014 a & b; Rinnan et al., 2018; Watson & Hoefler, 2016), with medical studies finding people with serious health crisis cope better emotionally if they find purpose in their plight (Harrar, 2020). Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Victor Frankl's theory of logotherapy, suggests that humans are motivated by a "*will to meaning*" (Damon, 2003, p. 56). which can be found in any situation to reframe and relieve suffering (Damon, 2003). The growth and transformation that occurs from crisis and suffering is supported in other literature (Murray, 2015), with this being a source of joy due to recognition these will pass, and good things lie ahead (King, 2020).

Cognitive awareness

Cognitive appraisal processes play a part in determining the experience of joy (King, 2020; Watkins et al., 2017). Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a commonly used social work intervention where clients consider positive and negative thoughts. Social workers assist clients to focus on thoughts most beneficial to healthy interactions with their environments (Matthews et al., 2020). As there is evidence to suggest joy can be learned (Emmons, 2020), once a person understands what brings them joy, they can intentionally create joy situations, practice joy, and train so it becomes habitual (King, 2020; Pooler et al., 2014 a & b). CBT therefore may be a tool that could well assist with the cultivation of joy.

Mindfulness

Practices such as gratitude and meditation feature in the literature as ways individuals can achieve joy. Gratitude as a source of joy is recognised by many authors (Emmons, 2020; Johnson, 2020; King 2020). Jack Kornfield, Buddhist psychologist, calls joy a "*moral obligation*", strongly connected with gratitude

and believes “*a little training in compassion, gratitude, generosity...can change a difficult situation in moments*” (Suttie, 2019, para 20). However, Watkins et al. (2017) research on the relationship between gratitude and joy found while the two often operate together in upward spirals, they are distinct in their own right.

Buddhist practices of mindfulness and meditation are linked with joy cultivation (Cassio, 2020). The Dalai Lama (Lama et al., 2016) encourages daily meditation on the eight pillars to enhance joy and the editor of this book writes that in Buddhism “*it seems...the ability to experience joy can also be cultivated as a skill*” (p 48). The practice of yoga, stemming from Hinduism, is also connected with supreme joy with its highest aim being to access our *vishoka*, the joy that is part of our true essence (Cassio, 2020). Other mindful ways for individuals to implement joy include; peace, relaxation (Dick-Niederhauser, 2009), spiritual readings, visualisation (Van der Bogert, 2006) and recognising or finding beauty (Whitaker, 2013).

Being in nature is also noted as a joy enhancer. For example, a study by Sturm et al., (2020), found participants who took ‘awe walks’ in nature had increased joy in comparison with the control group. Getting to the beach to escape the daily drudgery of refugee life was a source of joy for the women involved in Khalili’s (2016) research, and hash tags on a social media study of photographs demonstrated a strong relationship between joy and nature (National University of Singapore, 2020).

Choices and hard work

The literature offers many examples of things that can bring joy and many of these sources can be developed, practiced or controlled, usually involving actions or choices requiring effort and work (Eiss, 1997; Harrar, 2020; Horton, 2017).

The production of hormones which come from positive lifestyle choices are significant to the experience of joy in the literature (Dsouza et al., 2020; Farhud et al., 2014; Murphy, 2018). While estimates of the influence intentional activities have on happiness vary from 15 – 50%, there are correlations with lifestyle choices and wellbeing (Kennon et al., 2019). As an example, there is a growing body of evidence of the role optimism plays in the management and prevention of strokes, diabetes, and heart disease (Rimer, 2011).

Joy as a product of hard work is illustrated in the following examples: a parent’s struggle to get their disabled child to play areas turning to joy upon seeing their delight during play (Horton, 2017); a mother’s joy following labour when meeting her baby for the first time (Chemutai et al., 2020); and the

joy experienced by a community pulling together to revive their town by erecting an enormous statue (Eiss, 1997).

Connections with others

The literature shows that social connections enhance happiness (Diener et al., 2018; World Health Organisation, 2011) with joy being described as a mostly collective phenomenon (Johnson, 2020; Watkins et al., 2018). While the impact of culture on joy, and how it is experienced in collective and non-collective communities is under explored (Johnson, 2020), Shin et al. (2020) comparative study on the wellbeing of USA and South Korean populations found that independent cultures appear to place more importance on individual subjective wellbeing.

Joy and Systems

Progressing joy in systems fits well with national and global aims for positive mental health. In 2004 the World Health Organisation recognised that positive mental health could combat mental illness and encouraged global prioritisation of this (World Health Organisation, 2004). The New Zealand government's "Wellbeing Budget" in 2019 listed mental wellbeing as one of its five priority areas (Treasury, 2019), with recommendations, following an inquiry into mental health and addiction, that a social wellbeing agency be established to focus on prevention of mental illness (New Zealand Government, 2019). The financial burden of mental health service users in the USA saw development of a pilot programme titled "reclaiming joy" where mental health consumers were paired with volunteers to support them in achieving goals to improve mental health and wellbeing. This saw positive results for a reduction in depression, and improved quality of life (Chapin et al., 2013). There are systemic opportunities for joy implementation as a strategy to reduce mental illness given most New Zealanders interact with systems of some kind that are Government regulated. For example, 96.8% children attend early childhood centres (Ministry of Education, 2022), 71.7% of New Zealanders participate in the labour force (Statistics New Zealand 2023), 47% of those over 65 use Residential Aged care, which increases to two thirds for those aged over 85 (Broad et al., 2015).

Joy is a collective force that can motivate and support systemic change, along with addressing social injustice and oppressive systemic abuse (Dunn, 2021; Greco & Stenner, 2014). As social work's dual focus is *"to enable and empower people to find their own solutions to issues and problems, and to ... engage in action to change the structures that create and perpetuate injustice"* (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019, p. 7), this aspect of joy is very relevant to the social work profession. Johnson (2020) states that *"properly situated joy leads people to stand up to injustice as*

vision of better world encourages us to work to inaugurate it in the present” (p. 20). A focus on joy in systems should increase joy in that system, and have flow on benefits for social work clients (Pooler et al., 2014a).

Smith's (2014) thesis on what brings social workers joy in their work discussed the conflicting moral distress that social workers experienced from neoliberal policies, including the contracting of services to organisations whose values and beliefs may not align with government priorities. Neoliberalism has seen many social workers in Canada aligning with anti-oppressive practice values to fight injustices caused by power imbalances in society (Smith, 2014). Greco and Stenner (2013), along with other authors (Smith, 2014; King, 2020), position joy and happiness as political opposites. Joy is thought to be an antidote to hatred and a corrective agent for the selfish ambition of individual happiness pursuits (Johnson, 2020). Happiness is associated with neo-liberal, individualist, and controlling government agendas (Greco & Stenner, 2013; Hurmanci, 2017) whereas joy brings freedom, vision, and motivates collective action to promote positive political change (Bryant, 1982; Dunn et al., 2021; Greco & Stenner, 2013).

In 2021, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, radical joy was the topic of an article by Dunn et al. (2021) calling for abolition of oppressive education structures. Joy was described by Dunn et al. (2021) as motivating and creative, the *“sustaining life force of BBPOC [Black, Brown, Indigenous People of Colour] communities that continue to fight in spite of pain”* (p. 214), and explains the type of joy that sparks this action is only known by those who have experienced the most pain which makes *“a way out of no way”* (p. 213), and provides *“internal clarity”* (p. 214). The terms ‘black joy’ and ‘radical joy’ were used to describe the kind of joy that challenges and offers solutions for exploitation, exclusion, discrimination and injustice. Bryant’s (1982) church sermon addressing feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness to make a difference in the world echoes similar themes. It protested the curbing of minority human and civil rights and outlined the duty of the church to not be complicit or stand by in recession but take action to counter feelings of disenchantment. He encouraged the congregation to become *“alert and disturbed”* (p. 26) to understand the failings of the system, and to role model unified grass roots action for political change. Bryant (1982), Greco and Stenner (2013), and Dunn et al. (2021), all believe joy mobilises action in groups of people when hard times become intolerable.

Khalili’s (2016) research with female Palestinian refugees in Beirut found suppression of joy in the East to be a form of resistance against the hedonistic, consumer driven and market-controlled West. She observed the acceptance of suffering in Palestinian society as status quo and advocated for places

where joy could be found to liberate or suspend the realities and suffering of life as an invisible woman. She followed the occasional outings these women took to escape the drudgery of everyday life and how these acts of resistance brought joy to them. The places these women go to find joy are similar to the recommendations (in the context of schools) in Dunn et al. (2021), *“tearing down the pre-existing conditions that inundate the collective ... sites where joy is the norm”* (p. 214).

Group work and community development are common fields of social work practice. The literature provides examples of group work in a community bringing unity, great success, and economic recovery for their town (Eiss, 1997; Johnson, 2020). While much community group work is targeted towards addressing community concerns, group work should also empower members as they encounter changing situations and hard times, and provide opportunities to enhance wellbeing (Gutiérrez et al., 2017).

Chapter summary

The literature reviewed provides many examples of how joy helps in hard times, and supports wellbeing and positive engagement in society. Understanding this benefits the social work profession and clients alike, and fits well with many social work theories and models. The different types of joy that are aligned with hard times can mostly be nurtured; firstly, by understanding the benefits joy brings, and then through deliberate action involving choices, spiritual practices and collective will. The following chapter outlines the methods and methodology used to develop this research which will contribute to existing literature on the topic of joy. The research design addresses a recognised gap in the existing research, the aim being that understanding how joy helps in hard times, will contribute to evidence based knowledge of how joy can be cultivated to help in all times.

Chapter Three: Methods and Methodology

A qualitative exploratory approach using semi structured interviews was employed to achieve the aim of exploring how joy has helped participants in hard times, and whether it is possible to nurture this as a strength. This chapter outlines the methods and methodology of the research, examines limitations of the research, and considers ethical issues.

Research Design

Given the scarce attention joy has received in academic research to date, it was decided an exploratory approach, within a qualitative research design would best achieve the research aims. Qualitative research is most commonly used for in-depth explorations of how participants make sense of their circumstances in relation to the phenomena being studied (Lewis et al., 2014). At its simplest, qualitative research is an exploratory method that seeks to investigate social events without expectations (Engl, 2005). Understanding the experience and contexts of people with joy, should facilitate a deeper understanding of what can predict joy and what joy can bring (Underwood, 2020). An interpretivist, constructivist paradigm which seeks to understand individual experiences of joy, and identify patterns in these experiences, is also suitable for this research and fits well with qualitative methodology (Broom & Willis, 2007).

The premises this research rests on are; joy can help; that people benefit from strategies that can help in hard times; and if joy can be cultivated, it will be positive for individuals and society. Watson (2005), advocates for research where human flourishing is the purpose, ethically driven by moral principles, and assisting people to make practical choices in situations. Collaborating with participants as experts in their experiences of joy also fits well with the research paradigm of critical theory (Leitz & Zayas, 2010) where participants identify what is wrong with their current social reality, identify how it could be changed, and provide practical steps for transformation (Nickerson, 2022).

Two dominant ontological positions in social science are realism and idealism (Lewis et al., 2014). The research undertaken has aspects of realism, in that joy is a real concept, feeling and experience which exists, and can be obtained. However, given joy's manifest experience differs between individuals and groups, and can be enhanced, or limited by subjective ideals or social constructs, this also characterises the idealism viewpoint. There is a middle ground between the two. After much reflection on both the ontology and epistemology informing the research, and seeking to find a documented approach that best aligned, critical realism was chosen as the theoretical framework. This theory highlights that mental

states, although not directly observable, are part of our world; causality is an explanatory concept; and that rather than multiple realities there are multiple perspectives (Maxwell, 2011).

Criteria for participation

This research used purposive sampling methodology where the researcher identified and located participants who had experienced the phenomenon that was being explored (Palinkas et al., 2015). The premise that joy helps in hard times was translated into a basic word-art logo “How Joy Helps”, which was used in the recruitment phases (see Appendices 1, 2, 3).

Unlike quantitative research methods, qualitative research samples do not usually seek to represent the population, and may elect to use purposive or theoretical sampling to assist with a data pool that contains perspectives associated with the phenomenon being studied (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). In this research both inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to meet the theoretical and ethical needs of the study, and to ensure safety of the participants. To be eligible to participate, interested persons must have had joy help them through a hard time. Persons under 16 were excluded, as were people currently experiencing any distress, crisis, or engaging in treatment because of the hard time they were sharing or any other event. Additionally, they had to have completed, or have been discharged from any therapy or treatment at least 12 months prior to participation. This was an ethically considered exclusion criteria to minimise the risk of discomfort for participants.

Recruitment

A multi-pronged approach to recruitment of participants was taken. A poster was designed with brief information about the project (Appendix 1), with a request for interested parties to email the researcher. Those who registered interest were sent an information sheet with details about the project, including the eligibility criteria for them to consider (Appendix 2). I had also received a university grant to gift participants a movie voucher as a token of appreciation for their participation which was mentioned in the information sheet (Appendix 2).

I approached local supermarkets, libraries and community centres who all consented for the poster to be displayed on their community notice boards. To increase the number of prospective participants, random local spiritual organisations were also approached to display the poster. This was a carefully considered decision to overcome a documented barrier to the study of joy being the scarce number of people identifying as joyful (Johnson, 2020). As joy in the literature was frequently associated with faith and spirituality, it was hoped this approach would increase the number of eligible respondents (Watkins et al., 2018). Due to time constraints, not all spiritual groups could be approached. To ensure neutrality,

selection of organisations approached involved a randomly selected number between one and ten as the starting point for sampling in the Churches and Religious organisations section of the local yellow pages (there was no spiritual section). Every tenth organisation following that was selected with a total of 16 groups ranging from Bahai, Buddhist, Christadelphian, Christian, Hindi and Jewish faiths, along with yoga classes and religious reading rooms. Due to the limited opening hours of some of these places, visiting in person was not logistically possible. A phone call about the research was initially attempted to request they display the poster. Only half of the selected organisations were able to be reached by phone. Emails were sent to those unsuccessful contacts that had email addresses listed on websites, but no responses were received to these. Of the eight contact was made with, five were happy to be given a poster to display.

As there were no direct responses to the poster advertising, it was agreed with supervisors to extend recruitment through use of personal networks and social media, and include regional and national participants. Friends, colleagues, and family were asked to distribute the poster which was also placed on my work notice board. A request for any parties who might be interested in my research was also posted on my university alumni website. A further 15 faith groups from the local yellow pages were also approached, employing the same selection method above with a different starting point. Again, only half could be contacted, all of whom were happy for me to email the poster for display.

Interested parties eventually comprised, two people from faith organisations who I had spoken with on the phone when making my initial poster display request. The use of social media and personal networks resulted in a further eight responses.

Prior to confirming participation in the research, the ten people who responded were sent an information sheet explaining the study in more depth, and outlining the inclusion and exclusion criteria. One person was not eligible as they lived overseas, another I did not hear back from.

The final sample consisted of eight participants who met the criteria. While demographic data was not deliberately collected from the participants, there was diversity of ethnicity (including collective and non-collective cultures), spiritual beliefs, gender, and age groups in the final sample.

Data collection

Seven interviews were conducted face-to-face, and one was conducted over the phone due to this person living out of the local area. The face-to-face interviews required a venue that provided a private space for audio recording, and could accommodate the social distancing requirements the COVID-19

pandemic required at that time. This was negotiated with participants and included use of a local community centre, a family member's home, participant's homes, and a participant's workplace.

I began the interview by introducing myself, giving a brief overview of the research including the qualification I was working toward, and the aims of the project. Roles were established; them as expert, me as student researcher with express interest to learn from their experience of joy in hard times. Their comfort and establishing rapport was a priority from the outset to create a setting where the "sayable" was made possible (Watson, 2005).

The consent form was explained and signed before commencing (Appendix 3). From there I made my way through a list of open-ended questions carefully composed from identified themes in the literature. Campbell et al. (2017) recommends piloting questions and seeking feedback to ensure the interview flows well and to examine effectiveness of questions and the order in which they are asked. For this research I had trialled the interview schedule with close friends to ensure it would flow and achieve the research aim (Appendix 4). Data was recorded using a Dictaphone, with cell phone recording as a backup. Probing was used at times with participants to expand further on aspects and clarify responses provided (Lewis et al., 2014).

Participants were eased into the question about their hard time with careful attention being paid to any discomfort or distress in this section. Lewis et al. (2014) discusses the need for the interviewer to ask sensitive questions in a matter-of-fact way, and avoid assuming what questions may be difficult for participants to respond to. Social work skills were employed during the interview to clarify, show empathy, and reflect understanding (Campbell et al., 2017). Active listening and keeping the research aim in mind, was a constant priority for me during the interview as participants at times needed to be carefully steered back on topic. The use of active reflection was also employed to maintain neutrality, particularly at times when participant responses confirmed literature review findings, shared experiences similar to my own, or contributed new ideas. An hour was allowed for the interview with four taking approximately 40 minutes, two being close to one hour, and two going overtime by 20 - 30 minutes. One interview was split across two sessions due to time constraints.

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and sent to participants by email to check and edit as required. A transcript release form was then received from all participants giving permission for use of the transcript in reports and publications arising from the research.

Analysis

A thematic approach was taken to data analysis which is a flexible research tool (Braun & Clark, 2006). It was decided to provide the reader with a realist, rich account of the entire data set providing an overview of dominant and important themes, rather than go in-depth with one aspect (Braun & Clark 2006). An essentialist, realist approach provides a simple relationship between meaning, experience and language. This results in an analysis of the entire data set, taking a surface level descriptive meaning of participants responses rather than looking beyond for deeper interpretations. This is known as a semantic approach which is useful when investigating an under researched area (Braun & Clark, 2006).

The first five steps of data analysis using Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis are listed below. As stage six refers to production of the report, this is not included here as relates to the following findings chapter, and other means of dissemination:

1) Data Familiarisation

Each transcript was typed up by myself, which involved replaying recordings at times to accurately capture participants statements. Once data was member checked and authenticated by participants', transcripts were read through twice prior to the initial coding of data. Ideas about coding were noted during this initial phase.

2) Generating initial codes

The entire data set was coded manually using numbered post it notes that matched sentences or ideas generated in the data. Each transcript was assigned an identifying letter, and the codes within each numbered (for example, A1, E56). Some excerpts were coded twice if they related to different concepts. There was a range of codes identified in the individual transcripts, with a minimum of 49 to maximum of 157. Coding was determined by the ideas generated by participants in relation to joy, and the patterns that were emerging. This stage was time consuming and supervisors advised half way through to start looking for themes and consider coding directly into these.

3) Searching for themes

At this stage mind maps on large paper were used to organise codes into themes and sub-themes. This involved searching through the codes to find repeated patterns of meaning. Some codes logically grouped together within themes, while others which sat outside were noted. I was conscious throughout this process of the role I had in the research design, and that knowledge from

literature along with my aims, had potential to bias the grouping of the data. I was aware that the researcher through choosing the questions, and interpreting the results, cannot be a neutral bystander (Broom 2007). This was countered by rigorous reflection using diary entries and supervision. This stage also took considerable time.

4) Reviewing themes

Themes were reviewed to ensure they made sense and reflected the data set; this was done with care, actively avoiding using the interview questions and aims to frame the themes. There were also many codes which overlapped into other sub-themes. Part of this stage involved re-reading the transcripts and checking that no codes or themes had been overlooked. Several conversations were had with supervisors at this stage to assist with progress and not get stuck re-working and re-organising the data unnecessarily for little overall value.

5) Defining and naming themes

This stage informed the writing of the findings chapter with themes with sub-themes being refined and named. Linking these back to the research objectives was an important part of this stage to ensure that the findings, and following analysis, met the project's objectives.

Ethics

As this research engages human participants, compliance with the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching, and Evaluations involving Human Participants (Massey University, 2017) was required to protect participants, the researcher, and the University. Ethics approval was granted by Massey University, Human Ethics Committee, Southern B prior to recruitment (Application 21/42 see Appendix 5).

The principle of special relationships, where the research may be affected due to different treatment between people the researcher knows, and strangers (Massey University, 2017) was considered carefully. As I have lived in the locality for a long-time, use of an alias email address howjoyhelp@massey.ac.nz was created for the poster, to avoid a situation where potential participants might have registered, or not registered interest because they knew me. This became more challenging to manage when using personal networks. It was agreed with my supervisors that people the researcher was closely associated with, or had regular interaction with, would not be not eligible and the recruitment did not proceed with two interested parties due to this. The impact of the hard time shared by a participant with whom the researcher has a special relationship may have an ongoing effect

on the relationship outside of the researcher/participant roles due to vulnerability required. Four responses from personal networks were people known to the researcher, however as they were not close friends, associates or people the researcher had regular contact with, no conflict of interest was declared.

Another ethical consideration was autonomy, where the research allows people to make choices to participate based on their own beliefs, or deprives people of the opportunity to participate (Massey University, 2017). Through specifically approaching spiritual organisations, there was the risk they may have felt pressured to participate. Wary responses were received from a couple of the minority faith organisations approached in the recruitment stage. It became concerning that personally approaching groups may have led them to feel singled out and targeted for the research. This was managed by explaining to them the rationale behind the approach, the random sample method taken, and reassurance there was no expectation or judgement in regards to their choice whether or not to display the poster.

As the research question, methodology, and ethics approval were in place prior to recruitment, a group who wanted to participate, stating they had great insight into joy, were ineligible due to the inclusion criteria of having had a hard time which they said they did not experience due to joy preventing these. It was not possible to resubmit to the ethics committee due to time constraints and to engage properly with these groups would require the research criteria to be amended. This will inform future research in regard to flexibility of method, and consultation in the proposal stage with prospective participants to understand what is useful to achieve research aims and design research accordingly, prior to ethics submission. Discrimination in recruitment is unjust and while this must be balanced with inclusion/exclusion criteria, this was an unforeseen dilemma which could have been resolved through inclusion of a focus group specifically looking at how joy prevents hard times which in hindsight would not have impacted on the overall aims, rather have added richness to the project through a different lens.

The criteria that joy must have helped participants through hardship required them sharing their hard time story which may have caused discomfort. When considering the ethical principle of avoidance of harm (Massey University, 2017) there was the possibility that talking about their hard time may cause them, or others involved in their story, psychological harm, reputational harm and/or relational harm. To help minimise these risks, I included the criteria that participants must not have been currently engaging in any treatment (including therapy) because of the hard time they shared, or currently be

experiencing any distress or crisis. Additionally, they must not have been receiving treatment for this hard time or any other event and will have completed or been discharged from any therapy at least 12 months prior to participation. A list of resources was provided to participants following the interview of places they could receive support from if they required this.

The hard times scenario that the participant shared may have resulted from participation in a group, organisation, community, or institution. It was thought unlikely that these groups would be at risk of harm but to minimise any potential for this, all identifiable third parties (people, places, geographical locations) were anonymised in this thesis, and will be in any other future publications. Also given this was a small piece of qualitative research, the findings relate to the participants' experiences and do not reflect the views of other people.

The purpose of this research was made transparent and explained during the recruitment, information sharing, and interview stages. Participation was voluntary and written informed consent was obtained prior to commencing the interview, and throughout the whole process. Before the interview, as part of the consent process, the researcher confirmed the participant understood the potential for discomfort and were happy to proceed. The participant was advised that the interview could be stopped any time they wished, that they could withdraw at any stage and if they chose to do this, their data would be destroyed. No participants chose to stop the interview or withdraw from the research. As the overall focus was on the positive aspects of joy, the interview was steered back to this goal when required. In the final report, participants were anonymised.

When analysing the data, I was cognisant of the fact that these were individual narratives and qualitative research cannot speak on behalf of any group with any accuracy. In the final report, any significant findings relating to demographics, were considered with my supervisors as to how relevant these were, and how to frame these in a way to avoid implying statistical representation of one group.

Ethical considerations also included the positive aspect of looking at benefits that may come from the research (Massey University, 2017). For this project, there are many. Creating space for participants to reflect on joy, and be consciously aware of how they experience joy, may have assisted them in recognising and creating further opportunities for joy in their lives. The primary aim of this research was to benefit society as a whole by understanding how joy can improve wellbeing. The research also addresses an identified gap in the developing field of joy that is starting to draw the attention of academics due to its potential power to support human flourishing and engagement in society. The

benefits of understanding how joy can help people will be significant for any individual, group, or organisation that wishes to promote positive mental health and wellbeing. This work has the capacity to support the prevention of mental illness alongside enhancing quality of life, and will complement existing social work theories and models of practice

Limitations:

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way citizens in Aotearoa New Zealand shop and access public places. During the recruitment phase, my region had just moved out of a snap lockdown in wake of the delta variant into alert level 2, and later into the orange setting of a new traffic light system (Ardern, 2021). The use of posters placed on public notice boards did not register any interest, likely due to increased online shopping, use of nominated shoppers, restricted numbers of people in supermarkets and places of worship, along with social distancing requirements preventing shoppers and congregations from taking time to view notice boards that are often placed by doors, or in hallways.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also adversely affected mental health with depression and anxiety exceeding norms in New Zealand (Gasteiger et al., 2021). The Ministry of Health and mental health support services developed substantial resources targeted at supporting people through the impact of the pandemic and normalised feelings of depression or anxiety (Depression.org, 2022). In a climate of much adjustment, people who may otherwise have participated may have had their mental health adversely affected, or their capacity to participate in non-essential work to be reduced. Self-reported joy levels were likely impacted by a global hard time. Prospective participants may have also been deterred from sharing about other hard times where joy had helped them if they were experiencing the many financial, health and work challenges the population was facing in that era. Having said this, the resilience of those who did register interest added another layer of validation for their identification of joy helping them through hard times.

Another limitation for this study is the criteria which excluded people undergoing treatment for mental health currently or in the past 12 months. The experience of joy for those experiencing clinical depression, or other mental illness was therefore not able to be considered. While this study seeks to understand joy as a strength, it was not possible to explore if joy is realistic during acute or chronic mental health struggles. Three of the participants did share about their own mental health challenges and the motivation this had for them to find joy. Joy as a way of preventing and overcoming mental illness became a major factor in their commitment to maintaining joy and understanding its importance.

People experiencing mental illness over the past 12 months who had accessed joy in hard times would have provided helpful insight for the project aims, although avoidance of harm was prioritised over this.

While qualitative research seeks to provide a rich understanding of data rather than generalise findings, a possible limitation to this study is the high proportion of Christian participants. Poor generalisation is where results can only be applied to a certain population (Koshnitsky, 2021). The higher Christian participant response rate may suggest that Christians in Aotearoa New Zealand are more open or comfortable in talking about joy, or more familiar with the concept of accessing joy in hard times, however Christian participants felt the joy they experienced could be found by all and was not limited to faith. It must be noted that some of these participants made it clear during the interview that their priority was to share how God was the source of their joy which motivated them to participate in study.

In the Aotearoa New Zealand context of this research, several highly publicised issues facing the population were not raised in this study. None of the participants revealed any addictions, although alcohol was raised with mixed views. Drugs were not mentioned other than in a general sense as a negative thing by one participant. Sexual abuse was disclosed by one participant but not as her identified hard time so was not asked to expand on this in relation to joy, although it was present in her narrative on joy and pathway to finding it. Interactions with criminal justice services also did not feature. While homelessness and redundancy were named hard times in some interviews, participants were not asked specific questions about wealth and possessions, rather this information was volunteered when explaining what joy was for them, or how joy is valued in society. Some participants mentioned debt and made suggestions about alternate life styles. A further question about the impact their hard time had on them and those close to them would have enhanced the study.

Quality of research

A criticism of qualitative research is the lack of consistency with how themes are developed from the data (Norwell et al., 2017), and how to achieve trustworthiness (Lietz & Zayas, 2010) to ensure participants perspectives are gathered and presented as genuinely as possible. Four ways to achieve trustworthiness; credibility, transferability, auditability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited in Lietz & Zayas, 2010), will be discussed below:

Credibility

Credibility of research is achieved when readers can align the researcher's presentation of a topic with the participants views (Nowell et al., 2017). This was managed through reflective practice and member checking. As a registered social worker, I was acutely aware of self, role, and any assumptions

underlying the topic (Ferguson 2018). Self-awareness and emotional intelligence enable social workers to reflect in action on their own thoughts and feelings and actions to ensure self is managed, and enhance ethical and skilled practice with clients, and their representation of them (Ferguson, 2018). Cooper (2017) describes personal countertransference as what the worker might be projecting from their own perception of a situation which can be managed through knowing oneself well enough to understand and separate the influence of others on us, and us on them.

In this project, while I could relate to some elements of the context, experience, and beliefs shared by participants, the primary focus was joy in hard times which I have not experienced. Consideration was given to the difficulties with outsider research, with Watson (2005), listing three criticisms; that a researcher speaking for another is disempowering; outsiders do not understand the communities they research; and the relationship between the two is exploitative. The first was managed through research design as the research was exploratory and did not assume to speak on behalf of any group or community, and participants had the opportunity to member check and correct transcripts. The findings will be shared with participants as the intent was to use this knowledge to enhance and empower others. I emphasised to participants their importance as experts with the researcher's role as dutifully recording, analysing and presenting. The second criticism is not relevant as the joy in hard times experience differs for each participant and is not a homogeneous experience. The third criticism of exploitation became obvious in the recruitment phase. Several groups approached did not get back to me, two others did not wish to participate, another was keen to share their experiences but did not meet the inclusion criteria. This was challenging as the methodology was set in advance of recruitment with ethics approval already granted and no time to amend.

The potential for selective observation, where things in line with preferences or beliefs of the researcher are selected with outcomes being influenced by a pre-dispositional bias (Engl & Shutt, 2005) was assessed and considered low risk. While I am aware some faith groups promote joy as desirable for their members, and have some familiarity with biblical scriptures on the topic, I did not know how joy in hard times occurs, or have any preconceived idea about this.

I regularly positioned myself in regard to my own beliefs, experiences, and those of participants. While at times some similarities and differences were identified, these were managed as I was able to recognise them using active reflection. For example, one section of a participant's hard time story was similar to a close family member's. This was managed through self-reflexivity, which allowed adjustment through intentional thoughts and focus on the participant's narrative with knowledge that their

experience and understanding was unique and not to be confused with mine. Following interviews, time was made to reflect and journal (Nowell et al., 2017). This involved noting any similar experiences I may have had, acknowledging these, and separating them from the “experts” account through highlighting the many differences in historical, cultural and social contexts.

Transferability

Transferability relates to the usefulness of findings for theory, practice and future research, and how applicable it might be for other settings. This involves the use of ‘thick descriptions’, where the context of the research is made clear to enable others wishing to use findings to determine if the data is transferable and appropriate for their purposes (Nowell et al., 2017).

Being clear about how joy helps in hard times may help cultivate joy and resilience across populations, or inform others who may wish to utilise the findings for further research. The discussion chapter shows how the literature compares to the data collected which will aid those wishing to evaluate the usefulness of this research for future projects.

Auditability

An audit trail is recommended to evidence the rationale for research decisions allowing another researcher to follow the research design and come up with similar conclusions (Norwell et al., 2017). Auditability was achieved with supervision minutes, transcription, and journaling. At times peer debriefing was utilised to ensure I was not getting overly involved in the detail of the data and losing focus. Unfortunately, this approach was not overly helpful due to peers being unfamiliar with the topic, or having perspectives or opinions that were not consistent with findings or literature.

Confirmability

Confirmability is about others being able to confirm the findings. Member checking through transcript validation was used in this study and this chapter has outlined the decision making in this process, the logic behind the research approach, and the rationale about choices made.

Negative case analysis, where contrasting or diverse opinions are sought (Leitz & Zayas, 2010) was not possible due to limited number of responses in the recruitment phase which was unfortunate. I had hoped to diversify the sample to include different hard times, ethnicities and faith bases, all of which would support the richness of the data (Lewis et al., 2014). Diversity of experience is also significant to the experience of joy in hard times from the literature (Casioppo, 2020; Johnson, 2020). The discussion

chapter compares where possible, differences from literature on the topic, with research findings to support this.

Chapter Summary

The methods and methodology used to conduct this research were the focus of this chapter which outlined the research design, the sampling, recruitment, and interviewing processes. It then listed the steps involved in the thematic data analysis, and explored considerations taken to ensure the integrity of the research findings. Ethical principles in research involving people were discussed, along with limitations to this study. Throughout this chapter, the researcher's positioning as social worker, researcher, and outsider was reflected on. The next chapter explores the themes and subthemes that were revealed in findings from the participants' joy stories.

Chapter Four: Findings

This research focused on exploring if joy can be nurtured as a strength to promote wellbeing, and support transformative, positive engagement in society. It sought to understand whether the joy that helps people through hard times, is transferrable to helping people in all times. The participants were generous in sharing their stories, and their narratives provided rich data to support the project aim. This chapter begins with an introduction to the participants, followed by a discussion of the themes and subthemes that emerged in the interviews. Sources of joy for participants along with the various actions they took to facilitate joy will be woven throughout this chapter.

Participants

The eight participants met the criteria of joy having helped in hard times, and none had been a recipient of mental health treatment any time in the past 12 months. Some of the hard times experienced by the participants involved specific events, while others were ongoing (see Table 1). While the interview intended to focus on a specific hard time, some of the participants shared about other hard times and how joy had featured in these. Pseudonyms have been used to protect participants' identities.

Although demographics were not deliberately sought, many participants shared information about their gender, culture, career and faith during the interview process. The participants included one male, one non-binary, and six females. Bridget and Cynthia immigrated from the Philippines, Dev identified as Fijian-Indian, and Eloise as Swiss. Heather shared about her English, Scottish and Irish heritage, the other participants did not mention ethnicity or culture. All had children. All but one held tertiary qualifications, which included law, teaching, real estate, social work, and nursing. Half of the participants were currently employed in different areas of the health sector: aged care, mental health, and inpatient hospital care. Five made frequent references to their Christian faith. Gwyneth spoke of the importance of spirituality, referring to a 'divine presence' and a 'creative spark' within us, which was described as a shared energy and spirit. Ash identified as pagan and referred to the 'flow of the universe' and the 'miracle of life'. Dev described his wider family culture as a combined mix of Indian practices with Christian beliefs, but neither of these belief systems were mentioned again in his interview. While there was some diversity in the group as well as similarities, this research explains the participants' individual joy narratives and findings do not represent any particular group or demographic.

Table 1: Hard times experienced by participants

Participant	Hard time
Ash	Chronic illness, death of Father
Bridget	Son's ASD diagnosis/impact of illness
Cynthia	House fire in late teens destroyed belongings/property, temporary move to "chicken shack" in Philippines.
Dev	Marriage separation
Eloise	Move to new country in middle of COVID-19 pandemic/Isolation
Faye	Mother's mental illness/stigma at work due to this
Gwyneth	Losing most of her belongings in tent fire
Heather	Husband's redundancy, Mother's death

Most participants were motivated to take part in this research because of their desire to promote joy as a life-altering phenomenon which was a source of strength for them. Other reasons for participation included support for research that interviewed people rather than collecting data from secondary sources, and one participant was keen to develop more understanding of joy to complement their own work.

Participants were unanimous in their belief that joy can be accessed by anybody. They shared the benefits it has had for them as individuals, how it enhances connections, and its benefits for society. When sharing how joy helped them through hard times, clear themes were revealed.

- The experience of joy was unique to individuals.
- Joy supported mental and physical health for participants
- Joy brings confidence
- Joy brings perspective
- Joy requires commitment and practice to maintain it
- Joy changes over the years, with different ages and stages in life affecting what brings joy, and how it is prioritised.
- Joy is connected with other beliefs, qualities and emotions
- Nature and joy are closely linked
- Joy enhances relationships
- Systems and institutions can create opportunities for joy

These themes have been broadly grouped into: joy and individuals; joy and connections; and joy and society.

Joy and Individuals

On an individual level, joy was a strength for participants. It was highly valued and none of them wanted to live without joy. This section will consider the different ways participants experienced joy, how it supported their mental and physical health, and how joy brought confidence. It will show how joy enabled a different perspective on hard times for participants, required commitment, and changed over time.

Unique experience

The sources of joy and the experience of joy were unique for participants. As Dev explained:

One practice of happiness and joy isn't going to work for everybody because ... what I find makes me happy and joy might be different for you because of my upbringing and ... some people find they just like going across the road to have food, getting away from work and having a break, food, whereas I'm like, it's good to stop and connect.

The trigger to find joy, the things that brought joy, and the way joy was experienced and expressed differed for all participants as shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Joy for participants

Name	Where joy originated from	Joy defined	How joy is accessed	How joy expressed	How joy is maintained	How joy helped in hard times
Ash	Found during hard time when unwell, noticed what made them feel better – applied this, then joy came.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to wonder, something beyond you. Not dependant on feeling happy. • A river flowing through universe you can connect to • A world view that permeates everything • Colour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being in garden. • Recalling happy times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes human connections easier • Increases enthusiasm for life • Happier in self • More likely to share joy with others and be there for them 	A daily practice, linked with gratitude. Includes remembering to do and notice little things such as and nature (garden).	Holds them, helps move forward and keep going
Bridget	Found joy during hard time in God's promises of healing, doing this brought healing and joy	Internal, hidden on inside.	Recalls God's answer to prayers and trusts in promise of joy based on evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More giving and caring towards others • Creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritises reading bible. Blocks anything that may attack it e.g., news or conversations that encourage irrational fear. • Avoids time wasting mindless activities which bring stress and confusion. • Doing good things for self and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A space where you can be happy no matter what you are going through • Improves relationships; family, work • Doesn't have to carry baggage, can carries others baggage • Fears

						disappear and has peace
Cynthia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Found “real” joy when she got to know God. Sees God as source Had to have pride “broken” to get joy Joy and peace interconnected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bubbling, giggling from nowhere Extreme peace contentment and happiness Joy of Lord is strength 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being with loved ones Doing favourite things Having “me time” Spending time with the Lord 	In midst of chaos can laugh, uncontrollable laughter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asks God for it and trusts it is there. Don’t let others push your buttons or steal your joy Gives control to God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inner peace and trusting everything will be okay Brings laughter Can give words of comfort and encouragement to others
Dev	Has had joy since a young child, a connectedness with family/friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contentment Peace Level happiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflecting on Grandparents, values, past good times Finding meaningful hobbies Getting enough sleep True friends 	Laughter, joking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hope, finding positives Implementing boundaries Daily joy choices 	Brings balance
Eloise	Found joy when she met Jesus at 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linked with peace, hope, God and other people, not something experienced alone A feeling of pleasure, <i>agape</i>, friendship: <i>Koinonia</i> (Christian fellowship or communion with God or other) Christians. A way of life, being positive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliberate choice. Stops prays, meditates on verses about rejoicing, being thankful asks God to help her 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages and sees the good in others. In music and nature Trying new things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trains mind to move to positive perspective Helps others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidence it’s the hands of the Lord which brings stability Feels energetic, stronger and can-do things
Faye	Found joy when 11 and became a Christian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It’s something you surround yourself with, more than laughing Its creation It’s colour It gives strength 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliberate daily choice Usually needs to be by self. Writing, music, driving, walking With her children Being able to express feelings 	Dances, draws, gardens, giggles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priority is spending time with God in prayer and worship. Good food Having good relationships with others Surrounding self with positive people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not carry responsibility for things outside of own control – others choices Becomes more sociable Finds her joy brings others joy which increases own
Gwyneth	Can always recall having joy, a sense of everything’s okay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Base emotion of life Sense of consciousness that life can be fun Connected to the essence of life Never goes away An exchange, doing lovely things for 	Meditation, quiet place to access spiritual side, giving gratitude for divine presence, creativity, being alive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive energy recognised by others and contagious. Music, dancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving to others Looking after self, eating well, avoiding chemicals Honouring internal creative spark Being yourself Trusting instinct Slowing down to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing things happen for a reason which will be apparent. Reflection on hard times and lessons learned

		others or self			appreciate nature, other people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking full responsibility for own life
Heather	Always there, find beauty, things that give strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to define • Different to happiness • Sense of wellbeing • Vital to coping in difficult times • Provides ability to appreciate good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires discipline • Sings songs that remind her of God's promises • Quiet uninterrupted time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becomes more enthusiastic • Shares positively with others • Dances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets enough sleep • Exercises daily • Time to self • Prays and reads bibles • Fills environment with things she likes • Gardens • Knows triggers for negative state of mind and avoids these 	Confident God would help and look after self and family

The hard time experienced started some participants on their joy quest to remedy the negative impact this event was having on them. For instance, the period of testing and assessment for Bridget's son's health issue made finding joy a priority for her: *"I couldn't find joy anywhere and I had to have it ... I needed not just happiness, I needed to find this joy"*. Ash discovered joy in chronic illness and now refers to joy as a lifestyle:

I found that if I went and stood on the paving stones in my front garden, and just enjoyed the flowers and the smell of the air ... I felt better and I felt stronger. So, it was about learning to let my garden refuel me, and with that, that kind of joyful connection came.

Some participants directly linked hard times with joy and did not believe it was possible to have or recognise joy without these. Participants reflected on how their hard times taught valuable lessons which brought growth, joy, and subsequent strength for later hard times. Dev stated, *"knowing that there is change and change is always for the better, especially if you're in hard times, it's that thinking, reflectiveness and contentment"*. Gwyneth shared about a time she took an alternative remedy from someone against her instinct and suffered awful physical pain. She reflected, *"I learnt a really powerful lesson and one day if I hadn't have learned that lesson it could cost me my life. So, I've learned a lifesaving lesson and that brings me great joy."* Cynthia said she had to be *"broken"* to get to joy and realised pride was a barrier for her. She used a biblical metaphor of being *"pruned"* in hard times which enabled her to *"bear fruit"* and shared the importance of her hard time for future successes. Observing the absence of joy in others motivated other participants to start their joy journey. Gwyneth decided as a young girl: *"I don't want to be like the society we're in because there's too many people that look unhappy ... I'm not going to be trained by them because they don't look so great"*.

Joy was expressed in different ways by participants. For Ash it was something that *“permeates everything, flows through everything you do”* and is internally felt and expressed. It did not need to be *“big”*, and at times was a quiet smile to self or others. Some participants shared they may be viewed like *“idiots”* when joyful. Smiles, laughter, joking, and giggling were common ways of expressing joy along with increased affection for others. While Eloise found laughing to be part of joy, it was also something deeper for her with varying intensities. Joy was strongly linked with creativity for participants such as singing, dancing, drawing, baking and art. Gwyneth stated:

We have a creative spark within us ... we are very creative people ... you have to nurture yourself ... you’ve got to go within to find that ... revere and respect it ... it increases your own capacity to experience life.

The process of finding joy stimulants also helped participants with self-discovery and finding their identity. Recognising their unique joy triggers, and understanding what their joy destroyers were, supported them to be proactive in doing things for themselves that brought joy and placing boundaries in areas which did not. Ash shared:

There’s a level ... of self-awareness ... that comes when you have to start paying attention to what brings you joy and what doesn’t because if it doesn’t then that’s something you then have to deal with and you know let go of things which is not always easy.

Enhances mental and physical health

Joy helped participants get through illness and prevented relapses. Several participants shared how critical joy had been for improving their mental health, specifically anxiety and depression. Bridget explained how it helped her overcome depression. When her son was diagnosed with autism, she *“felt really, really down”*, wanting *“to end this torment”* and believed many people have committed suicide due to a lack of joy. This motivated her to find joy and she shared how she now *“fights”* to maintain joy to function, because *“when you lose your joy that’s when you get sad, then it spirals down to depression”*. Participants believed that if joy was prioritised it would greatly improve mental and physical health for society and recommended national mental health campaigns and strategies to promote joy.

Participants found the contentment joy brought helped with problem behaviours such as impulse shopping. There were mixed views on alcohol. Eloise observed as a teenager the temporary high was followed by regret. While Dev did not condone drunkenness, having beer with friends was something

that brought joy as it facilitated honest conversation and connections, something he believed was difficult for males. Overall participants believed that more joy in society would reduce addictive behaviours and violence.

Having a routine was important to some participants for maintaining joy. Participants who had experienced depression spoke of the importance of simply getting out of bed in the morning and appreciating the day. For Gwyneth however, being free, waking up when she wanted, and not being tied down to other people's agendas or expectations was important for joy. Music was another source of joy for participants in the forms of listening, singing, or playing an instrument. Bridget found songs that reminded her of good times brought joy. Eloise believed worship songs stimulated joy, and spoke of the power of music to evoke moods and the need to exercise caution with song choices to avoid depressing feelings.

The participants had different opinions on movies and joy. For Dev, watching movies allowed mental and physical rest which brought joy. While Eloise also found movies could bring joy, she felt it was important to be selective about what was viewed as could have the opposite effect. Bridget avoided movies as they contained too much drama which affected her negatively and Heather shared about the impact false realities can have on joy:

I think one of the things that really has an impact on people's day is they spend a lot of time looking at say tv or movies, or You-Tube or whatever and instead of living life, they are observing life, but what's even worse is it's not even real life and it's quite amazing, a lot of American shows you would see families living in these pretty amazing houses, money's never a consideration, frequently driving cars like Volvos and BMW's, now I feel like if you're feeding that into yourself all the time you're going to build discontent and that's going to take away joy.

Participants connected mental health with physical health and felt that joy would improve both due to healthier ways of viewing things. For Ash, understanding what brought joy helped manage chronic fatigue. Participants found joy in actions which enhanced physical health such as being outdoors and exercising. Some emphasised the value of maintaining a healthy lifestyle through getting enough rest and eating well. Gwyneth explained the importance of reducing the amount of chemicals consumed through food, water and inoculations which harm the pineal gland, the "*creative centre*", pivotal for joy. Dev said that laughter, "*a precursor to joy*", has physical and mental health benefits as it increases

oxygen intake and lowers blood pressure. Several participants felt that if joy was more common there would be less need for mental health clinicians and physical health doctors.

Participants also found joy enabled them to help others who were experiencing feelings of anxiety, helplessness, and depression. For example, Cynthia described how she *“brought happiness to distressed people”* by sharing her experiences of joy and recovery. This, combined with her own joy enabled her to care more about others which had a contagion affect. The joy participants experienced when helping others resonated throughout all the interviews. The multiple actions participants do to bring joy, which enhanced their mental and physical health, are described in Appendix 6.

Confidence

Having confidence that everything was going to be okay helped bring joy in hard times for several participants. Proven evidence of joy having assisted in previous hard times gave Ash confidence in joy’s ability to help in current and future tough times. For Bridget, having God answer prayer through her son’s healing and ongoing progress gave her confidence and brought smiling and laughter in hard times. Faith in God was also associated with this confidence for other participants who explained that they trusted God would not place them in situations they could not handle, and that things would work out for good. This belief is illustrated in the following comments: *“I know it’s in the hands of the Lord and that it will be good even in the midst of difficulties”* (Eloise); *“I just know that things will work out for good and God wouldn’t put me in a situation if I couldn’t do it”* (Faye).

Gwyneth shared the importance of having confidence in your instinct, and honouring decision making *“from the heart”*, will ensure the lessons learned in hard times bring joy in the future. Many participants found joy brought calm and contentment in hard times. For Bridget, joy stopped bad reactions and *“helps fear disappear”*. Cynthia shared how accessing God’s joy and peace in the middle of chaos gave her containment and security. For Eloise, joy in hard times came from God *“who gives peace”* and she shared about a friend who was able to be joyful and at peace when dying as knew she was going *“home”*, to heaven. Confidence in positive outcomes was clearly connected with joy and often created positive cycles of emotions for participants.

Brings a different perspective

Accessing joy in hard times often required a change of perspective for participants. Bridget found that when her perspective changed joy was found instead of *“drowning”* in the situation. Eloise found joy when reflecting on unexpected benefits in challenges and provided the example of being told at an Australian airport she could not depart to join her husband in New Zealand due to a sudden

discretionary decision in the context of emerging COVID-19 border restrictions. This event, which was devastating at the time for her, resulted in unexpected quality time in a luxury apartment with her children and husband who was able to fly back to join them. She reflected on the memorable, joyous family times they would not have had otherwise, *“the whole family, music, we dance and this is a real joyful situation, while we were stuck”*.

Ash found joy amid grief following the passing of their Father, *“honouring the joy that he brought to my life is helping me navigate grief”*. Dev also linked sad experiences with positives and at funerals he remembers his grandparents, their values and upbringing which brings another perspective in times of sadness.

He shared how other people helped bring joy by sharing a different lens on hard times:

Cause hard times ... blinkered thinking and brain fog or cloud of doubt gets set in ... it's hard to find joy in the tough times albeit sadness and grief and if you've got that slightly negative thinking and don't have good supports it can be quite dark and then when you have friends that highlight the positive it brings up your joyful tank you appreciate more things and you see it differently whereas if nothings happy where's that contentment and then with friends highlighting the positives you see there is good, joy.

'Taking notice' featured as an important joy action for some participants allowing them to find joy enablers in their environments and situations. Heather provided an example of a single flower growing in concrete cracks in a decrepit area as something which brought joy as its beauty contrasted its surroundings. Several other participants spoke of *“choosing to see joy”* (Faye) and how it becomes a natural way of life. Applying a different lens or perspective was important for joy for the individuals in this research.

Takes commitment

Maintaining joy required work and commitment. Bridget said while joy does not disappear it can get smothered and requires help to let it shine again. She said that for her joy does not come naturally and she described it as a battle in the mind, *“if you let go of joy you lose yourself”*. Dev found joy by making an effort and doing things he didn't feel like doing during his marriage separation, such as connecting with friends. Gwyneth described hard times as transitional paths, which are not always easy but *“every challenge helps you progress up”*.

All participants found that getting joy involved daily decision-making. Ash said they had to choose between stress or joy and decided *“not to settle for miserable”*, instead chose to laugh and find fun in life and now pays close attention to what brings joy:

Sometimes it’s just asking myself what would bring me joy in this moment and I even say getting dressed in the morning what earrings do I want to wear that will make me feel happy throughout the day ... and then it is things like yeah being sure I pause to admire the flowers.

Similarly, Eloise observed:

There are different hard times: the hard times that society puts on you or circumstances put on you, but there are also hard times that we choose. Like I choose, sometimes I would wake up in the morning, I have the choice, to let me down or just think hey take a grip, read your bible, get strength where it is in God and move on.

She thought that people can choose between joy or depression and reflected, *“I had a lot of friends who were depressed and there is always, as far as I know and have seen, there is always a choice. Where you can get up and move or let yourself down.”* Heather also found proactively choosing joy helped when she was feeling low:

Sometimes it takes some discipline because if I’m feeling a bit down, I know that I can do certain things that will make me feel better but if I’m having a pity party I don’t want to, so those times it takes discipline you have to decide that you’re going to do things so that you have hope and joy.

Bridget said her choices involved deciding to put energy into the aspects of life which brought her joy. Joy choices for several participants involved prioritising their own wellbeing and putting boundaries around the effect others had on this.

You’re going to lose your joy, even if something good happened to you today and you’re happy if you keep on talking to the wrong people ... not saying that you can’t be with sad people but fix yourself first, grab a hold of it (joy) first, and then you know whether you can talk to them or not. (Bridget)

Participants shared that how they spent their time, and who they spent it with, impacted their joy maintenance. Dev advised *“not to rely on others as people will let you down and the only person that*

can lift you up is you” and that “joy just doesn’t happen, joy is built up of many things and the opposite of that is all the negativity knocks it down, like Jenga”. Cynthia warned about “not letting other people steal your joy through the negative things around you, negative attitudes around you ... especially if they are not very nice not very kind, or they stab you in the back”. Heather stated, “if you keep putting negative stuff into you, you’re not going to be able to keep a positive view on life”.

Participants found that once they could access joy, it not only brought them strength and energy in hard times, but it became easier to obtain as it built on itself, *“as you notice more then the joy builds and ... it just keeps lifting itself up”* (Ash). Relatedly, Dev stated *“joy is a practice not a given, you have to decide for yourself, and then take action”*. Once that decision is made, Ash recommended staying connected, finding spiritual practices that help, and learning to understand and recognise things which brought joy no matter how small, along with things that do not. Advice from participants for individuals wanting joy involved an initial decision to choose to practice and prioritise joy, and then protect it from negative influences.

Evolves, changes over time

Most participants shared how their joy had changed over time and was experienced differently throughout the life stages. Childhood was viewed by most participants as a naturally joyful time with pleasure being derived from simple things such as riding a bike or eating a bowl of food. While most shared that as a child they had a sense of joy in the security *“that everything is okay”* (Gwyneth), for one participant adverse, traumatic events during childhood impacted on the experience of joy which was not experienced until adolescence.

Participants found joy became harder and was less accepted by others as they matured with rules and expectations set by authority figures, notably parents and teachers, being prioritised over joy. Ash said that *“joy is sometimes seen as a childish thing that we are expected to grow out of and 'get real' because adulthood is a serious matter”*.

For some participants their observations of others as they were growing up, helped them prioritise joy. Gwyneth determined she would not be unhappy like the adults around her, and Dev’s observations of Grandparents and Uncles experiences both *“good and bad”* informed the approach he took to life. False expectations about what brings happiness in early adulthood was also reflected on by some participants who suggested that magazines and movies created desires in people for items that would only bring short term happiness, such as nice cars, travel, expensive homes, but ultimately resulted in dissatisfaction due to incurring debt. A fear of missing out (FOMO) culture was commented on as having

a significant negative influence on joy in our millennial and centennial generations due to the prevalent influence of social media warping perceptions of joy which will be discussed further below.

Several participants interacted with elderly people in their work. Seeing how unhappy and suicidal some of these people were motivated Bridget to find opportunities to share hope with them and she commented that *“it’s almost like they haven’t heard it before, they haven’t heard about happiness or joy or hope before”*. Others shared how important it was for them to bring joy to people in aged residential care as they were reaching the final chapter of their life. Eloise commented that as her mother ages, a fear of getting sick and dying is affecting her joy and ability to make future plans.

The way different generations experienced joy came through in the interviews. Dev noted the influence one’s upbringing has on joy and Eloise shared how much suffering there had been following World War II which negatively impacted the joy of that generation. Similarly, Ash shared how her grandparents tried to *“knock it [joy] out of her”* mother, as parental decisions about what children should be doing in that generation were more important than their joy.

The participants all had joy present in their current stages of life. They prioritised it and deliberately did not allow others to affect or influence this negatively. Some shared how as parents it was important for them to role model joy to support its growth in the next generation. Several commented about how participating in this study was a way for them to do this. As seen in the joy actions list (Appendix 6), the participants found that simple personal actions from accessible sources brought joy that can be attained easily, do not involve cost, are enduring, and these actions facilitate joy to build on itself.

Joy and Connection

Joy coming from connections with something other than self was observed by all participants. Dev, for example, observed that connections are part of human nature as *“we are physically born connected, lost without connections”*. Eloise also shared that joy is always connected to an *“other”* be that nature, God, close friends, *“never a solitary thing”*. This section will explore these connections and the themes of spirituality, nature, and other people.

Spirituality

All participants connected joy with spirituality, or something beyond themselves. Five of them closely linked joy with their Christian faith and associated joy with being something that came from the Lord.

As Bridget explained:

The joy that I'm feeling is joy because it's not depending on people, it's not depending on circumstances. Nature, flowers, trees increase my joy, but they're not the source so because if they're the source of my joy, and they enhance my joy then what if they back chat me, what if they gossip about me, then it's all gone. The joy from the Lord is from the Lord for a reason, it's a staying kind of joy and its unaffected by people, it can't be increased by people ... but it can't be taken away by people either.

Christian participants shared how the *"joy of the Lord"* brought strength, peace, and inner happiness. This joy was found reading the bible, worshipping God, and in prayer. Joy was greatly enhanced and reinforced when prayers were answered. Faye shared a vision she had of Jesus giggling which helped her find and understand the Lord's joy as until then had viewed Jesus and the Christian faith as *"very serious"*. Two Christian participants spoke of communal laughter, initiated by the Holy Spirit in Christian group settings, and referred to this type of joy as a *"fruit of the spirit"*. While some Christian participants said the joy they valued was exclusively connected to faith in God, others believed it was possible to have joy without faith, but faith in God elevated it. To bring joy to others these participants recommended Christians should be empowered to pray, share their faith, and the bible, with others.

Other participants found that spirituality was closely connected to nature and gratitude. Spirituality was something Gwyneth discovered herself. She said traditional practices such as attending church *"didn't gel with me ... so I fell on, into my own culture which was really nature, a reverence for all living things and that includes people"*. She spoke of a divine presence that is in her and in every living thing, and shared how joy arrived when she gave thanks to this for her ability to love and have clarity in life. Ash also referred to joy as something they connect to, *"to me joy is almost like this river running through the universe that you can connect to"*, and likened their joy practices to spiritual practices which included being in nature and having gratitude.

Most participants connected joy with gratitude and found being thankful helped bring or restore joy. Meditation was also something many practiced to bring joy. Meditation topics included God's promises, gratitude, nature and reflecting on positive memories.

Participants linked other concepts such as hope, peace, wellbeing, and freedom with joy. Bridget referred to the *"joy of hope"*. Dev explained how important hope was for joy, particularly in hard times because *"as hope builds, you become more positive"*. Most participants found joy, and peace or contentment to be related with Cynthia describing joy as *"extreme peace"*. Dev described joy as *"things*

are good, no worries, nothing off balance". Joy and wellbeing were intrinsically linked for Heather, *"I think joy is a sense of wellbeing even when everything around you is falling apart"*. Other participants noted how important freedom is for joy: *"it's the freedom that comes from knowing you are the boss of you and you decide ... then ... the joy comes"* (Gwyneth).

While some participants used the terms happiness and joy interchangeably at times, the majority expressly separated joy and happiness as distinct concepts with happiness coming from external things or circumstances, and joy being spiritual, internal, and enduring. Heather explained, *"I think happiness is more a short-term thing, so you feel really happy because something good has happened, where joy is more a constant approach to life"*. For Eloise *"the real joy is something that lasts whatever the circumstances"*. The participants who expressed a strong faith in God contrasted God's joy as something which lasts, with other joy being temporary and changeable. Bridget, for instance, stated, *"I tried getting joy and happiness when God hadn't found me yet but I felt like it's something that goes away quickly like its changeable, you know it depends on circumstances, a shallow kind of joy"*.

Nature

Nature was described as a source of joy by all participants. An appreciation of natural elements such as flowers, gardens, water, birdsong, sunshine and being outdoors were joy activators. *"Taking notice"* and *"slowing down to appreciate nature"* were phrases used by participants. Ash explained how joy builds itself up through taking notice of one's surroundings and some participants used photography as a way of doing this. Gwyneth prioritised joy so much that she moved to a rain forest to be closer to her joy catalyst, nature:

I'm sitting outside my tent and I'm getting kissed by dragon flies...the sun's shining and then a little bird comes close ... I'm resonating with it [nature] ... and this energy is flowing through me so it seems like joy is ... right here, it's in you actually and if you just look for it and recognise it you get rewarded, it's an incredible formula (laughs) and it works.

Animals brought joy in several different ways for participants including fishing, hearing bird song, watching cats, and riding horses. Water and its relationship with joy also featured in the interviews, as a metaphor; river, something bubbling up from within, and as a source; being by the ocean, connecting to the river of joy. Many participants spoke of how tending to their gardens, or admiring other gardens brought them joy. Flowers featured as frequent source of joy. Colour was also a metaphor used to describe joy *"it's like every colour"* (Heather), with an absence of joy in life described as grey (Ash).

Other people

Relationships improved for the participants when they were joyful and many of them shared how joy helped them to care more for others. Joy enabled participants to recognise the good in others and become less self-centred. It also facilitated encouragement of others, along with an increase in positive actions and attitudes. During the pandemic, Cynthia's joy relieved flatness and discouragement in others as she was able to connect with them and bring lightness and humour when entering rooms. Interactions with colleagues improved when joyful due to capacity for increased acknowledgement and respect, and participants shared how they were more likely to have increased job satisfaction and help others when joyful.

Exchanges were another theme related to connections and joy. Giving and receiving encouragement, giving and receiving help, doing good things for others and vice versa were examples the participants provided. Gwyneth said, *"it's like an exchange so when you do things for other people, or when you do things for yourself, instantly benefit, you're sharing an energy, again that's beneficial, that's good"*. She shared how helping others brought joy to herself and them, stating it *"doubles the joy"*. Cynthia was more likely to give to others when joyful and provided an example of feeding hungry children which brought joy for both them and her.

Authentic, genuine relationships with others was found to be important for joy. Gwyneth believed joy brought optimism and unity between likeminded people. The collective nature of joy and its ability to bring people together to make changes which brought and reinforced joy was something she was excited by. Dev shared how other people can find positives in situations which *"fills up the joy tank"*, another common metaphor used by participants to describe joy. These relationships were clearly distinguished from other associations as ones where participants did not feel judged, could give and receive honest feedback, and were supported to be themselves. For some participants, isolation was something which negatively affected their joy, however other participants who described themselves as more introverted, found quiet time on their own to be important for maintaining joy.

The impact of family on joy was mixed. Memories of happy times with family sparked joy for participants as they recalled family holidays and special occasions where they shared joyful times. The influence of their parent's joy was significant for participants. Parents who did not have joy motivated their joy quest in the hope of a more positive experience of life. They shared how important it was for them to role model joy for their own children. Children were identified as a source of joy and parenting improved for participants when joyful by bringing fun and playfulness. An absence of joy had negatively

impacted marital relationships for some participants. Bridget shared how once she found joy it reduced arguments and conflict in her household. As with other relationships, boundaries were put in place by participants when they found family members negatively affecting their joy, for example family group chats that involved gossip and drama, but due to the desire to preserve relationships with other family members these boundaries were more conflicting and harder to maintain.

In summary, the importance of connections and joy came through consistently in the interviews. Spirituality was identified by all as significant for joy, both in belief and practice. This was often linked closely with nature, senses of wonder, awe and gratitude. Participants had increased care and capacity to help others when joyful resulting in enhanced relationships with others in all areas of their lives

Joy and society

This section will explore joy in relation to wider societal structures. Participants reflected on how little joy is spoken about in society and believed it should be more encouraged due to its transformative powers. They discussed the impact capitalism, government, workplaces, schools and media had on joy, and had suggestions for how joy could be implemented into society for positive benefit.

Current state

At times participants paused during interviews and shared they had never deliberately considered or been asked about joy before. Some commented on how unusual talking about joy was, as it was not a commonly discussed topic. They shared enthusiasm for this research due to concern about the lack of joy they observed around them and how important raising awareness of this would be in aiding other individuals to find joy and learn strategies to implement this.

The participants did not believe joy was currently prioritised in Aotearoa New Zealand culture. Gwyneth stated: *“this society that we’re in unfortunately does not encourage this [joy] ... I understand the containment process but I’m not enjoying it ... within me there’s way more than I’m allowed to express”*. Ash and Bridget believed that people who are joyful are viewed as weird, as it is *“counter culture”*. Dev noted that joy is usually reserved for certain occasions such as birthdays and Christmas. Unhappiness was seen as the status quo for society by some participants. Gwyneth shared her observations as a child:

... they’re doing the best they can to train me to be like them and to know the social norms of society ... I would walk around and smile at people and they would look away or I would

look into their eyes and they would look away, they didn't want to look back, and I didn't know what I was looking for but I was just looking for connection.

Ash shared about societal expectations when their father passed away:

It's kind of odd, because you feel like you should be miserable ... a social obligation to be miserable. It turns out I'm not, well I can be miserable if I put my mind to it, but actually, I'd rather not.

Participants shared hope the current state of joylessness could be turned around with joy becoming a normal and accepted way of life.

Contagion

Participants did not think it would be hard to increase joy in society and explained how readily joy can be passed from person to person through smiles, laughter, hugs and kind words:

Joy is also contagious, it's very contagious, you can do a lot for a hopeless person. Like all the people that you're seeing walking around have something that they're dealing with so if you can say something that's gonna increase their happiness or you can just hit something there that produces joy, like even just one comment... (Bridget)

Gwyneth also talked about shared joy:

...that's sheer joy when you give something to somebody and you look into their eyes and you see them receiving what you gave them, their joy enhances yours and it makes you buzz, it makes the energy rise in you. So shared joy is a huge thing, get yourself with people who love to do the same thing as you or similar, like thinking people and tell jokes, laugh, turn your favourite music on and dance, and you're refreshed, your instantly rejoicing, it's contagious...

For some participants being in groups and doing activities they enjoyed with others brought shared joy with examples including singing and praying in church groups, dance nights and shared meals. Dev had observed "laughing" groups, and while he thought this was unusual, he believed groups meeting in public to practice, promote and normalise joy could become commonly accepted:

if we ... got to practice [joy] in community we need to do it not behind closed doors like do it in a setting where people can see that whatever is being practiced and how its joy ... some people find joy ... in different things ... so not one thing like a community group

say, people going to just laugh, it's not going to work for everybody ... so if you ran different groups and had a specific, not just achieving x y and z, but the purpose ... [to] connect, be joyful.

Participants thought that for any initiative wanting to implement joy to succeed, it needed to be run by people who were joyful.

Political Impact on joy

Capitalism was criticised because it promoted consumerism as a false source of joy. Participants acknowledged that while buying a new house or phone may bring joy, it is a temporary joy that results in increased desire for more goods to sustain the feeling. Dev expressed concerns about people feeling the need to keep up with the latest trends results in envy, debt and pretentiousness. He noted that the need to work long hours for income to sustain these lifestyles reduced the time parents have to invest in their children's wellbeing. He believed this created a negative cycle as instead of spending time with their children, parents substitute this by buying them items to show they care and subsequently embedding this way of living in the next generation.

Fear was identified by some participants as something government and other power structures use to control people which negatively influences joy as impacts on freedom and creativity (identified as important for joy). Decision-making around COVID-19 was offered as an example of the government limiting joy and criticised by Eloise and Gwyneth for feeding fear into the population with Gwyneth going so far as to state that joy was *"being actively suppressed by those in power"*. She believed that once people recognised this, they would take action to advocate for freedom to experience joy. It was agreed the government could take steps to prioritise joy when determining policy, with participants wanting to see the government include joy impacts in its decision making which would have a positive effect on policies and laws. Dev provided the example of how government mandated vaccinations demonstrated the power of government, and how this influence could be similarly used to ensure joy strategies are prioritised by employers in the public service. He spoke of a social obligation for action on this due to the level of discontent and burn out across sectors:

So if it came from that higher level, 'this is what we expect', because right across people aren't happy, you know the police force is burnt out, even there's discontent in the parliament setting, there's a lot of discontent being reported lately, and people come in and do their job, get disgruntled and then they go home disgruntled, then they take it out on their partners and so forth... so it would start in the workplace and how do you get that, it

starts with yourselves, your manager, the organisational expectations and then maybe it's something that's implemented at a wider level.

Participants believed that a commitment to joy by the government would make a difference to the joy experienced by citizens and that government had the means to entrench a culture where joy cultivation was prioritised.

Workplaces

The impact a workplace has on joy was discussed by many participants given the high percentage of time most people spend in paid employment. Faye explained the treatment her mother received from her manager directly contributed to her mother's mental breakdown and she struggled to understand how power could have been abused like that. In addition to usual responsibilities, Dev talked about ways managers could influence joy by identifying and utilising the strengths of their team in creative ways, such as someone who enjoyed social gatherings organising team building exercises. Achievements such as completing projects, or solving problems also brought joy with Dev recommending staff be encouraged to celebrate achievements, big and small. Being in work they enjoyed, having a sense of purpose, being useful to others and performing well was important to joy for participants. Having joy helped Bridget manage a heavy workload.

The pace of society and expectations of productivity was also noted as something which countered joy. Bridget spoke of how busy life can be, stating *"you're always constantly pulled in different situations"* and how that can bring stress. Gwyneth observed:

We learn by being and seeing and we're not taught this. People say, "slow down", that's for a reason. If you're rushing through, you've had your three coffees a day or whatever you're hell bent ... not recognising what's good because you're in a hurry, because you're following somebody else's timeframe and you have to be there and you have to be there as well, and you've got to hurry, hurry, hurry, and...you forget to give thanks, and ... the joy doesn't happen much because you're not seeing what's around.

Workplaces are well placed to promote joy. Having managers who understood joy and supported this as part of self-care was recommended to promote joy in the workplace which Dev implied was an ethical responsibility of workplaces given burnout levels. It was suggested that workplaces create opportunities for laughter and offer different groups to cater to the different joy stimulators of staff. Having these groups run in public places where others could join, or observe joy was felt to be important. Bridget

believed that due to the contagion of joy, and word of mouth, people would be attracted to these and they would be well attended. These workplace initiatives could increase morale in the workplace and have a positive flow on effect for home life.

Schools

Some participants raised the negative influence schooling had on joy. Heather shared about the nervous state exams would get her in, and Gwyneth stated that fear-based testing was not conducive to supporting joy in young people. She was also concerned that theories taught in government funded education systems limit independent and creative thinking, which are important for joy. As a child she chose writing poetry and being in nature over school attendance where she felt the uniqueness of children was overlooked. Faye, who experienced trauma as a child, felt that schools were under resourced and teachers did not have enough time to invest in children's joy, seeing their work as just a job and children as numbers rather than people. Making it clear schools are interested in students' wellbeing and increasing the number of teachers and counsellors was recommended by some participants. Heather suggested counsellors could provide practical tools children could apply in their lives to bring joy, *"for example don't spend so much time on a device, go out there and do some physical exercise, find something, if you like drawing draw, don't just watch something on You-Tube, all those sorts of things"*. Dev also raised concerns about device-based learning at schools increasing stimulation, affecting concentration and functioning in children, and breeding discontent and disconnection. Faye would like to see children taught skills like anger management and a reduction in competitiveness. The consensus from participants who mentioned schools, was that joy is not prioritised in the public education system.

These participants felt there was an opportunity for joy to be nurtured in schools, as illustrated in this comment:

...most people ... are really good at heart, but the training they've had, either from their jobs or their parents or their schools or their teachers ... peers etc, often leads a little bit to be desired, I think we need to overhaul, it's a new paradigm coming in, overhaul our training and make sure it is beneficial, that people understand the principle of exchange and happiness and joy (Gwyneth).

The influence schools had on the experience of joy for children was something that participants thought could be addressed through recognition of individual joy stimulators and tailored programmes that encouraged these.

Media

The negative impact of media and social media on joy was commented on by some participants, especially how fear dominates news. Heather provided examples of the negative impact the over-exposure of traumatic events such as the Christchurch earthquakes and COVID-19 had on joy and she deliberately avoided the news during these periods and stated that avoiding media in all forms helps her maintain her joy. Gwyneth observed that even during the weather reports, forecasts of good weather are overshadowed with warnings.

While Ash used social media as a tool to share joy through use of Instagram, Dev worried that using applications such as Facebook to share joy can backfire if others don't respond or "like" posts. He criticised social media for bringing discontent, contributing to the *"look at me culture"* and portraying a false reality through sharing of selective filtered photos. He felt comparison with others and competing for "likes" brought envy. He also noted that it causes disconnection: *"you can be disconnected in that social media world where we are all connected in other means other than face-to-face"*. He worried that parents are spending more time on devices than with their children resulting in children learning to find stimulation from these which Gwyneth despairs is impacting on joy as people talk less to each other reducing shared energy which fosters joy. Media was not seen as positive for joy by most participants with some actively avoiding exposure to this in order to maintain their joy.

Future state

Participants showed their commitment to joy and the lifestyle changes required to prioritise and protect this. As these findings illustrate, this often involved putting boundaries around some of society's expectations and norms, and choosing alternative ways to live. Participants were motivated to do this as they did not want to return to a life without joy. Understanding what did not bring joy was also a useful starting place for them. Recommendations on how to nurture joy in society focused on the need for courage to make changes to protect the natural joyful state of children who are our future leaders. Participants recommended that parents role model joy by showing they value it and giving up work they don't enjoy as their unhappiness affects their children. Gwyneth suggested moving away from the busyness and pollution of city life, and moving to a natural environment which would help foster joy in the next generations:

Parents need to know how to bring back a better world for their children and themselves, and in looking after their kids, if they're really going to do that, they're going to bring joy into their lives. It means that they don't buy into jobs, it means a whole change from top to

bottom. If you're focussing on children and that becomes your driving force, then you'll give up the crap job, you'll give up the city where the EMFs [electrical and magnetic fields] and the dangers lie a lot and you'll move to the country, your kids will be happier, your friends will end up moving with you because they love you because they want to be with you or they want to be in a place where you're happy ... you know the focus brings about the change, where your heart goes, comes the change.

As seen above, joy was closely linked with positive mental health for participants. Bridget recommended a public service campaign to raise awareness about joy. She believed joy should be used as a mental illness prevention strategy as campaigns such as suicide prevention are "*pointless without alternatives*" and went on to say:

I would like to see more encouragement for joy and for, because it's a mental health thing, like you can campaign all you want about mental health and depression line and everything but if you don't counter that with the counteract, you know the joy, education about that then even if they talk to you on the phone about their depression they won't know what to do, they can't take that positive step because they don't know what joy is and how important it is and where to find it and the effects of it.

Participants were optimistic about joy being the key to a powerful positive future for all who chose to commit to this.

Chapter Summary

Findings from the participants who had joy help them through hard times have been presented in this chapter. The key themes were grouped under the headings of joy and individuals, joy and connections, and joy and society. Joy was something participants prioritised in their lives and they were enthusiastic about the opportunity to share the positive impact joy had brought to their worlds. Participants revealed how joy was a unique experience that differed for individuals, and the different ways they accessed and deliberately maintained their joy. For them joy had positively enhanced their mental health, specifically in the area of depression, and their physical health. Prior experiences of joy increased their confidence when experiencing hard times that these would pass. Their commitment to joy practices enabled them to experience joy amid difficulties. They shared how their joy had changed over the years as they entered different life stages, as well as their observations on the varied generational experiences of joy.

Participants agreed that joy involved connections and that spirituality was a source of joy. The majority believed their faith in God was closely connected to their joy. For others spirituality was described as something bigger than themselves and strongly associated with creation and nature. All participants found a connection with nature to be a joy influencer. Joy was also closely linked with gratitude, peace, hope and freedom. Connections with others greatly influenced participants joy, both positively and negatively. They raised the need for conscious awareness of individual joy triggers, and destroyers, so boundaries could be put in place as required to protect joy.

Participants did not believe joy was promoted or valued in society. They did not think it would be difficult to nurture joy in communities due to its contagious characteristics, and felt strongly that this should be prioritised. The political impact of joy was raised with a view that there were opportunities, as well as responsibilities, for macro systems to promote joy for positive effect on populations. Capitalism was criticised for promoting consumerism, giving false ideas about what brought joy. Workplaces and schools were identified as influential places where joy could be nurtured. A social media culture was criticised by some as reducing genuine connections and the subsequent opportunities for joy that came with these. Participants suggested public awareness raising campaigns and programmes focussed on joy would have a positive effect on mental health. They felt strongly about the need for joy to be fostered in children with parental role modelling being a key influencer for this.

Findings showed participants were unanimous in the life changing power of joy in all aspects of their lives. They would not live without it and felt strongly that individuals and society would positively benefit from joy being actively encouraged to enhance others' lives and wellbeing. Of significance for the aims of this research, and for future work in this area, the findings showed joy was a strength which brought many benefits for participants. The experience of joy was something they could access in all situations; it was a learned deliberate practice revealing that joy can be nurtured and cultivated. The next chapter brings these findings together with the literature to discuss how these results demonstrate the strength, and possibility of nurturing joy.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This qualitative study aimed to provide insight and suggestion for how joy can be nurtured as a strength which promotes wellbeing, and supports transformative, positive engagement in society through exploring the narratives of how joy has helped people in hard times. This chapter discusses how the literature compares with the findings in relation to the research aim. The types of joy that has helped in hard times will be considered, followed by the ways this joy can be cultivated with benefit for individuals, relationships, and society. The contributions this study makes to further the understanding of joy will be demonstrated throughout.

The typology of joy that helped in hard times

Understanding the kinds of joy that can be fostered to enhance wellbeing was an important focus for this research. Joy may be viewed as both a preventative factor, and coping mechanism for hard times. Significantly, joy is a life enhancing experience that provides daily benefits. The experience of joy for participants was varied and unique, which is consistent with the experiences of joy in the literature (Dick-Neiderhauser, 2009; Smith, 2014). It is acknowledged that as well as different meanings, there are different cultural nuances in the way joy is expressed and experienced (Johnson, 2020; Shin, 2020). The various types of joy in the literature that helps in hard times were identified with by participants, namely emotional, spiritual, dispositional (Johnson 2020), radical (Dunn et al., 2021; Whittaker, 2013), and virtuous joy (King, 2020). Participants' experiences of joy provided them with confidence and strength in all situations and perpetuated action in hard times.

Spirituality and Joy

All participants identified spiritual components to the joy that sustained them through hard times, with the majority unable to make clear distinctions between spirituality and joy. Although some thought it would be possible to have joy without faith in a higher power, all believed joy was enhanced with belief. This view is confirmed in Emmons (2020), and Watkins et al. (2017) with recommendations that spirituality and its connection with joy be further researched due to the correlation with improved mental health (Tong, 2016; Underwood, 2019). As this was the most common type of joy expressed by participants, this study contributes to further the understanding of spiritual joy.

Viewing suffering as an opportunity to experience God's grace and redemption is a feature of joyful individuals according to theologians (Johnson, 2020). There were features of this in interviews with participants such as healing as a result of faith and prayer, a belief that hard times were opportunities to

learn, and the situations they were placed in were controlled by a higher power for purpose. The notion of purpose is associated with joy aiding a person's ability to manage oppression and trauma (Damon, 2003; Dunn et al., 2021). Underwood (2019) believes understanding more about joy has the potential to help distressed and traumatised people which was the experience of participants who believed the lessons they learned in hard times brought joy, and protected them from other potentially damaging situations.

Joy was described by some participants as a "fruit of the Spirit" which is a term used in the bible (Bible Study Tools⁴). Participants described how the Holy Spirit inside of them deposited joy in their hearts and experienced this as 'spiritual tickling', and uncontrollable laughter in group settings with others who shared their faith. Understanding joy as a 'fruit' is a current knowledge gap which Johnson (2020) did not think would be easy to explore given the small number of people who may identify with this. That said, further exploration of this aspect of Christian faith could be of value as it was clearly significant for the Christian participants in this research.

The Christian participants frequently referred to the 'joy of the Lord' which was differentiated from other types of joy as internal, present and accessible in all situations. They often contrasted this with happiness which was temporary. Distinction between happiness and joy in the literature suggests that joy is viewed as deeper and more durable (Banks, 2018; Berkeley, 2020; Volf, 2019). While the literature does not distinctly contrast spiritual joy with happiness, rather joy more generally, concerns are that a barrier to the study of joy is its relationship between the term's 'happiness' and 'wellbeing' (Watkins et al (2018). As previously mentioned, some scholars use the terms interchangeably (Dick-Niederhauser, 2009; Farhud et al., 2014; Rinnan et al., 2018), or view them as related emotional states (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Although most participants deliberately distinguished joy from happiness, at times they referred to wellbeing and happiness as synonyms for joy, which reinforces the similarities, and lack of clarity on the definition of joy.

Participants' joy was strongly associated with other spiritual themes and beliefs. Some described how their experiences of joy, peace and hope were so strongly intertwined that at times they were unable to separate them from each other. While these concepts may not be exclusive to spirituality, the literature does connect them with spiritual joy (Dick-Neiderhauser, 2009; Smith, 2014; Underwood, 2019). Traditional religious beliefs include these elements as part of their fundamental doctrines (Bible Study Tools, 2020; Lama et al., 2016; Suttie, 2019). Bryant's (1982) sermon refers to the book of Hebrews

⁴ Galatians 5:23-23

where faith is the base for hope and joy and the key to surviving hard times being “*Steadfast faithfulness to the religious, political and social convictions we regard as just and loving is the underlying root of our hope for the future, and our joy*” (p. 25).

Gratitude was another theme strongly related to participants’ joy which some authors associated with spirituality (Suttie, 2019; Watkins et al., 2017). Practices involving gratitude were employed by participants as part of accessing joy. These links were made in the literature and while research found them to be separate concepts (Watkins et al 2017), gratitude was identified as a joy enabler (Emmons 2020; Johnson 2020; King 2020; Suttie 2019). Awe and an appreciation of something greater than oneself also featured strongly in the interviews providing participants with overwhelming positive sensations of connectedness with nature and the universe in the form of ‘tingling’, and uncontainable expressions of joy. This was confirmed in the literature, with ‘awe walks’ in the outdoors proven to increase joy (Sturm et al., 2020). All participants experienced joy in nature and the joy they had in natural environments was both energising and relaxing. Nature facilitated joy by providing them with an escape from daily stressors in work and home environments which was also confirmed in Khalili’s research (2016). The natural environment with its own ecosystem, beauty, unscathed by bureaucracy or artificial embellishment was another unanimous shared source of joy in the findings. Nature was often contrasted in this research with institutions such as schools and workplaces.

Dispositional Joy

While for some participants joy was actively sought out and developed, the experience of joy for others was something they always recalled having. It was a natural part of their personalities, often described as optimism, but something they did not believe was common in society. Dispositional joy, sometimes referred to as trait joy, is characterised by people experiencing enduring joy in all situations, which is significant for emotional wellbeing (Johnson, 2020; Watkins et al., 2018).

While dispositional joy appears to be largely influenced by genetics (Dsouza et al., 2020; Rimer, 2011), the upward spiral nature of joy could see this developed regardless of genetic predisposition (Johnson, 2020). This was the experience of participants who found joy later in life. They were able to apply strategies to ensure their joy was present, and joy perpetuated itself as an active cognitive process, involving reflection, perspective and positive outlook. While academics are divided on whether there are cognitive processes involved in positive emotions (Gallagher & Chiba, 1996; Griffiths, 2013; Leys, 2018), dispositional joy’s profile seems more consistent with a cognitivist viewpoint due to its appraisal and preparation characteristics (Casioppo, 2020; Watkins et al., 2018). Watkins et al., (2018) suggested

more research be done into the appraisal nature of joy, involving preparation and recognition of joy, which findings from interviews confirm is present.

Radical Joy

The two different interpretations of radical joy in the literature were identified with by participants. Joy being borne in the midst of hard times is a key feature in Dunn et al.'s (2021) article where 'radical joy' is a form of joy experienced by those who have endured pain. They describe joy as the "*vital force that is deeply rooted in the internal and purpose driven nature that lies in every single human being*" (p. 213). A subset of this radical joy is "Black Joy", referring to the experience of vulnerable people who have experienced pain through discrimination. Social work's unique interest in empowering those who are marginalised, oppressed, vulnerable or in poverty resounds with a commitment to upholding radical joy. As well as its ethical commitment towards assertion of people's identities, constructive structural change for perpetuation of injustice, and support of those collectively working to strive for change through collective action supports this form of radical joy (Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work Association, 2019; Dunn et al., 2021). Joy is linked with anti-oppressive social work practice to make system changes to support marginalised, vulnerable groups (Smith, 2014).

Several participants expressed how this form of radical joy had transformed their lives. Being non-conformist to society's expectations or the status quo was important for their joy maintenance along with having the ability to express freely how they felt. The political nature of joy was expressed by most participants from direct and observed experience, of how joy was largely influenced by power structures, which they believed commonly suppressed and oppressed it. Participants actively sought to bring joy in the form of freedom to those around them through encouraging them to shift their environments and be active, vocal members of society, true to their own values and beliefs. They spoke of the power of joy to assist those marginalised and suffering due to poor mental health, and oppressive work conditions. This perspective is confirmed by Dunn et al., (2021) and Greco & Stenner (2013) who spoke of the power of collective, visible action which facilitated joy through its contagious features.

A wider commitment to prioritise joy over happiness to alleviate poverty was expressed by participants. Their experience was that people were getting in to debt to obtain the happiness promised through media advertising to keep up appearances and receive approval on social media. There is an ethical responsibility for social workers to address policies and practices, in the form of incurring debt, and social media influence, to reduce the financial struggle it incurs for some people (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019). Participants identified with joy's association with freedom; from

oppression (Dunn et al., 2021), through being active changemakers in their world's (Greco & Stenner, 2013; Johnson, 2020), and in the form of uninhibited physical expression (Johnson, 2020), both of which are consistent with how the social work profession seeks to empower others (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019).

The other form of radical joy in observing beauty that continues to cultivate in damaged environments (Whitaker, 2012) was experienced by some participants who shared how flowers and regrowth in a place of deprivation or natural destruction brought joy in the form of awe and appreciation. This view is consistent with nature being a source of joy (Khalili, 2016; Sturm et al, 2020), and the recognition that joy can be more realised in damaged environments and inspire reparation (Whitaker, 2012). Again, this perspective resonates with social work strength-based practice where reflection, identification with a focus on building client strengths helps focus on how to get through hard times and foster growth in the midst of challenges (Munford & Sanders, 2007).

Virtuous Joy

Virtuous joy in the form of aligning to one's sense of what is ultimately good (King 2020) came through strongly in the participants' narratives. Joy was ultimately a subjective positive experience, involving self-betterment which resulted in a sense of responsibility to do good for those around them. This found them exhibiting and encouraging joy for the benefit of others and was a strong motivator to participate in this research.

While questions exist as to whether truly virtuous characters exist (Johnson, 2020), the virtuous characteristics of joy are apparent through actively looking for good in self and others (Pooler et al., 2014b), and participants shared a moral obligation to ethically pursue goodness to bring joy. This is supported by King (2020) who writes of understanding joy in connection to how one lives their lives. Joy's moral and spiritual connections assists people in finding meaning in their lives (Damon, 2003; King, 2020) as purpose brings more joy than the active pursuit of happiness (Damon, 2003).

Joy as a strength in hard times

Joy was recognised by participants as a critical strength for coping in hard times and was a remedy for intolerable situations. The hard time participants experienced was a strength that facilitated their recognition and appreciation of joy, or initiated their joy journey. Greco & Stenner (2013), suggests a Deleuzian concept of joy as *"an increase in one's power to affect things, coupled with an increase in one's power to be affected"* (p. 4). Participants had a positive affect on joy for those around them, and

once they understood joy were increasingly aware of how their environments impacted on their own joy.

Reflecting on how lessons they had learnt in hard times gave them joy, and how hard times are necessary for growth was related to the experience of joy and resilience. This is supported by Johnson (2020) who observed that while suffering is undesirable, the growth that can come may facilitate joy. Joy is strongly connected with resilience for social workers (Smith, 2014). Finding meaning in hard times and having a sense of purpose can relieve suffering (Damon, 2003). Joy can also result from the observation of growth and belief in an ultimate 'good' that lies ahead (King, 2020).

Freedom from fear was also a noted strength that joy brings, with participants positioning fear as an opposite to joy. They provided examples of the media coverage of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic to illustrate how crippling fear could be due to overexposure of negative information and bad news, and how this negatively affected the joy of those around them. They believed freedom from fear was important for joy to blossom, and to protect their joy they implemented boundaries to avoid negative news platforms which induced fear and impacted on their joy. Brown's (2013), prospect of joy invoking fear due to concern that the object of joy could be taken away was not confirmed or raised by any participants in this study. The joy they had was durable and the sources of it, for example nature, God, remained constant, and filled them with confidence and hope.

Joy as a strength that can be cultivated

Understanding how joy can be cultivated was a key aim of this study and a recommended focus area in the literature (Emmons, 2020; Underwood, 2019; Watkins et al., 2017). Researching how positive emotions can enhance wellbeing to counter mental illness is also encouraged by the World Health Organisation (2004), and the positive psychology movement (Greco & Stenner, 2013). This fits with Aotearoa New Zealand's priorities in its 2019 Wellbeing budget (Treasury, 2019) and focus on the prevention of mental illness (New Zealand Government, 2019). As this research provides evidence that joy can be cultivated, it addresses gaps in current research which hypothesised that joy has the potential to assist people with trauma, aiding emotional wellbeing (Underwood, 2019), improving quality of life (Rinnan et al., 2018) and enabling active engagement against oppressive structural and political agendas (Dunn et al., 2021). The findings from this research demonstrates that participants were able to deliberately cultivate joy for positive benefit in their lives and had recommendations at individual, relational and structural levels for how joy could be found and nurtured.

As the participants in this study were able to apply joy to prevent problems and aid functioning in hard times, the social work role in understanding joy as a strength should be employed in all areas when assessing mental health, social environment, spiritual health, and whānau health, along with the impact of systems, when considering interventions to support change. Joy for participants brought strength, peace, hope, confidence, optimism and enhanced connections with others. Joy minimised the impact of hard times, allowing these to be reframed, resulting in improved physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing and growth. Joy providing benefits in different ways fits well with widely accepted social work models and practice which consider holistic views of people, recognising that issues individuals experience may be multi-factorial and external factors often contribute or influence these (Drisko & Grady, 2012; Durie, 2010).

Participants thought anybody wishing to assist with joy cultivation should firstly prioritise finding their own joy. Nurturing joy in others requires one's own joy to be present and cared for to enable the contagion affect. The role modelling provided by a social worker, and the influence they have in times of need through therapeutic use of self can create positive spirals in colleague and client relationships (Pooler et al., 2014a). Social workers can cultivate their own joy through recognition of the difference they are making in client's lives (Pooler et al., 2014a & b; Smith, 2014; Watson & Hoefler, 2016), finding meaning in their work, right niche (Murray, 2015; Pooler et al., 2014a & b; Watson & Hoefler, 2016), continuous learning (Pooler et al., 2014b) and actively engaging in policy discussions, decision making and being heard (Pooler et al., 2014b; Smith, 2014). Clinical supervision is a vehicle that can help social workers identify professional development to assist them with this (Pooler et al., 2014b).

Joy for individuals

Joy is a strength that supports mental and physical health. Participants reported their mental health improved when they committed to a joy lifestyle. Joy made it possible for them to overcome depressed mental states due to a change of perspective. Joy provided them with a positive frame of mind enabling them to recognise and have gratitude for the good aspects of their lives and environments. Dick-Niederhauser (2009), claimed that joy is a core indicator of good mental health, or a sign of recovery from mental illness. Joy may be used as an alternate term for "*feeling stronger*", and "*a state of growth*" (Greco & Stenner, 2013 p. 4). The positive psychology movement describes joy as a positive emotion which has been largely neglected but holds much promise for human flourishing (Emmens, 2020). Alternatively, positive psychology has been criticised by Greco & Stenner (2013) as "*learned happiness*" (p. 12) designed to help subjects cope with environments detrimental to their mental health,

perpetuating neo-liberal ideology and distracting from wider systemic struggles. The potential of joy is also recognised as a strengths-based strategy to address burnout and other issues affecting the social work workforce (Pooler et al., 2014b).

The 'joy tank' was a term used by participants, as something that filled them up and gave them strength to get through daily challenges. In Murray (2015), social workers reflected on the same concept with joy being something that kept them going through emotionally challenging work with joy counteracting depletion by bringing nourishment. Participants shared how affirming joy was for them, as it gave them mental peace and respite from comparing themselves with others (examples of money, clothing, holidays) which was mentally tiring and impossible to maintain. Some participants explained maintaining joy involved fighting on a spiritual realm against an "enemy" that wanted this destroyed. This often involved mental battles against negativity in the form of people, media and music, and distracting influences or mindless activities. Understanding joy in relation to its opposites, depression and apathy, are discussion points in Johnson's (2020) literature review. While *acedia* accepts the status quo and quashes individuality (Johnson, 2020), pursuing joy gave participants insight into knowing themselves and accepting themselves as individuals with unique talents and interests that they actively started developing to enhance their wellbeing.

A commitment to joy made participants stronger physically. By providing them with hope, they were able to foster resilience despite poor prognosis which gave them strength to manage diagnosis, and proactively manage health issues. Aspects which brought participants joy aided physical and mental recovery, for example, getting fresh air and being active. A healthy lifestyle complemented joy in the findings. Some participants believed that joy practices brought physical health, sharing how laughter increased oxygen intake, and exercise supported overall bodily health, and released endorphins. This is supported in the literature with hormones (Dsouza et al., 2020; Farhud et al., 2014; Samuels as cited in Murphy, 2018), positive lifestyle choices (Kennon et al., 2019), and optimism (Rimmer, 2011) being significant for joy and overall physical health.

Participants found joy to be a motivator which made them physically more productive, engaged and energised in their workplaces and environments. This is somewhat disputed by Izard (1977) who speculates that 'tranquil' joy may hinder problem solving and intellectual performance as it does not concern itself with conflict. Participants did not avoid conflict, rather they prioritised joy by recognising areas that did not bring joy and placing clear boundaries around these.

Cultivation of joy for individuals

Joy for most participants was a learned process which they could access both in hard times and in everyday life. While genetic components account for up to 50% of trait happiness, (Dsouza et al., 2020; Rimmer, 2011), this study has shown there is ample room for those without this hereditary trait to grow joy as only a small proportion of this sample identified with having a genetic disposition. The majority shared they learnt to develop and maintain joy through:

- Deliberate intent
- Daily commitment
- Understanding spirituality
- The power of nature
- Having a sense of purpose
- Creative outlets

Having joy involved daily choices, practices and recognition of joy stimulants and destroyers. Noticing what helped was an important first step involving active cognitive awareness of their environments and responses which they adjusted as needed to prioritise joy in their lives. This is consistent with the cognitive view of joy (Casioppo, 2020; Griffiths, 2013; Watkins et al., 2017). Participants shared openly how they had to work hard mentally to overcome joy destroyers to maintain their joy. This supports CBT as a tool to help the cultivation of joy (Matthewes, 2020). This joy mostly aligns with dispositional joy. The scale developed by Watkins et al. (2017), could be used by social workers to measure baseline joy, implement strategies, and re-test to confirm if deliberate cultivation of joy is effective.

Spiritual practices; daily meditation, prayer, worship, reading scriptures, and appreciating creation, were strategies used by participants to foster joy in their lives. Meditation as a way to cultivate joy is common in traditional religions (Casioppo, 2020, Damon, 2003; Suttie, 2019). The other practices were confirmed in Dick-Neiderhauser (2009), Whitaker, (2013) & Van der Bogert, (2006). Christian participants shared how anyone could access joy by requesting this from God. Their joy cultivation was found in confidence in God's good plans for their lives which King's (2020) research supported with joy resulting from knowing ultimate good lies ahead. Having a sense of purpose resulting from spiritual faith was also a way participants nurtured and maintained joy. According to Damon (2003), purpose is critical to joy with individuals having unique abilities that the world needs. Joy can result from the realisation and actioning of these. Other literature supports joy resulting from meaningful contributions

in occupation (Pooler et al., 2014a & b; Smith, 2014). Again, strength based social work can support identification and growth for client's identification of their intrinsic value, and assist with ways to grow this for positive benefit.

It is important that social workers understand the strength that religion, and/or spirituality brings for clients (Al Makhamreh, 2019; Kopua, 2019). Having knowledge and understanding about different beliefs and practices is an ethical responsibility (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019) and exploring these effectively will help the social worker understand joy belief's, sources, and how to support clients in accessing these. Participants who did not identify as Christian, linked joy and spirituality closely with nature. A sense of reverence, and peace came with them prioritising time in the natural environment through taking notice of their surroundings and practicing gratitude. Nature is closely linked with joy, with intentional time in natural surroundings being a way to cultivate joy (Sturm et al., 2020).

Being creative was another way participants increased their joy. They shared how dance, singing, baking, photography, art and writing enhanced this. As the Broaden and Build theory of emotions links joy with play and creativity in artistic and intellectual behaviours (Fredrickson, 2004), social workers taking time to explore individuals' creative outlets and desires should result in the actualisation of joy.

Participants did not succumb to expectations of them in regards to societal norms, and chose to engage in things which brought them personal joy. Similarly, the literature links freedom to be oneself (Dunn, 2003; Khalili, 2016), positive relationships (Harrar, 2020; Haugen et al., 2019; Pooler et al., 2014a & b; Rinnan et al., 2018), connection with the outdoors (Khalili, 2016; Van der Bogert, 2006) and a work life balance (Murray, 2015) to joy.

When considering the cultivation of joy, Rinnan et al.,'s (2018) work with older adults, building on Seligman's wellbeing philosophy, along with Pooler et al. (2014a & b), study of social workers and what brought them joy is useful. Elements found to be significant to joy in these studies, that were shared by participants include sources of meanings (Rinnan et al., 2018), making meaning (Pooler et al., 2014a & b), positive relationships (Rinnan et al., 2018), and making a life, which includes perspective, management of expectations, rejoicing in little things, continuous learning, increased confidence, and maturing (Pooler et al., 2014b). Participants did not seem so concerned with acceptance, or belongingness in their current stages of life which were findings in Rinnan et al., (2018), although positive relationships with trusted others enhanced their joy.

Joy and relationships

Relationships with others can improve significantly when people have joy. The participants provided examples of how joy enabled them to focus on other's needs, sparking sociability and altruism. Relationships in their family life and work, strengthened when they had joy. They spoke of the contagion effect of joy and the influence others had on their own joy. Being around other people who were like-minded, or facilitated perspective, activated joy as a strength for participants. This is supported in the literature with connectedness being a dimension that enhances joy (Rinnan et al., 2018; Pooler et al., 2014a & b) and positive relationships with others regarded as essential for happiness (Diener et al., 2018; Murray, 2015). Joy as a collective phenomenon, expressed in group settings, is well documented in the literature (Meadows 2014 as cited in Johnson, 2020; Watkins et al., 2018).

It must be noted that there are cultural aspects to joy with historians emphasising the need to understand emotions in cultural and political contexts (Boddice, 2020). Recently, neuropsychologists argued that emotions only exist as categories within cultures (Eustace, 2020). In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, bi-culturalism, and multi-culturalism see a blend of individual and collective cultures. While no participants identified as Māori, most identified with the collective nature of joy. Although not specifically asked, just under half of the participants revealed the collectiveness of their culture which is an under explored area in research (Johnson, 2020).

Non-western collective cultures are thought to experience wellbeing differently to western, individualised cultures with positive emotional experiences involving more connection with others (Shin, 2020), although known studies of joy have been limited to Western populations so far (Johnson, 2020). This research had participants from both, with no major differences identified in the experience; both western and non-western participants spoke of how their joy is enhanced collectively with others who share similar values and beliefs.

As one of social work's foundational concerns is strengthening relationships at all levels (Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019), understanding joy as a strength to facilitate these is useful for the profession. At a micro level, social workers seek to establish meaningful relationships with clients to bring about therapeutic positive change. Where relational issues are identified, social workers can use joy as an intervention for relationships in their client's lives to bring joy. Participants were clear that joy as a strength often involved recognising and placing boundaries around people and stimuli which took away from their joy. Social workers can assist with recognition of these in their client's micro level lives to enhance joy. Practitioner's own joy should help with client engagement given the mutually reinforcing

nature of joy (Pooler et al., 2014a & b). Relationships are also identified as a major source of joy for social workers themselves, alongside making a difference for clients (Pooler et al., 2014a).

Social work is concerned with persons in their environments (Drisko & Grady 2012) and fostering joy would have benefits for these interactions. Participants shared that when they experienced joy they cared more about the natural environment, were more active in their communities, and had greater capacity for compassion and empathy towards other people.

Being with likeminded people helped bring joy for participants. Groups consisting of likeminded people were identified by participants as a way joy could be cultivated and flourish. Their own experiences consisted of faith groups, social groups, and work groups. One recommended that workplaces take the lead in providing opportunities for a wide range of groups to form based on the different joy stimulators of those in the organisation. Social workers are trained to be skilled in the facilitation of group work and are well placed to identify whether individuals would benefit from this modality, and support as needed to develop groups or programmes which stimulate joy in their communities to enhance community and individual wellbeing (Garvin et al., 2017).

There is a contagion affect with joy. Participants shared how smiling at others resulted in a return smile, and observed the positive difference their joy made when they entered rooms. When considering the contagious nature of joy, it is also important to understand that participants spoke of a self-perpetuating joy, the more they had, the more it increased which is consistent with the Broaden and Build theory, (Cuncic, 2021; Fredrickson, 2004). Normalising joy conversations is a way to cultivate joy. Participants shared how rare it was to talk about joy and research shows that talking about joy contributes to the contagion affect with visible differences in body language and positive feelings and behaviours (Pooler et al., 2013b; Watson & Hoefler, 2016).

The family system is also significant for the cultivation of joy. With parental success largely determined by the social environment children are raised in, Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to human development invites efforts to improve the social environment (Garbarino, 2017). Most participants lived with a partner and had children, and both parents worked. Some participants shared concerns that the amount of time working has seen a reduction in quality time with their children which was negatively impacting on their children's development due to parental absenteeism, and device babysitting. The impact that two parents, or a sole parent, in employment have on family wellbeing, particularly when issues arise, are noted by Munford & Sanders (2006). To nurture joy in their families,

some participants had chosen to work close to home and avoid weekend work, another had moved out of the city to a remote forest by a beach to live a life of joy surrounded by nature. Memories of childhoods on the beach, freely bicycling around, and having family present, were joyful times for participants and they felt strongly about the need to prioritise similar opportunities for their children to help them have joy. New Zealand's current data on increased cost of living must be factored in here as a barrier for many families to have the liberty to work less, or move to remote areas (Hendry-Tennent, 2023), with current housing shortages resulting in increased density in major cities (Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 2023) which will undoubtedly impact on childhood freedom to explore safely in rural areas.

Participants shared that trust was critical for joy. This factor did not feature specifically on the literature reviewed on joy. Trust is the first stage in Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (McLeod, 2023). While trust and building trust is encouraged as part of wellbeing (Helliwell & Wang, 2011), the importance of establishing personal boundaries to protect oneself from harm was important for participants and is essential for effective professional relationships between social workers and clients. Furthermore, Valliant (2008, as cited in Watkins et al., 2018) mentions the positive influence secure attachment between parents and children has on joy for both, highlighting the importance of play, suggesting that human development may impact baseline joy levels. As social workers commonly use human development theories to inform their practice, it is important that they are cognisant of the important implication joy has in these early stages and understand how to encourage situations and resources to nurture this. Of note, every stage of Erikson's psycho-social theory was verified by participants as having an impact on joy (McLeod, 2023).

Participating in this research and sharing hard times required vulnerability. Participants found that trusted friends they could be vulnerable with, who in return would be honest with them, were important to their joy as they provided honest feedback which would allow them to identify areas in their lives that required working on to increase their future joy. Vulnerability and its relationship with joy was identified in the literature as an area to explore further (Brown, 2013; Pooler et al., 2014a & b). Johnson (2020) positions *acedia*, as an opposite to joy, being a form of apathy employed to provide protection against vulnerability, and ultimately joy. Participants shared how as they learnt what brought them joy, they began to prioritise these things, became more active in their worlds, and resisted passive distractions from reality.

Joy and societal structures

Societal structures influence all aspects of life. The participants provided examples of the impact of schools, workplaces, media and government policies had on their joy. They felt institutional systems were missing an opportunity to foster joy. They believed if joy was embedded in structures and systems, it would strengthen society and be a solution for negative emotions such as fear, burnout, stress and envy. Examples they provided showed that individual strengths were not recognised or valued in schools and workplaces. The invasion of private space through increased reliance on devices such as phones, impacted joy both in private and public domains. Government investment in mental health was viewed as an ambulance at the bottom of a cliff rather than being proactive and prioritising joy of citizens to build a solid barricade. Some scepticism about the fit between global policy agendas, and the freedom that was strongly associated with joy were vocalised. Neo-liberalism and capitalism with associated consumerism were criticised as anti-joy which was confirmed in the literature (Greco & Stenner, 2013; Harmanci, 2017; Smith, 2014). Decisions made in policy contexts directly impacts positively or negatively on workplaces, social services, communities and families (Garbarino, 2017). Participants were concerned that debt incurred as part of individual happiness marketing was crippling and a focus on internal joy would help overcome financial difficulties through bringing contentment, reducing expenditure on products marketed to bring a temporary hedonistic satisfaction and desires. The hedonistic treadmill is positioned as an opposite to joy by Johnson (2020).

Interestingly the economic implications of joy show that a demonstration of joy by a presenter during a funding pitch had positive outcomes (Jiang et al., 2010). While from a social work perspective it is a concern that joy could be manipulated for financial incentive, this shows the contagion of joy in the market place and joy's influence on career success. With social work becoming more outcomes based, due to fewer resources and greater need (Smith, 2014), understanding how joy may influence funding decisions may be of use for advocacy by the social work profession.

The political aspects of joy cannot be ignored. For example, joy motivated escape from the drudgery of refugee life (Khalili, 2016), provided vision as a catalyst for political change (Dunn et al., 2020), and was the product of communities pulling together through challenges to revive their town (Eiss, 1997). Joy enabled people to become powerful, active, engaged, creative members of their societies (Greco & Stenner., 2013), and stimulated grass roots action to address discrimination and exploitation of minority groups (Bryant, 1982). For these reasons it is thought to be a solution to the indifference, laziness and carelessness experienced in our current times (Johnson, 2020).

Understanding the strength that joy brings to communities (Al Makhamreh, 2019) is important for social workers who work with oppressed communities in community development, and policy fields. Joy has the potential to promote human flourishing and spark action against injustice (Johnson, 2020). As the social work profession understands personal issues are connected to wider injustices and overcoming structural barriers, part of its commitment to social action could employ joy as a strength from which to measure exploitation. A strength of social work practice is the ability to understand and challenge systems that exclude citizens from being able to fully participate in their communities. Joy could be employed as a change strategy, using joy stories to create vision as an alternative to negative narratives (Munford & Sanders, 2006). Challenging negative thinking has been evidenced to increase optimism over time in children (Clarke 1995, as cited in Gillham & Relvich, 2004; Johnson, 2020), with optimism being a by-product of joy (Sturm et al., 2020).

Studies have shown that participating in research on joy brought joy with a noticeable positive difference in body language and animation for subjects (Watson & Hoefler, 2016). This was confirmed through interviews in this project with laughter as participants shared their joy stories. For many this was the first time they had considered joy and shared their experience and were grateful for the opportunity. Every interview ended in joy for the participant and interviewer as its contagious power became evident. As joy upward spirals and builds itself within systems, engaging in research on joy brings joy for participants, joy builds on joy, strength builds on strength. This is important for social work practice and cannot be overlooked.

Structural cultivation of joy

Joy can be cultivated and perpetuated through systems and the participants identified intervention at this level to be the most influential mechanism in establishing a joy culture. The vast majority of New Zealanders interface with, and spend a lot of time in institutions over the course of their lives ranging from early childhood centres, schools, workplaces, aged care, hospitals and prisons. Many of these are government regulated and have health and safety responsibilities. The New Zealand Government (2019) has committed to supporting the mental health of its citizens and early intervention initiatives (Treasury, 2019). Norway's health system has embedded joy of life as a concept with certified schemes in aged care to promote joy for elderly (Rinnan et al., 2018). Interventions committed to nurturing and supporting joy cultivation would be preventative, with many benefits for society. This research has found that individuals who have enduring joy understand their joy is unique for them, that it needs to be learned, and practiced, and they end up being productive, caring people who spark joy in others.

While there has been some criticism of the wellbeing movement as politically motivated through encouraging individuals to take responsibility of their wellbeing to divert from external oppressive factors (Greco & Stenner, 2013), a focus on joy would encourage people to engage in making a difference in their realms. Supporting people to live with a sense of value would be transformational. Throughout all stages of life, the influence of structures, government and organisational policy on joy was noted. Participants shared how individual pursuit of happiness through acquisition of goods and services, perpetuated through media and social media negatively impacted joy. The negative impact on joy that neo-liberal and capitalist societies, through their focus on individual wellbeing over the collective, is largely documented in the literature (Dunn et al., 2021; Greco & Stenner, 2013; Smith, 2014). However, the influence macro societal structures have on joy present an investment opportunity to increase population wellbeing in line with World Health Organisation and New Zealand Government priorities. While this research intends to show how joy can be cultivated to alleviate the distress that comes with hard times, it should be noted the active component of joy which shares features with social justice is borne out of struggle and injustice (Dunn et al., 2021).

While participants were clear about their avoidance of people, stimulants, and environments that took away from their joy, this is not always possible in a world where we have little control over our neighbours, colleagues, media we are subjected to in public environments, policies, laws and mandates.

Freedom to be themselves and be accepted for who they are was critical to joy for participants. Joy is strongly associated with freedom in literature (Greco & Stenner, 2013), with continuous restraint, lack of freedom sparking motivation to find joy (Bryant, 1982; Dunn et al., 2021; Greco & Stenner, 2013). This can be difficult in goal-oriented environments with diverse populations. A challenge is how to provide freedom that does not impede other's ability to have the same, and achieve institutional objectives. For example, schooling is compulsory for people aged 6 – 16 in New Zealand with the majority receiving government funding to deliver the government set national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2022). For students who are not interested in curriculum offerings, how would freedom look? Dunn et al., (2021) article encourages freedom for teachers to create that unlock creativity and "*defy the rules of racist education with capitalist motives*" (p. 219). Likewise, how would workplaces utilising key performance indicators (KPI's) support workers who found these stressful and joy depriving? Finding strengths that align with the company's goals and individualising measures may be more appropriate.

Beginning with the early stages of life, participants shared those times were mostly well connected and attached in family units, both nuclear and multi-generational, that provided for them and allowed them

to have joyful experiences. Mostly, these involved times in nature and with caring relatives. While family units in Aotearoa New Zealand are varied, social workers are often involved with supporting parents when there are identified issues (Munford & Sanders, 2006). Understanding strength-based work with families is important to fostering joy in the early years. Parents and early childhood centres can be supported to offer time in natural environments, and understand and encourage play to enhance attachment and experience joy with primary caregivers.

Groups consisting of likeminded people were identified by participants as a way joy could be cultivated and flourish. Their own experiences consisted of structured faith groups, social groups and work groups. One recommended that workplaces take the lead in providing opportunities for a wide range of groups to form, based on what brought joy to those in the organisation.

The time spent working also negatively impacted on joy for participants if one was in employment that did not bring joy or foster creativity and participation in something more than oneself. Working long hours also had a negative impact on family life negatively affecting joy. They believed cultivation of joy in employment is achieved through work that uses skills and abilities, and knowing one is contributing positively to society along with a good work, life balance. Participants felt that employers that recognise workers strengths can use these, either formally through task delegation, or informally through social contribution to influence joy in the workplace. For example, two hours a week in workplace to focus on joy in the job could involve for someone passionate about singing the opportunity to develop a choir with other likeminded people and practice. Benefits for organisations include staff who are valued and loyal, with work being more than just a job, rather a space where their identity and uniqueness is recognised. Autonomy in work also has connections with freedom and was seen as important for joy in Smith (2014). Employers can take this on, with choice and autonomy shown to be a key area in improving joy for staff members (Perlo et al., 2017).

Joy cultivation in organisations would not be difficult to implement. Most of these government regulated structures require interviews or assessments to determine right fit, care, and other needs. Social workers could have a role in this as they regularly undertake assessments across sectors to identify strengths, risk, and protective factors. Having joy assessments undertaken with individuals at the beginning of their engagement with a system would allow a joy plan to be developed. This study has shown that the critical factors for joy maintenance are:

- Knowing yourself and what brings you joy, along with knowing what doesn't.

- Having access to these enablers and being free and supported to activate them
- Prioritising time to regularly fill up the joy tank
- Having hope
- Being valued for who you are

Social work is a well-placed profession to guide or develop joy assessments based on developed instruments such as the disposition of joy scale (Watkins et al., 2017) and the joy of life scale (Haugen et al., 2019). Understanding what brings joy for individuals, and developing plans to bring this into the daily setting will have many benefits for the person and institution. Higher productivity and engagement with learning, work, along with increased quality of life with the contagion affect should see positive results for society in all areas.

Chapter Summary

This discussion chapter has shown that joy can be cultivated with positive result for individuals, relationships, and wider societal structures. It has established that living with joy is a deliberate choice, associated with daily practices and choices, and that others have the ability to influence joy.

The types of joy that were associated with helping in hard times revealed that spiritual components have the ability to enhance joy, often associated with other spiritual themes such as hope, faith and gratitude practices. Other types of joy that helped through hard times, or enabled people to become active participants in the world were dispositional, radical and virtuous joy. Joy was found to be a strength which helped in difficult times, conversely difficult times was often the catalyst for the importance of joy to be recognised and discovered. Joy is a strength not only in hard times but all times as improves overall health and wellbeing.

The strength joy brought to individuals', relationships, and societal structures was discussed along with practical ways that joy could be nurtured in all these areas. It was contended that social work is a well-placed profession to advocate for the power of joy to be valued and pursued in Aotearoa New Zealand for benefit of social workers, and their work with others. Implications of a society where joy is present is exciting for the wellbeing of all citizens and this thesis makes a compelling case for how this is not only possible for individuals to achieve, but also an ethical duty of those entrusted with the wellbeing of others to promote.

The following conclusion chapter summarises the research, provides suggestions for how social workers can apply the findings from this research in their work, and offers recommendations for future research on joy cultivation.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this conclusion chapter the aim of the research will be evaluated. The key findings will be summarised, the relevance of social work as a profession that can be a vehicle for joy implementation will be discussed, along with recommendations for how this might be achieved. The importance of joy cultivation will be argued, and suggestions for furthering this will be presented. It will conclude with a reflection on this research journey.

Research Aim

The aim of this project was to provide insight and suggestions for how joy can be nurtured as a strength to promote wellbeing, and support transformative, positive engagement in society. By targeting how joy has helped people through hard times, it aimed to contribute knowledge to existing research on joy, and demonstrate the relevance of joy literacy for the social work profession. The qualitative method used in this study provides informed, evidence-based solutions for how joy can be nurtured in Aotearoa New Zealand. This research, involving semi-structured interviews with eight participants who identified joy as helping them through hard times, provides evidence that joy enhances coping abilities, can be found or motivated in difficult times, and supports wellbeing in all times. It can be learned and nurtured. People with joy are positively engaged with others and their joy is contagious. Popular social work modalities and theories, such as strength-based practice, systems theory, ecological systems model, and human development are well placed to assess and support joy in all fields of practice. Social workers should be cognisant that joy has its own features that strengthen, sustain, provide optimism and is a different way of viewing the world.

Summary of key findings

Participants had to find their own path to joy. This involved identifying what brought them joy, and actively pursuing these things. Common for all participants was spirituality, nature, active cognitive processing, deliberate practice, and identifying and avoiding stimulants which negatively impacted on their joy. Unprompted, all participants differentiated happiness from joy, associating the former with neo-liberalism, possessions, following popular trends, and selfish ambition. They all spoke of the contagion of joy, how they brought joy to others, and how their own joy facilitated an increase in joy for themselves.

Spirituality, a belief in something bigger than oneself, and a sense of purpose in life, was important for joy helping in hard times. Meditation, prayer, spiritual readings, worshipping, and gratitude practices

were all significant for joy for participants which is supported in the literature on Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu practices (Casioppo, 2020, Damon, 2003; Suttie, 2019), and while joy does not always involve spirituality, findings show it is greatly enhanced by this.

To cultivate joy, it is important to understand every person's uniqueness, and what will bring them joy. These did not involve material items for participants, and money did not feature at all as something critical to joy, rather the opposite which makes joy affordable for people regardless of budget. While realistic about the need to work, doing this to afford holidays, houses, latest fashion items were not viewed positively, rather as an attempt at status which was viewed as a joy destroyer. The time involved in earning money also negatively impacted on joy if one was in employment that did not bring joy or foster creativity. Working long hours also had a negative impact on family life. The key here is to find work that uses skills and abilities, and knowing one is contributing positively to society along with a good work/life balance. Employers that recognise workers strengths and can use these, either formally through task delegation, or informally through social, morale contribution can influence joy in the workplace. Benefits for organisations include staff who are valued and loyal, with work being more than just a job, instead a space where their identity and uniqueness is recognised.

The natural environment with its own ecosystem, beauty, unscathed by bureaucracy or artificial embellishment was another unanimous shared source of joy in the findings. Nature was often contrasted in this research with institutions such as schools and workplaces. The radical joy movement finds joy even in damaged environments, with the connection between humans acknowledging their environment being a source of healing (Whitaker, 2012). The participants reminisced on childhoods where they found joy in nature, and enabling this for future generations should be a goal for those advocating for wellbeing. An opportunity from the COVID-19 pandemic was the increased flexibility to work remotely or from home. This would enable children and caregivers the ability to live in environments where they could thrive in nature, while maintaining income.

The findings showed that joy is strongly linked with connections with others who had a significant positive or negative affect on participant's joy. Prioritising joy influencers involved making choices and putting boundaries in place against joy destroyers. While participants who spoke on this subject were clear about their avoidance of people, stimulants, and environments that took away from their joy, this is not always possible in a world where we have no control over our neighbours, colleagues, media we are subjected to, and policies, laws and mandates. As cognition is a large part of joy, understanding how to use this to minimise negative impacts on own joy may help overcome this.

Social workers can facilitate joy cultivation

Social workers can bring joy to the world and are well positioned to do so. While this task is not exclusive to the social work profession, indeed every institution and workplace charged with providing services or care to people can implement joy practices, social work has its own unique code of ethics and influence which includes commitment to positive societies with individuals flourishing in them, and overcoming challenges, which fit well with joy cultivation.

Social workers should advocate for joy-centred systems and processes at all system levels. Based on evidence from this research that joy can be cultivated, is positive, and can assist people through hard times, there is an ethical responsibility for social workers in regard to the public good. Nurturing joy in others requires one's own joy to be present and cared for to enable the contagion effect. Participants were clear that anyone who was leading any joy-promoting initiatives must firstly identify with joy and this is consistent with the contagion of joy factor. Social workers need to understand what brings other's joy and creatively nurture this.

The role modelling provided by a social worker, and the influence they have in times of need, can create a joy spark. This research provides practical solutions for how joy can be found, maintained, and cultivated for both social workers, and those they work to support.

To cultivate joy through the social work profession there are several steps:

1. Social work educators should understand the power of joy, how to nurture it, and incorporate opportunities for students to develop their own joy as part of their studies.
2. Social workers identify their own joy triggers, and implement joy practices to maintain this
3. Social work managers should commit to supporting a workplace of joy, promote the importance of this, and implement joy assessments plans to contribute and nurture the joy of employees.
4. Social workers responsible for policy development should understand joy, and consider joy when reviewing, contributing to, or creating documents of influence.
5. Social workers should understand their diverse communities and advocate for joy through challenging structures and systems that oppress joy for individuals and groups.
6. Joy conversations should be encouraged and normalised by all social workers in all fields of practice.

When working with clients, assessments and plans should include joy components that:

1. Provide safe spaces in which clients can let go of fears, and be vulnerable

2. Raise as appropriate, joy as a strength and complete joy assessments which include goals and plans to cultivate joy
3. Explore unique passions, creative interests, and provide opportunities to develop these.
4. Identify unique skills and facilitate use of these to contribute positively to their environment.
5. Support opportunities to explore spirituality and have spiritual encounters. This could include finding what parts of nature bring peace and gratitude and how to access these.

At a macro level:

1. Supporting policies that allow green spaces and natural environments for all to enjoy
2. Promoting work, lifestyle balance for individuals and advocate for rural living to valued with barriers removed from this.
3. Understand oppression and how overcoming this links directly to joy. Examine policies contributing to marginalisation of joy and have courage to articulate this.

Further, funds from the wellbeing budget could be released to relevant government ministries (for example, the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, Ministry for Social Development, Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, Ministry of Education), and allocated to implementing joy-based assessments and plans for people in their care. Research such as a pilot programme with participants from government funded institutions across sectors to consider the best strategies for cultivating joy across the entire population range would best inform how this could be accomplished. Consumers at grass roots levels identifying what brings joy, being supported to implement a joy plan, with joy dispositional scales to measure joy levels throughout the pilot would be one way to examine the success of this.

Researcher's reflections on this joy journey

The concept of doing a study on joy arrived in 2019. Ironically the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic which brought a global hard time followed shortly after, impacting negatively on the population's physical and mental health. The toll this caused made me question many times the appropriateness of the topic, not wanting to gaslight the lived experience of our population during this time. I also at times wondered the value of rigorous research to reach these findings as often they seemed like common sense, and people, in an attempt to be helpful, would often send me links to articles, or self-help practices, outlining similar themes and recommendations for joy cultivation. I recall my workplace promoting "Joyful June" during this time, with actions that were consistent with my findings, again

causing me to question if I was contributing anything new, or of value to the understanding of joy cultivation.

My own self-reported levels of joy fluctuated during the period of this thesis. Highs included the potential this research had to contribute to people living their best lives, being confirmed by other researchers. The participants excitement about the project and their lived experiences. The political nature of joy surprised and energised my interest in this subject given my commitment to social justice. The lows experienced were during the methodology chapter when grappling with the ontology and epistemology behind the research and the mixed views I held which did not neatly align with most models. The time taken with transcriptions, deciding on themes for the findings chapter caused angst as all discussion points were valuable but it was not logistically possible to include them all. Personally, this experience took a toll on all areas of my life with regular sacrifices being made to accomplish goals.

At times I got completely stuck with how to organise and present the chapters without seeming repetitive, doing my participants justice, and not boring my readers. As joy is a creative topic, my instinct was to include original art and poetry, things that bring me joy, which sadly was not possible. I had to keep myself on track to achieve the goal of robust academic research, and the timeframes for completion. The time this took caused concern as to the relevance of the findings, as joy is an emerging topic with new articles regularly emerging after literature review completion. Having had the learned experience of thesis writing, future projects will be organised differently allowing more time for reflection on methodology prior to research design, and literature review undertaken both before and after findings. Further extensions of this work will involve creativity as findings show the value of finding joy in work.

What kept me going was commitment to the individuals who participated in this study. Their belief in the power of joy and the importance of this research fuelled me. At times I was excited to see how their experiences confirmed the literature on joy cultivation, and was inspired by their stories, passion and belief for the promotion of this topic and how academic enquiry would showcase its value and importance for all. I was surprised and delighted as the literature and findings showed how relevant joy was for the social work profession, as individuals, and as influential helpers.

Reading back on my journaling throughout this process, I am incredibly proud to have completed this and overcome the many hurdles and doubt experienced along the way. The support and encouragement provided by my supervisors was highly valued when I was starting to despair.

Conducting this as a master's student, with guidance, and diligence to ensure quality, validated results, I am delighted it provides evidence to show the positive nature of joy and how it can be found. I have done the best I can with the time I had available and I am pleased that the project design provided a good vehicle to explore my aims, and the results achieved the most satisfying outcome, that joy cultivation is possible!

Let there be joy!

This research has shown that joy is life changing and powerful. Once people are aware of this, they can choose to develop and prioritise joy in their lives with many benefits that ultimately contribute towards a healthy, productive society. Individuals can achieve joy through identifying their own joy enablers and implementing boundaries on negative influencers. The social work profession can endorse and support joy cultivation which will have a positive impact for those they work with who are in need of support to get through hard times. The response of those that have financial and political power will largely determine how supported joy in society will be. The conclusion being; individuals, communities and government have the means to develop joy. This will require education and support for most initially as it is a different approach to life. Results show that joy is a strength that can help and prevent hard times. If prioritised and encouraged it will be a significant contributor to a healthy, flourishing, joyful Aotearoa New Zealand. Let there be joy!

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment Poster



The poster features a yellow background with a black border. At the top, a grey cloud-like shape contains the title 'How Joy Helps' in a serif font, with 'Joy' in orange and 'How' and 'Helps' in black. Below the title, the text 'If Joy has helped you get through hard times, your story can help others!' is centered in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Underneath, a paragraph in a smaller black font states: 'Participants are wanted for a research project that will explore how joy has helped people during difficult times.' At the bottom, a final line of text in a small black font reads: 'If this has caught your attention and you are interested in participating, or would like more information, please email the researcher: howjoyhelps@massey.ac.nz'

How Joy Helps

If Joy has helped you get through hard times, your story can help others!

Participants are wanted for a research project that will explore how joy has helped people during difficult times.

If this has caught your attention and you are interested in participating, or would like more information, please email the researcher: howjoyhelps@massey.ac.nz

Private Bag 11-222
Palmerston North 4442



INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for expressing interest in “How Joy Helps” which is the topic I am researching for my Master of Social Work through Massey University.

Knowledge in this area will assist with understanding how joy can be nurtured to enhance wellbeing.

I am seeking participants who have had joy help them in a difficult situation, are over 16 years of age and currently live in Aotearoa/New Zealand..

If joy has helped you during hardship, I would like to invite you to register your interest in this research project.

I am seeking to interview a range of participants with diverse faith, ethnicities, and life experience.

To help minimise any discomfort that may occur during this project, participants will:

- not currently be experiencing any crisis, distress, or actively engaging with mental health services
- have not been under any mental health service during the last 12 months.

Project Procedures

- If you are selected you will participate in a one hour (approx) semi-structured interview which will be audio recorded. This may be either face to face or online.
- After your interview I will email you with a transcript of the interview for you to approve. You will be able to remove, add or correct the transcript at this time.
- As a small token of appreciation, you will be given a Light House cinema gift voucher

Your personal information will only be accessible to the researcher and her academic supervisors. It will be stored securely. All digital data will be password protected, and hard copies will be kept in a locked cabinet. Your information will only be held for the duration of the research project (two years maximum) after which it will be destroyed. You will be anonymised in all information published from this project.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any questions
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview,
- stop, pause or terminate the interview at any time
- be provided with information about support services that can assist you should participation in this project cause you any discomfort.
- withdraw from the study at any time before 30 December 2021
- ask questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given a summary of the project findings when it is concluded

If you meet the criteria and would like to participate, or have any questions, I would love to hear from you. Please email me at howjoyhelps@massey.ac.nz. Alternatively, you may contact my primary supervisor Dr Kathryn Hay K.S.Hay@massey.ac.nz.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/42. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz.

Thank you for taking the time to read about my research project.

Your sincerely,

Donna Murphy

Appendix 3: Consent Form



Massey University
Private Bag 11-222
Palmerston North 4442



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read and understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me. Any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me
3. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name] hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4: Interview Guide



Semi-structured Interview

(Note the order may vary to allow natural flow and participants will be prompted to expand on answers at times to assist with richness of understanding/information)

Thank you for coming and participating in this research.

Preliminary Matters

- 1 Introduction – who I am
- 2 Topic – How Joy Helps
- 3 Aims and objective
- 4 Confidentiality, anonymity
- 5 Check criteria
- 6 Length, recording, data storage
- 7 Consent Form
- 8 Small gift voucher as thank you
- 9 Any questions?
- 10 Happy to continue?

Before we get under way, I need to emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers. You are the expert here and this is all about your experience of joy. You have much to offer to my research and I am really looking forward to hearing what you have to say.

The questions I have provided here will be used as a guide to assist our interview and at times I may prompt you to expand on answers. You may decline to answer any questions and may stop, pause or end this interview at any time. I acknowledge that talking about your hard time may cause you some discomfort and I am happy to go at your pace and allow you to have a break if you need or want one. I will provide you with a list of support services that you can seek assistance from should this process bring up any issues for you.

Please feel free to take time thinking about your answers and we can skip or go back to any questions when or as needed. I have allowed about an hour for this interview, and will let you know you when we have ten minutes remaining.

Questions:

1. Can we start with you explaining what joy means to you? How would you describe joy?
2. When did you first start to recognise or experience joy?

3. How frequently do you experience joy? In what situations?
4. Tell me about the situation that prompted you to participate in this research (a time when joy has been present when you were going through a hard time)?
 - a. How did you experience joy when you were in this situation?
 - b. How did joy help?
 - c. How do you know it was joy that was helping you?
 - d. How would you describe the feelings of joy in this situation?
5. In what other ways and situations do you think joy helps you?
6. How do you access joy? Can you do this when you want or need it?
7. In what ways do you nurture joy?
8. How would those close to you respond if I asked them about the presence of joy in your life?
 - a. Why would they think that?
9. How important is joy in your culture?
 - a. How is it experienced?
 - b. Do other people enhance your experience of joy? How?
 - c. In what ways do you express joy? How do others respond to this?
10. How do you think the joy you have could help others who are going through hard times? How would they get this?
11. How much value do you think society places on joy?
 - a. Why do you think that?
12. What do you think society would be like if everyone could access joy when they were having difficult times?
13. How could organisations or groups help people achieve this?
14. Before we close is there anything else on the topic of how joy helps that you would like to share or comment on?

Thank you very much for your participation, I will send you a typed transcript of this for you to review along with a transcript authority release form for you to return to me. Can I confirm again that you are happy for me to use this information to help with my research?

Appendix 5: Ethics approval



28/09/2021

Dear: Donna Murphy

Re: Ethics Application - SOB 21/42 - How Joy Helps

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

Human Ethics Southern B Committee at their meeting held on **Thursday, 12 August 2021**

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Appendix 6: Joy Actions for participants

