

The cover features three large, overlapping blue circles of varying shades (dark blue, medium blue, and light blue) arranged in a descending staircase pattern from top-right to bottom-right. Two thin, light blue diagonal lines cross the page from the top-left towards the bottom-right, intersecting the circles.

Laugh For No Reason

The Effect of Laughter Yoga Practice on the
Lives of Laughter Yoga Professionals

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degree of Masters in Science in Consciousness and
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*“When you laugh you change and when you change the whole world
changes”*

Dr. Madan Kataria, *Founder of Laughter Yoga and the Laughter Clubs global
movement*

Abstract

Laughter and humour have become a popular area of research during the past 30 years. Their physiological and psychological benefits have proved that they can be applied in multiple areas of human activity and dysfunctions, with uplifting and, in some cases, therapeutic results.

This research project differs, in the sense that it tempts to study a different kind of laughter than the majority of the ones that preceded it, and it focuses on qualitative rather than quantitative results.

Emphasis is given on the practice of Laughter Yoga (LY), in which laughter is self-generated and experienced as an exercise, with no use of external humourous stimuli. Six LY Professionals have shared their experience on the changes their practice has brought to their lives, in terms of their perception of laughing as an exercise (in comparison to humour provoked laughter), Quality of Life, joy, purpose in life and dealing with difficulties and stresses. The six participants have been interviewed and their experience has been analysed and presented using Heuristic Inquiry as described by Moustakas (1990). The findings have shown a definite affect of LY practice on the aforementioned areas, with distinct transformations of the participants' attitude and approach towards life.

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My sister, Eleni Skrekou, who traced this MSc course for me and gave me the opportunity to know myself and grow through its procedures. Thank you for pointing the road towards Laughter Yoga and keeping the faith even in difficult times.

I would also like to thank my tutor, Dr. Brian Les Lancaster. It may have been a distance learning, and thus solitude experience, nevertheless it's nice to know that you have someone with which you can share concerns, even if it is on-line!

My gratitude to You: Spirit of Laughter that you reside in all human beings! Getting to know you and accepting your existence in myself was and is one of the most self-transformative processes I experience.

Last, but not least, a big giggling thank you to the members of the Laughter Yoga community worldwide. Those that responded to my request for participants and the six of you whom I chose to analyse data from. You reassured, inspired, moved and touched aspects of my being I hadn't realise I possess.

Chapter One

Introduction

“Laughter has no language, knows no boundaries, does not discriminate between caste, creed, and colour. Laughter is a powerful emotion and has all the ingredients for uniting the entire world.” Dr. Madan Kataria

Laughter is one of the most positive emotions that can be experienced by human beings. It is a universal human behaviour found in all cultures worldwide. Its benefits have been experienced for centuries; nevertheless science has to exhibit findings from the last 30 years that research has been taking place. In most scientific researches, laughter is induced mentally, through humorous procedures. Later on changes are measured in bodily and brain functions. Thus laughter and humour are intertwined and studied in unison by scientists worldwide.

Laughter Yoga (LY) is a radical method of self-induced laughter. It does not presuppose humour or any kind of mental understanding as the cause of laughter. It follows the “fake it until you make it approach” and categorises laughter as a form of exercising which, as any other form of exercising, is good for the body, mind and soul.

I first got to know about LY in 2007, when I watched a video on the internet with people performing the routine. My judgement was that of “a severely paranormal adult behaviour” and I rejected it for what I thought it was. It was after having the experience of practicing it with other people for the first time, that I changed my perspective; it actually worked! Not only were other people laughing and enjoying themselves, but I was laughing as well! After my sister’s enthusiastic encouragement I decided to train as a Laughter Yoga Teacher with Dr. Kataria the same year. It was in 2008, exactly a year after my training that, along with my sister and associate, I was able to expose myself in the province we were living at the time, and founded a Laughter Club that held free of charge, weekly LY sessions for the community. At the same time I was a part-time student in the MSc course on Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology of John Moores University of Liverpool.

As the time for concluding on a theme for my Thesis’ object was drawing near, I thought of many different options, deriving from the material with which I had engaged through the course. It was not only up to one month before I had to announce the title of the project to my Professors, that I felt the need to look inside myself for the answer.

How had LY practice affected me as a human being? What are the changes I had seen and in which areas? With LY being a global phenomenon, was I alone in this transformative process?

I initially intended to study the effect of LY practice on the lives of people that practice it worldwide. My own experience lead me to realise, that the experience of a LY Professional is rather different than that of a person who participates in LY sessions for his/her own benefit and with no further responsibility. Soon enough the question surfaced in my mind:

What is the Effect of Laughter Yoga Practice on the Lives of Laughter Yoga Professionals?

Heuristic Inquiry as presented by Moustakas (1990) seemed the ideal research method of inquiry, since the researcher can, and needs to, involve deeply and fully with the phenomenon investigated. It is through the external dialogue between researcher and participants, and the internal procedures the former leads to, that the outcomes of the project are consciously brought into light and presented.

Chapter two

Literature Review

“A cheerful heart does good like a medicine: but a broken spirit makes one sick.”
Proverb 17:22 (Living Bible 1971)

Laughter is one of the first social vocalisations expressed by human infants (Gervais et al, 2005) and is a global, human behaviour. Darwin (1872) has studied its significance in evolutionary terms, yet the subject of laughter and humour has been studied scientifically in the short duration of the past 30 years.

Norman Cousins and his famous book ‘*Anatomy of an illness*’ (1979) have played an important role in raising scientific and popular interest towards laughter, humour and their benefits on human health. In it, he describes the role of laughter and positivity towards healing a severe collagen disease he was suffering from, in 1964. His acclaim that ten minutes of belly laughter lead him to two hours of painless sleep, has been used sideways, by laughter defenders and opponents, these past 30 years.

In evolutionary, biological terms, laughter can be distinguished in Duchenne: caused by a stimulus and with a coherent emotional response, and non-Duchenne: self-generated and with no emotional response (Keltner&Bonanno, 1997, Wild et al, 2003). Duchenne laughter is thus correlated with humour, while non-Dutchenne is “*a spontaneous conversational laughter that occurs in the absence of attempts at humor*” and may occur in times of discomfort or stress (Gervais et al, 2005, p.401). What happens then with non-spontaneous laughter, that is caused deliberately and with no external humorous stimulus, yet it does have an emotional response? In the, perhaps limited, literature review that I have performed for this research project, I have not, up to this point, met a characterisation or description of this kind of laughter. For the purposes of this thesis, I thus take the initiative to name this laughter self- Duchenne laughter, since it preserves an emotional response, but it is generated by the self and not an external humorous stimulus. Self-Dutchenne laughter is the kind of laughter practiced in LY sessions (see a detailed description of the practice and a LY Leader’s or Teacher’s responsibilities in Appendix A).

Returning back to recent researches, it seems that the majority of them were based on humour as a laughter stimulator. As Provine (1996) affirms, humour has been investigated by researchers more than any other laughter stimulus. I find worthy to examine some of the findings concerning laughter and its physiological and biochemical effects, along with opposing claims on the scientific value of these findings.

Medical researcher of stress Dr. Hans Selye has classified laughter as a form of eustress (‘eu’ meaning good in ancient Greek); a positive type of stress that helps to

adapt successfully to change and encourages a “feel good” feeling. This feeling is caused due to the release of adrenaline and non-adrenaline, and the stimulation-relaxation balancing effect laughter brings to our body and mind (Kataria, 1999).

Laughter therapy in nursing has also been documented to have therapeutic effects (reduction of hyper-tension) on patients (Herth, 1984). After Cousins’ (1979) claim on the analgesic effects of laughter a research project (Cogan et al, 1987) came to verify that discomfort thresholds were higher in adults that had experienced periods of laughter prior to the measurement, than those that had experienced mere distraction.

Humour related laughter decreases cortisol levels and modifies Natural Killer Cell activity (Berk et al, 1988,1989) fortifying the body’s immunity against disease.

In terms of cardiovascular activity, laughter can be considered an aerobic exercise, since 100 laughs a day are considered equal to 10 minutes of rowing or jogging (Fry, 1994). Laughter can also be considered as the body’s natural means of ventilation, as it consists of deep inhalation and full exhalation, providing oxygen to the cells (Kataria, 1999, p. 210).

The endothelium (the inner lining of blood vessels) seems to expand when laughing, increasing the blood’s flow and reducing the risk for cardiovascular diseases. Dr. Miller contacted a research project in 2005 (Kataria, 1999, p.211), measuring the 20 volunteers’ blood flow after having watched a comedy and a drama, with the former leading to an average 22% increase and the latter to an average of 35% decrease of blood flow activity.

All the aforementioned studies seem to bind humour with laughter, in a way that, at times, they seem to be using the two words to describe the same thing. In truth humour and laughter are two different mechanisms, triggered by different stimuli; Formal humour is “*a linguistic system that enables symbolic representations of the world to conceptually invoke the recognition of nonserious social incongruity*” (Gervais et al, 2005, p.418), while laughter is “*an event in the physical world*” (Mahoni, 2000); it is clear that humour is an intellectual, cognitive procedure, while laughter is a physical activity. The use of humour may or may not lead to laughter, since there are variables (cultural, emotional, intellectual, spiritual) that differentiate one’s reaction from another’s, to the same humorous stimulus. This raises many issues concerning the scientific validity of the above research projects, since most of them rely on comic videos and anecdote situations to provoke laughter, excluding each individual’s approach and understanding to humour. Nevertheless, quantified measurements regarding the physiological benefits of laughter and/or humour remain, drawing to the conclusion that laughter does indeed have a positive effect, though it should not be overestimated as a therapeutic tool (Snowden, 2003). It was Cousins himself that tried to clarify his position on his healing by saying: “[...] *laughter was just a metaphor for the entire range of the positive emotions [that lead to his healing, VS]. Hope, faith, love, will to live, cheerfulness, humor, creativity, playfulness,*

confidence, great expectations—all these, I believed had therapeutic value” (1983, p.50). Indeed these may be feelings that are triggered and enhanced by Self-Duchenne laughter, when it is practiced with a frequency, as this project tries to examine and clarify.

LY as a practice is based on Self-Duchenne laughter. Some unofficial researches, with questionable scientific approval, have proved that the benefits of laughter and/or humour also apply in the practice of LY. The first research, following appropriate scientific standards, concluded that LY helped patients/participants recovering from strokes, to lower their blood pressure and is an adequate therapeutic tool for their recovery. The -yet unpublished- study done by Dr. Ilona Papousek, shows that feelings of happiness caused by the practice of LY, can also influence the quality of life of the patients (Kataria, 1999). Another research (Beckman, Regier & Young, 2007) examined the benefits of regular LY sessions in stress indicators and emotional variables of people working in an IT company. The results showed improved personal efficacy (and the parameters it entails: assertiveness, optimism, motivation, adaptability, self regulation, actualization, acceptance, awareness) of the personnel, that also had a lasting effect of several weeks after the period of daily LY practice. The latest comparative study (Suraj-Narayan, 2009) examined the impact of LY exercises on stroke patients. The results were a reduction in post-stroke depression and in stroke-related pain, enhanced mobility, an easier recovery- in some cases- from cognitive deficits resulting from stroke, and improved communication skills.

Yet still, these LY related researches focus on the physiological benefits of self-Duchenne laughter. The overall experience of being a LY Professional that comes into regular contact with the method has not been examined. It is true that a LY Professional may indeed experience the physiological benefits of laughing but does the story end there?

I have been trained as a LY Teacher in October 2007 and I have been practicing it with people since October 2008. Drawn from my personal transformations I felt the need to come in contact with other LY Professionals and share views and experiences regarding our practice. Through the heuristic process, that will be analytically presented in chapter three, I created a questionnaire (see Appendix B) that relates LY to the participants’ personal perception of quality of life, joy, sense of purpose and reaction to life’s difficulties.

Knowing that these are subjective, perhaps philosophical meanings, I wanted to break through the pattern of quantification, as important and crucial it may be, and qualitatively touch areas that had, up to this point been left untouched. This heuristic journey has, and still remains, a dialogue between people, a sharing of goals, a reawakening of joy and personal power and a communion with the inner Spirit of Laughter.

The image that comes into mind when thinking about future perspectives that this project may bring is that of trying to peel an apple and managing simply to scrape it; it seems that there is a lot more depth into the qualitative effects that self-Dutchenne laughter, practiced in LY sessions, can have for LY Professionals and participants. I see this as only a –giggling- beginning.

Chapter three

Methodology

Heuristic Research

Heuristic inquiry differs from the traditional phenomenological paradigm. Phenomenology encourages detachment from the researched phenomenon, when in Heuristics it is with personal engagement and connection with it, that the findings emerge.

“Phenomenology ends with the essence of experience; heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience.” (Moustakas, 1990, p.39)

The process of heuristic inquiry commences with a question, which the primary researcher needs to shed light to, or answer. Towards the enlightenment of the question, the researcher may journey through different stages and concepts of engagement with the phenomenon:

-Identification with the focus of the inquiry; not only thinking upon it but actually being it, becoming one with it.

-Self dialogue; the researcher enters into a dialogue with the phenomenon, letting it flow from the individual to the general, from the self to collective experience.

-Tacit Knowing; inherent knowledge that cannot be intellectually explained but it is revealed through the process of the inquiry.

-Intuition; *“The bridge between the explicit and the tacit is the realm of the between, or the intuitive.”* (Moustakas, 1990, p.23)

-Indwelling; turning inwards in order to tap into the tacit and intuitive, through the practical engagement with the explicit.

-Focusing; creating the space within, through which the core themes of the experience are identified and connected to thoughts and feelings, leading to cognitive knowing.

-Internal Frame of Reference; the primal researcher returns to him/herself and personal experience to evaluate intuitive, tacit, explicit and any kind of knowledge. Interpersonal internal frames of reference, between researcher and participants build trusting relations that lead to empathic sharing of experience.

The Phases of Heuristic Research

-Initial Engagement. It is the procedure of surfacing-through self-dialogue and the aforementioned stages- the topic of interest, the phenomenon of investigation.

-Immersion. After the question has been clarified, the researcher enters into a state of living with it through every activity he has. Every situation in his/her life consists an opportunity to understand the nature of the phenomenon investigated.

-Incubation. The stage in which the researcher seizes to focus on the question and retreats from observing it, while the results of immersion settle in and continue to develop, outside of his/her immediate awareness.

-Illumination. A sudden breakthrough of meanings and clarifications, concerning the question, that is arising into conscious awareness. It may involve a change in perspective or aspects of the question that have remained untouched.

-Explication. An examination of what has been revealed in illumination. It involves self-observation of thoughts and feelings, in coherence with the input provided from the participants. The components of the phenomenon are realised and described, before they are put together and presented in unity.

-Creative Synthesis. The final stage, in which the components of the phenomenon are tacitly and intuitively presented in a narrative depiction, a poem, a painting, a story or any other form of creative expression.

Validation

With heuristic research having personal experience as the core of its methodology, a matter of subjectivity arises; it is from the personal experience of the primary researcher, along with the personal experiences of the participants, which are filtered through the former, that conclusions are drawn. These conclusions cannot be quantified and the validation criteria are restricted to participants' feedback on the arousing data.

The Research Question

Personal and professional development through the practice of LY has made me wonder:

What is the effect of LY practice on the lives of LY Professionals?

Research Design

Initial Engagement

Having experienced once more in the past the moments of enlightenment, along with the realisations occurring from heuristic research (Skrekou, 2009), I knew that it would be my choice of methodology for this thesis project.

With LY having played such an important role in my self-development, I felt the need to document and put into perspective the changes I have seen in my life these past two years of practicing it, alone and with other people. My initial idea was to interview people who participated in LY sessions with a frequency and for an adequate period of time.

Keeping into consideration that LY is a global phenomenon and practice, with people following the same norms in 65 countries around the world, I planned to interview whoever fulfilled the aforementioned criteria from countries representing all five continents.

My perspective changed when I thought of my own personal experience with LY and how I would be able to incorporate it in the project; the times in which I had just participated in LY sessions were outnumbered by the times I had lead them, or had taught others on leading them. I then decided to restrict my target group of potential participants to LY Professionals; certified (by Laughter Yoga International like myself), LY Leaders and Teachers from around the world.

This international aspect of the sample of participants, pointed to the internet as means of communicating. Semi structured interviews or reflective answers in writing would be given to a questionnaire I had conducted, after first contact was made through the global LY network (see recruitment email in Appendix C).

The questionnaire was inspired by the aspects of my life that I had seen change in through LY-namely quality of life, joy, sense of purpose in life, life and its difficulties-and the need to examine how the practice had affected other Professionals worldwide on these life aspects (see the questionnaire in Appendix B).

After the recruitment email was sent through the monthly LY Newsletter (in January 2010), I started getting responses that came up to 60 potential participants. I had decided, after receiving advice from my professors, that with the time I had in front of me, six participants were an adequate number to interview, or receive answers in reflective writing from.

After the first contact was made, I excluded a number of them, either because they were simple participants and not trained LY Leaders or Teachers, or because they had trained recently and had no, or little, professional experience up to that moment. That decreased the sample in 52 potential participants. The 52 participants then received the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix D), along with the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix E).

I gave the option of either conducting an interview through Skype software, after having set an appointment, either that of answering the questionnaire in reflective writing. By returning the consent form, the participants authorised recording, transcription and use of their interviews, or reflective answers, for the scope of the project. From the 52 potential participants, that I came to contact with, 22 were

willing to use Skype and 26 to answer in writing. From the first 22 I conducted 10 interviews, with the remaining 12 not answering back. From the second group of 26 people, I received nine written responses, from which only two matched the criterion of “reflective writing”.

I then concluded to the six final participants, which I had interviewed through Skype, judging by:

- Years of experience
- Frequency of practicing LY
- Representativeness of the country of origin.
- Sense of connection while interviewing.

Immersion & Incubation

Interviewing the 10 potential participants and reading the nine answers in writing was a unique experience; I realised that each and every one of them had his/her unique story to share, personal input that was beyond the questionnaire and that was creating a sense of connectedness and sharing between us. With some of these people I still communicate and share views or just laugh with!

The whole procedure took more time than I had originally designed; living busy lives along with the time differences made things a bit complicated regarding appointments. The first interview was conducted on the 21st of January and the last on the 3^d of March 2010. In the meantime I was replaying the recordings while performing irrelevant to the project activities in my house. It was an idea that came to mind spontaneously: instead of music to listen to recordings. I cannot measure how this procedure affected me and in which way, I can only say that a tender feeling of hope and unity prevailed during this period, along with a quite opposite feeling of interior sadness.

Up to that point and prior to the interview process, beside my seminars and sessions, I would daily laugh on my own. During the interview procedure, I failed to follow my personal practice, not feeling “in the laughing mood”. I started transcribing the six selected interviews and it seemed that one was taking longer than the other. Immersion was followed by incubation, since as soon as I finished with the 1st transcription I would spend two weeks and even more to proceed with the next one. During this period of two and a half months, I felt detached from laughter and that was evident for me in my LY practice. Each interview, each new transcription would fill me with positive feelings, but as soon as the transcription or the interview would finish, I would see myself sinking in laugh-less incubation once more.

Illumination, Explication & Creative Synthesis

After transcribing the 6th and last interview, I started reading the transcriptions again and again (see transcriptions in Appendix F), taking notes and high-lighting words and expressions. During this phase laughter regained its lost meaning. I could feel what the six co-researchers were feeling, I could be them and ultimately see them in me. I could feel empathy and connection in ways that words cannot describe. This period of illumination was followed by explication; individual depictions of each co-researcher and later on a composite depiction of their commonalities, that resulted into identifying two exemplary portraits from the six. The individual depictions were sent to the six participants, in the short period that had remained to deliver the essay, and five answered back with positive feedback. A creative synthesis was finally expressed concluding the heuristic process.

Chapter four

Results of the Inquiry

In this chapter the basic concepts, meanings and common elements of the research, are presented as they emerged from the co-researchers' interviews and transcriptions, in the form of a creative synthesis.

An individual depiction of each co-researcher follows, presenting personal characteristics and the views of each one, concerning LY and the core themes discussed in the questionnaire.

Through the initial composite depiction, derive two exemplary portraits, that have been chosen as the most representative of the six co-researchers.

Views, words, ideas and insights deriving from the data are merged with my own experience and lead to the creative synthesis; the changes LY has brought in our (the co-researchers' and my self's) lives.

4.1 The participants

In the table that follows you can find the distinct characteristics (name, date of interview, country of origin, age and gender) of the six co-researchers. In order to avoid identification I decided to refer to them as "co-researcher" (1) to (6), based on the date their interview was taken.

Name:	Date of interview:	Country of origin:	Age:	Gender:
Co-researcher (1)	21 st January 2010	Canada	57	Male
Co-researcher (2)	22 nd January 2010	Canada	59	Female
Co-researcher (3)	27 th January 2010	USA	57	Female
Co-researcher (4)	2 nd February 2010	Australia	59	Female
Co-researcher (5)	10 th February 2010	Denmark	45	Male
Co-Researcher (6)	3 rd March 2010	Sweden	56	Female

Table 4.1

4.2 Core issues/Composite Depiction

The core issues discussed in the six interviews are based on the questionnaire. Below one can find a summary of the answers given by the co-researchers for each core issue, emphasising on the commonalities between the six.

Perception of laughing as an exercise (self-Dutchenne laughter) in comparison to humour provoked laughter.

All six co-researchers recognised a difference between self-Dutchenne laughter and humour provoked laughter. The former is seen as a physical expression with the corresponding health benefits, while the latter is perceived as something intellectual, the formation of an idea in the mind that is triggered by external stimuli. Laughing as an exercise, as it is performed in LY, is seen as a self-generated procedure, in which an individual has the freedom to choose to do it or not. Humour provoked laughter is considered restrictive, since not all people respond with laughter to the same stimulus. Self-Dutchenne laughter thus, offers the opportunity to control laughter and connecting with others on a level beyond the intellectual.

Co-researcher (1) sees the two kinds of laughter starting “at opposite ends of the room and they eventually converge [...] eventually the end result can be [...] very very similar”.

Personal Definition of Quality of Life (QoL)

QoL is defined through two basic resultants, the physical and the spiritual. The physical aspect of QoL involves health, exercising, feeling good in the body and is considered as something to start with. In the spiritual aspect, QoL is defined as having the freedom to make choices, having a sense of control over life, living life according to one’s beliefs. An emphasis is given by all co-researchers to contributing; in the form of service to others. Other humans, and offering to them, cannot be excluded by the perceived QoL.

Interconnection between LY and QoL

All co-researchers recognised an interconnection between their LY practice and their QoL. They admitted that LY places them on the positive side of things, a fact that has given them a different perspective towards themselves, their confidence and their relationships with others. The personal well being LY brings is enhanced by the opportunity it offers to be of service to other people by spreading joy into their lives.

“It’s like laughter opened up my psyche, the mental me, and gave me an openness, a willingness to become more aware of who I am, what I’m doing here...” (Co-researcher (5)).

Affect of LY practice on the sense of connectedness to other people

LY has enhanced the co-researchers’ sense of connectedness to other people; their practice has brought personal transformations (comfort with one’s self, being at ease) which is expressed through talking about laughter and facial gestures, that attract other people like a magnet.

Comparison of connectedness before engaging to LY practice and at the present moment

There are three co-researchers recognising a sense of connectedness with other people prior to their engagement with LY, one that does not describe her stance on the subject prior to that, and two that can describe a definite change of attitude regarding the connectedness they are experiencing now. Nevertheless all participants have experienced a change in their sense of connectedness to people outside their immediate circle of family and friends. Co-researchers (2) and (5) feel that now they can connect to anybody, while co-researcher (4) feels that her already experienced sense of connectedness to others has multiplied by 100%.

Personal Definition of Joy

Joy is related with things in life that give pleasure and provoke a sense of comfort and peace. It is a childlike feeling of fun that is not connected with the mind but with the heart. Almost all participants defined joy time wise; joy is being present in the here and now. According to co-participant (6) “joy is to be in flow...no worries of the future...and no regrets of the past [...] It’s a sort of no-time consciousness, your heart-centered feeling, the feeling is really in the center, in your body.”

Joy in relation to LY practice

On the issue of how is LY connected with the co-researchers’ lives, they all recognised a twofold connection; in terms of laughing as a physical action, with the benefits it has for the body, and the joy this action brings to the soul. The majority of the co-researchers perceive their LY practice as a tool that helps them cultivate joy, a state of mind in everyday life and see a direct correlation between feeling joy and laughing.

Sense of belonging in a global community

With LY being a global movement all co-researchers expressed their sense of belonging to a community of like-minded people. Even if their other activities have to do with corresponding (physically or spiritually) with people around the globe, they all referred to the opportunity the LY global community offers to laugh with people in other places of the world. Five out of six have left their countries and participated in LY activities worldwide. All of them experience support and unity by the fact that there are people worldwide, following the same method and working for the same cause; bringing joy to themselves and ultimately peace to the planet.

Connection between LY practice and personal sense of purpose in life

All the co-researchers feel that experiencing joy for themselves and sharing joy with others is part of their purpose in life. Independently of each one’s involvement with LY, they all see it as a tool that helps them express their purpose in life, and enhances the other activities they consider as part of their personal purpose.

The components that LY entails that make them feel that were defined as spreading joy, sharing love, as well as connecting with other unknown people and bringing them closer to happiness.

LY and coping with life's difficulties and stresses

All participants (some more extensively than others) have seen a change of approach in life's difficulties and stresses through their LY practice. They all feel more optimistic and give less attention to stresses, since practicing LY and in comparison to the past. They use the LY techniques to overcome everyday stresses and bring themselves back to their personal centre of joy and peace. LY was described as a survival kick, a procedure that helps to lighten up and don't take life so seriously, a stress booster.

"I have become more calm in stressful situations, I am more at ease in those and I can also stop negative emotions and negative thoughts easier by saying 'OK! Hahaha!' or laugh silently" (co-researcher (6)).

The need to be a participant

Being a LY Professional means that you play a central role in coordinating the sessions and seminars. A core issue that came up in the interview process is that of needing to just participate in LY sessions instead of always leading them. The co-researchers didn't express the need to do it, but they all have experienced practicing LY with another LY Professional leading. They all find it interesting and educating for their practice, and feel it plays an important role in their sense of belonging to a global community.

4.3 Individual Depictions

Co-Researcher (2) (Co-R2)

Demographics and Background

Co-R2 is a 59 years old woman, living in a French speaking area of Canada. She has a background in IT, as a consultant and a school manager. She has been continuing her training in IT, up to the point when our interview was held on the 22nd of January 2010.

First Contact with LY and current engagement

Co-R2 got trained as a LY Teacher in 2003 by Dr. Kataria. She was one of the organisers of the seminar in her city, and a founding member of the Laughter Club there. She has had two trainings in the same year, and is now leading the local Laughter Club every once or twice per month, interchangeably with other leaders. She also offers corporate LY sessions. Informally, she uses LY related exercises in her business meetings as an ice breaker. At the moment, besides laughing alone, she leads approximately one formal LY session every two weeks. She makes sure to declare her

LY Professional attribute whenever she interacts with people, because she feels that, by simply declaring it, people permit themselves to let go.

Responses to Core Issues

Perception of laughing as an exercise (self-Dutchenne laughter) in comparison to humour provoked laughter

Co-R2 sees humour as an intellectual procedure where “you need to have someone else to prepare something”. Self-Dutchenne laughter for her is an exercise that she can practice whenever she feels the need to. It is a group procedure that leads to connecting with other people on the physical level, with the intellectual one following.

“[...] by just sharing a moment of physical exercise, and then we feel really well in our bodies and we can get like this kind of connection with the other people.”

Personal Definition of Quality of Life (QoL)

An emphasis is given by Co-R2 on the physical aspect of QoL; she considers all forms of exercising as a means to make one feel good inside his/her body. Herself practices aerobics, yoga, ski and wind-surfing in order to have this ‘well-being’ feeling inside her body, that can then be transmitted to other people through her “good vibes”. She considers herself as a QoL initiator amongst people, since she tries to apply the philosophy and techniques of LY when she is around others, so that they let themselves go and smile or even laugh.

Interconnection between LY and QoL

Co-R2 recognises a personal transformation through her LY practice, in terms of smiling and laughing more and around other people, “every time I am with people [I amVS] in a whole euphoria, very happy”. She feels that she cannot get affected by negative emotions in her environment, since her practice helps her to maintain a positive attitude, and also, at times, transmit it to others.

Affect of LY practice on the sense of connectedness to other people

According to Co-R2, her LY practice has had a definite affect to her sense of connectedness to others. She characterises her sense of connectedness prior to LY as “intellectual”; the connection was made when sharing views and speaking. She now realises that, she may not have an intellectual common ground with some people, but through the affect of her LY practice on herself, she can connect on a different level.

“So actually you can put me in any place with anybody, I can have fun with anybody!”

Personal Definition of Joy

Joy for Co-R2 has two distinct aspects:

-feeling good in the body (even if one is not healthy), in terms of accepting who one is and the situation he/she is experiencing.

-appreciating the present moment for what it is.

“Joy is always related to the present moment, so everywhere you go you can create joy.”

Joy in relation to LY practice

Co-R2 believes that joy can be felt by interacting with other people and feels that LY offers her that smiling, or laughing, interaction that leads to joy. For her, joy is a state of mind that can and should be experienced also outside LY sessions, in everyday life, even in difficult times.

Sense of belonging in a global community

Co-R2 feels a sense of belonging to a global community of LY Professionals and practitioners. She travels to other places of the world to offer LY seminars, and the fact that she can do that enhances her sense of belonging.

“For me it’s [LY VS] an international way of sharing and interacting to people, I am a part of a global village [...] I am powered on a special mission!”

Connection between LY practice and personal sense of purpose in life

Co-R2 sees a definite connection between her LY practice and her purpose in life; she sees “bringing happiness to other people” as exactly that, and she believes that by sharing joy and leading joyful activities one can experience joy in one’s self. The fact that she has practiced LY with humans of all ages and with good results, makes her feel that LY could be her purpose in life.

LY and coping with life’s difficulties and stresses

Practicing LY with groups and by herself, gives Co-R2 the strength to change her attitude towards the biggest difficulties in life. She practices laughing alone in outdoors environment to help her distress and overcome difficulties.

“Well, actually [with LY VS] I always have the survival kick.”

Need to be a participant

Co-R2 participates in several LY sessions a year without leading them. She enjoys it because she can let herself go, be more present and learn from other LY Leaders. Nevertheless it’s hard for her to just participate since she is always thinking like a LY Professional, trying to incorporate things in her sessions.

“[...] even when I am a participant I think as a leader. It’s part of my life to be a LY leader.”

Co-R2 considers important the change of attitude her LY practice has offered her; from being a person with regular “ups and downs”, through the six years that she has practiced LY, she feels that she is experiencing “a natural up”. LY has given her the opportunity to look back on her life and feel happy about all the experiences it has offered her, both “ups” and “downs”.

Co-Researcher (3) (Co-R3)

Demographics and Background

A woman of 57 years old, Co-R3 lives and practices LY in Southeast USA. With a background in teaching art, she thinks that LY has not only brought transformations in her life, but has also led her to new fields of teaching. She was teaching art before working as a ceramic artist for many years. She came to know LY at a point in her life when she was heavily into another project, but felt an intense need to contribute in her community.

First Contact with LY and current Engagement

Co-R3 was preparing a presentation for a seminar she was going to hold when she heard about LY on a radio show. She considered it interesting and searched for a Laughter Club near her area. She located one and participated in it for four weeks before she decided that LY was something she wanted to be trained to do. After a first attempt to get trained as a LY Leader that did not work out, she got her training by Dr. Kataria and became a LY Teacher in 2007.

When we held the interview, on the 27th of January 2010, she lead her own, weekly Laughter Club in her area, offered LY Leader trainings and sessions in her community (in clubs and organisations) and also had presented and performed LY in corporations. She has also written a guide for LY Leaders and was working on a brain fitness seminar for seniors.

Responses to Core Issues

Perception of laughing as an exercise (self-Dutchenne laughter) in comparison to humour provoked laughter.

Co-R3 distinguishes humour provoked laughter than self-Dutchenne laughter; she believes that both make one feel good but the former is not sustained laughter, as opposed to the latter. For Co-R3, laughing as an exercise has to do with duration and deep breathing, in order for one to get the maximum physiological benefits.

“[By laughing as an exercise VS] you get all this big basket of goodies as opposed to the humor [...] the momentary kick so to speak”

Personal Definition of Quality of Life (QoL)

For Co-R3 the basic minimum of QoL consists of the following:

- having the “basics”, in terms of having food and shelter.
- being “relatively healthy” and thus in the position to feel comfortable and perform the actions one desires.

With that as a prerequisite, Co-R3 recognises an extended QoL:

- having a “mind and spiritual wholeness”.
- “helping others” in the sense of contributing, so that others can feel good.
- having high self esteem.

The basic along with the extended QoL leads one to perform the actions he truly desires and receive “this whole package of what makes up a beautiful life.”

Interconnection between LY and QoL

Co-R3 recognises a “dramatic” improvement in her QoL by her LY practice, and she specifies it on her sense of self-worth, her sense of self, her contribution to the community she lives, her social networking and the feedback she gets from people on the effects of LY.

“[...] it’s hard to put it to words how it has made such a difference in my life and I’ve seen it make a difference at other people’s lives as well.”

Affect of LY practice on the sense of connectedness to other people

Co-R3 admits a difference on the way she connects with others now, and before her engagement with LY and she explains this change, as a change first occurring in herself; she feels more comfortable with herself now, which results to feeling more comfortable with other people too. She also feels that her practice has helped her become “less inhibited”, “more confident” and “more positive”, characteristics that she feels that also influence her sense of connectedness to others.

Personal Definition of Joy

Co-R3 sees joy as a sense of comfort:

- with life and what it brings towards her,
- with the environment she lives at. She feels that joy is related to a peaceful feeling about where one is in his/her life.

Joy in relation to LY practice

Co-R3 feels that LY is connected with joy in her life, in the sense that she is an initiator of joy when leading LY sessions and getting to know new people. She also admits that feeling of joy blending in with the rest of her life and changing her attitude towards it.

Sense of belonging in a global community

Co-R3's prior professions regarded working a lot by herself. She feels excited by the fact that she belongs in a global community that gives her the opportunity to meet and interact with so many different people. She interacts with other LY Professionals to give and take support.

“The global community is important, even the local community is important. We need connection, we need support. We're pioneers [...]”

Connection between LY practice and personal sense of purpose in life

LY came into Co-R3's life at a moment in which she felt she needed something new and different to contribute, “I was ready for something new, you know my life had kind of...you know how you go through life? And I was ready for something.”

She feels that LY has become her purpose in life since “everything went to the back burner when I heard about LY”. The main element she sees in LY that makes her feel that she is on the right direction, is the fact that she has the opportunity to teach people, something she has been doing all her life and that speaks to her heart.

LY and coping with life's difficulties and stresses

Co-R3 feels that, not only the practice, but also the philosophy of LY has helped her change her attitude towards life. She has started focusing more on the positive than on the negative side of things, and she now recognises the meaning behind situations that don't work out the way she would have preferred them to.

“I've gone from a 'glass empty' to a 'glass full' type of person. And I really have to contribute 99% of that to getting involved with this [LY VS]”.

Her practice reminds her that life does not have to be taken so seriously, and helps her to lighten up when difficulties occur.

Need to be a participant

Co-R3 practices LY alone and she occasionally visits other Laughter Clubs because she enjoys the sense of participation. For her, it's not a matter of needing but a matter of enjoying someone else leading a LY session. She admits that she can participate physically, but her mind continues to think as a LY Professional, evaluating the person leading the session.

Throughout the interview Co-R3 shared personal stories and explained how LY has transformed her life towards a joyful, enthusiastic perspective. She feels that she came into contact with LY after a series of synchronicities, that are now continuing to unfold, offering her the opportunity to meet new people and expand her teaching grounds.

“I feel like I am going in the right direction, so I’m just gonna keep walking.”

Co-Researcher (4) (Co-R4)

Demographics and Background

Co-R4 is a 59 years old woman living in Australia. She used to own an alternative healing centre in a province, offering therapies (Swedish massage, reflexology, counselling, Reiki) and courses (on self-esteem, meditating) before closing down her centre for personal reasons. She later on moved to the city, where she continued with practicing LY.

First contact with LY and current engagement

Co-R4 was drawn intuitively towards laughter and she came to know LY through a search she did on the internet. She was first trained as a LY Leader and founded a Laughter Club in the province she was living at the time. In 2004 she got her training with Dr. Kataria and became a LY Teacher. The Laughter Club went on for more than a year, up to the point when she had to move to the city where she founded her second Laughter Club. She has been training LY Leaders since 2004 and she offers voluntarily weekly sessions in her (second) Laughter Club for the past four years. She offers LY sessions in her community to groups that suffer from chronic illnesses (vision impoverishment, special needs), people with mental health issues (depression, nervous breakdown), and people recovering from cancer, as well as groups of elderly.

Responses to Core Issues

Perception of laughing as an exercise (self-Dutchenne laughter) in comparison to humour provoked laughter.

Co-R4 distinguishes laughing as an exercise and humour provoked laughter. She feels the former has helped her cultivate and broaden her sense of humour, since after five years of practicing LY she can now laugh more easily than before. She relates self-Dutchenne laughter with being childlike and considers it liberating from the analytical mind’s procedures. She also differentiates the two laughters in terms of the freedom of choice they give the individual:

“LY is actually deciding at that moment that you are giving yourself permission to laugh without a reason. But with comedy, you are going to have comedy deciding that something is going to make you laugh.”

Personal Definition of Quality of Life (QoL)

Co-R4 defines QoL as the ability:

- to be healthy and fit in order to enjoy what one has in his/her life,
- to laugh,
- to walk and talk,
- to enjoy the company of loved ones (family and friends).

She makes a definite exclusion of materialism in her definition of QoL.

Interconnection between LY and QoL

Co-R4 feels that her LY practice has an impact to all areas of her life because she can connect “through the heart” to others. She considers this connection essential for a balanced life, “When that [laughter VS] is happening on a daily basis, everything else falls into place [...] laughter menses everything else in my life.”. She emphasises on the improvement she has seen on her self-confidence, admitting that she was a self-confident person before, yet “my self-confidence has just sky-rocketed!”.

Affect of LY practice on the sense of connectedness to other people

Co-R4 believes that the joy that LY practice has brought in her life, is contagious and transmitted to others, who in turn are attracted to her. She refers to “the energy of laughter and joy” being “like a magnet to people wherever I go.”. She admits experiencing this sense of connectedness with other people in the past, but she feels that at the present moment “it has multiplied by 100%”, due to the qualities that LY has brought in her life.

Personal Definition of Joy

Co-R4 makes a distinction between happiness and joy, claiming that the first is a mind and the second a heart oriented procedure. She defines joy threefold:

- as a childlike behaviour and feeling,
- as a sense of enjoyment, that is experienced in the present moment,
- as a fearless state of being.

Joy in relation to LY practice

Co-R4 feels that LY is perhaps the main activity that gives her joy in her daily life; by practicing LY for five years she has changed her approach towards laughing and she has a life full of what she calls “natural laughter”. She can now experience joy by permitting herself to be childlike, in everyday life, and she is firm in relating joy with laughing, or at least smiling.

“I don’t think you can experience joy without a smile or at least without laughter, I think they are linked.”

Sense of belonging in a global community

Co-R4 has travelled around the world and has experienced the global connection with a community of like-minded people first hand. She admits that it is a “wonderful feeling” that “carries with you”, the knowledge that one can laugh with people all over the globe.

Connection between LY practice and personal sense of purpose in life

Co-R4 recognises an interconnection between her LY practice and her sense of purpose in life. Sharing joy through her practice and experiencing the effect that LY has on other people are the main components of LY, that make her believe that. She considers her practice as one of her purposes in life that “connects with everything else I do and it makes everything else I do even better.”

LY and coping with life’s difficulties and stresses

Co-R4 uses LY techniques to handle with stressful situations, perceiving stress as excessive energy in the body, that needs to find a way out, in order for it not to be harmful. She feels that laughter and deep breathing are excellent tools towards this direction. Her belief is “we’re all human beings and we go through all the emotions that human beings go through, but the sooner we get to laughter the better it is for us.”

Need to be a participant

Co-R4 has the opportunity to participate in LY sessions lead by other people if she feels the need to. At the same time she considers “making up new laughs” as a joyful activity, providing her the participant effect.

In conclusion Co-R4 summarizes the effect LY has had in her life in the following categories:

- obtaining an “instant distress tool”,
- increasing her laughter ability in terms of quality and quantity,
- having a tool that can be used to also help others,
- making a difference in people’s lives by talking about LY, leading sessions and teaching LY Leaders.

Co-Researcher (5) (Co-R5)

Demographics and Background

Co-R5 is a man of 45 years old, living in Denmark. He has a background in planning and logistics, in positions with high responsibilities and a big number of employees under his supervision.

First contact with LY and current engagement

Co-R5 has first heard about LY in 2000, when he was working in logistics and criticised it: “I thought these are nuts people, crazy people who are doing crazy things”. While experiencing a minor break down, he received an email on organising 2003’s World Laughter Day (WLD) in Denmark (for information on WLD see Appendix G). He considered participating, since it was a project that needed organising and planning, both skills he possessed. His first experience with LY was at the first meeting of people willing to organise WLD. He comments, “It was a revelation, it was eye opening, I never had so much fun in my life really.” Since then he continues to help in organising WLD in his country. In 2005 he, along with his associate, decided to create a company that offers LY seminars in companies, in Denmark and world-wide. The initial plan was for Co-R5 to organise and administrate and his associate to offer the workshops. In 2006 Co-R5 started participating in workshops and after some advice from his associate, was able to give his own laughter seminars. Since then, his main profession is to offer corporate courses, through his company. His associate and Co-R5 have expanded their courses’ thematology to positivity, being present in the moment and braking habits. Nevertheless he feels that “laughter is the beginning [...] the easiest, fastest, more efficient way to create connection [...]”.

Co-R5 was selected as a co-researcher, despite his lack of formal LY training due to his experience and frequent contact with LY.

Responses to Core Issues

Perception of laughing as an exercise (self-Dutchenne laughter) in comparison to humour provoked laughter.

Co-R5 sees humour provoked laughter as laughter that is depended on an idea. He finds this idea capable of producing laughter to some people but not all, since different people have different senses of humour. For him laughing as an exercise “is all about using laughter itself”. Co-R5 refers to an internal point of reference; one’s inner capacity to laugh, leaving external humorous stimuli out of the procedure. For him, by laughing as an exercise one is accessing his inner strength, a fact that leads to more laughter in one’s life.

Personal Definition of Quality of Life (QoL)

Co-R5's definition of QoL consists of:

-freedom of choice, in the sense that one is able to live life according to his/her personal convictions.

-sharing moments with loved ones. He is firm in clarifying that his loved ones don't owe him anything and that they are free to have their own convictions.

-“having space”, as in physical space and also in terms of having the time to do the things one desires.

Interconnection between LY and QoL

Co-R5 recognises a change of perception towards life, deriving from his LY practice.

“It's like laughter opened up my psyche, the mental me and gave me an openness, a willingness to become more aware of who I am and why I'm here.”

Affect of LY practice on the sense of connectedness to other people

Co-R5 recognises LY as a tool that has offered him a different approach towards other people and the role they play in his life. Before his engagement with LY he may have considered people as “enemies” or “obstacles”, but through his LY practice he feels “connected to everyone, even the ones that simply don't want to participate.”

Co-R5 has felt the will to share this knowledge of happiness in everyday life. He has organised two tours (in Europe and in USA) in which, along with two groups of people, they toured around countries and states, to show how laughter can help one open up and be more happy.

Personal Definition of Joy

He laconically, yet profoundly, states:

“Well my personal definition of joy is...to be able to see the fun in everything in life.”

Joy in relation to LY practice

Co-R5 sees LY as a “tool” that helps him cultivate joy in his life and at the same time he perceives his practice as a “cause”; the transformative cause of having an open perspective towards life.

Sense of belonging in a global community

Co-R5 places the fact that he is a part of a global community of like-minded people, in his general spiritual belief of unity and universal connection.

“Well my belief is that we are all one. [...] Everything in the universe is connected so of course it affects me having this knowledge.”

Connection between LY practice and personal sense of purpose in life

Through a procedure of internal search, Co-R5 has recognised his will to become more happy as a person in 2000, three years before getting acquainted with LY. He sees LY as the tool that brought him closer to personal happiness, and to the realisation that creating happiness for himself and for others, is ultimately his purpose in life. For the aforementioned reason he feels that, at the present time, LY is his purpose in life, without being certain that it will continue to be in the future.

“I knew back then that happiness was part of what I wanted to be. I just didn’t know how.”

LY and coping with life’s difficulties and stresses

Co-R5 feels that his LY practice has affected his approach towards stress and the difficulties of everyday life.

“Most often I don’t feel stressed and when I do, I often turn to laugh at the stress, whatever it is.”

He admits incorporating laughter in situations that he would not have in the past and he refers to the example of a physically painful situation, which laughter helped him overcome in a positive way.

Need to be a participant

Co-R5 does not recognise a need to participate in LY sessions without having a leading role. He enjoys laughing with his trainees at their LY sessions and he has also visited Laughter Clubs outside Denmark. It is easy for him to participate without having the judgmental role of the LY Professional.

In conclusion, Co-R5 has seen definite life changes from incorporating LY into his life; professionally he changed his career, he created -even more- worldwide connections and friendships with people than ever before. Spiritually he felt an opening regarding his attitude towards life and he found a tool to manifest his purpose in life “to create happiness in myself and others”. And last but not least, personally he has met the “woman of his dreams” with which he now shares a wonderful life and family!

4.4 Exemplary Portraits

Co-Researcher (1) and (6) were chosen as exemplary portraits, since their depictions are the most representative amongst the participants. Through their experience, one sees the effect LY can have on the life of a LY Professional, on the core issues that are discussed in this project.

Co-Researcher (1) (Co-R1)

This interview was my 1st for the research project. I must admit that despite my stress on the interview's flow and the technical details, it almost immediately entered into a flow, through which the core themes of the questionnaire were discussed and analysed.

Demographics and Background

Co-R1 is a man of 57 years old, living in an English speaking province of Canada. He has had many different activities before getting to know LY: he was a professional in wood crafting, a college instructor, a musician (drummer), a fitness instructor. His search for change in his life has resulted in getting acquainted with new things, LY being one of them. On the 21st of January, when we held the interview, he shared his experience of being a LY Professional, a fitness instructor, a part-time project manager and a leader of long-distance cycling groups, all at the same time.

First contact with LY and current engagement

Co-R1 first experienced LY in 2006, in a local fare in his town. He was dealing with a difficult professional situation and he felt “a little, down, a little sort of depressed” so he decided to try this experience without knowing what it was. After having tried it, he decided to train as a LY Teacher with the founder of the system, Dr. Kataria, who was holding a LY Teachers' training in his area a few months later. He describes his decision as “an epiphany”.

Two months after his training he founded a Laughter Club in his area that still offers monthly LY sessions, free of charge. He considers himself a person used to being exposed in front of people, due to his prior experience as a musician and a college instructor, so presenting LY to his community was an easy decision.

He has trained a group of LY leaders in his community and he offers voluntarily LY sessions in church groups, senior care facilities, and groups of people that suffer from chronic illnesses (arthritis, kidney deficiency). On the corporate side, along with his wife, they offer corporate LY sessions to government agencies, businesses and district employees in their community.

Responses to Core Issues

Perception of laughing as an exercise (self-Dutchenne laughter) in comparison to humour provoked laughter.

Co-R1 feels that laughing as an exercise and humour provoked laughter are two distinctly different procedures. In his words “they start at opposite ends of the room”. Nevertheless he believes that the result of these two procedures can be similar since “they eventually converge”.

Personal Definition of Quality of Life (QoL)

He defines QoL threefold:

- a prerequisite of physical and spiritual health, that expands in the actions one performs when having this prerequisite.
- the direct involvement of other human beings in one's life.
- a constant change of orientation and the existence of multiple activities in life.

Interconnection between LY and QoL

Co-R1 recognises a direct link between LY and QoL, since he feels that “laughter enhances the good side of life”. He sees it expanding from his personal sense of QoL to the people surrounding him socially, and to the leaders he has taught, from which he gets feedback. He firmly affirms “[LY VS]...it has become an unconsciously direct part of my QoL, so much that as I go out to my community and spend time with my friends and colleagues [...] my inner spirit of laughter recasts and bounces off other people and we are not just consciously laughing, it's just that we are all in a joyful state, joyful persons.”

Affect of LY practice on the sense of connectedness to other people

He considers himself a person experiencing connection to other people, through displaying compassion and empathy, throughout his life, yet he feels that his 3 years of experience as a LY Professional, have enhanced that, already existing, qualities.

Personal Definition of Joy

Co-R1 points out a definite connection between joy and time; he differentiates happiness from joy “happiness happens before and after joy” while joy is “a personal feeling in the moment [...] Joy as here and now”. He personally experiences joy by being present in the moment and by doing things that offer him pleasure.

Joy in relation to LY practice

He clearly relates the act of laughing to the “joyful feeling” produced while doing it. He admits having an inherent knowledge of that fact, that has also been affirmed by him studying Psychoneuroimmunology: “I believe it is a direct connection between hormonal response from laughing and that joyful feeling”.

Sense of belonging in a global community

Through travelling and working outside his country Co-R1 has felt for many years the feeling of global connectedness. The developments in the LY global movement (the growing popularity of World Laughter Day, the expansion of Laughter Clubs worldwide), along with the knowledge that people around the world follow the same

method and try to live according to the same convictions, make him feel professionally and spiritually connected.

“We are connected for sure...the mission of health, joy and world peace is a reality in some circles and it’s expanding [...] I was so committed when I realised I could actually do something concretely profound for world peace, just by having a Laughter Club and laughing with people around the world, it’s a relieving thing.”

Connection between LY practice and personal sense of purpose in life

Co-R1 sees himself as a person who has tried to find common ground between people and facilitate communication in conflicts from his early years. He feels that his LY practice is a tool helping him to continue towards fulfilling his purpose. He is in the path of discovering his purpose in life, and does not rule out LY as ultimately becoming exactly that.

The elements he sees in LY that make him feel that maybe it could become his purpose in life are:

-feeling joy

-exchanging love.

“[...] a wonderful outcome to learn to be a LY Professional is that the exchange of love is just a natural thing that people can just feel from me. And I am still learning to do that.”

LY and coping with life’s difficulties and stresses

Co-R1 uses LY in his daily life as most of the LY Professionals do. He finds that his practice works as “a natural defense for some stressful situations [...] it quickly disarms any stressful situation”. When confronted with a difficulty or a situation that laughter would not be accepted as a reaction, he laughs silently, coming into contact with his inner spirit of laughter.

Need to be a participant

There is no need from Co-R1’s side to simply participate in a LY session without being the leader. He has done so few times and he considers the existing online Laughter Clubs as a good way to get ‘the participant effect’.

“[when leading VS] I find myself responding directly to their [the participants’ VS] laughter, so I am a participant anyway!”

In conclusion Co-R1 has seen many benefits since being a LY Professional physical (a decrease in blood pressure and an increase in lung capacity) and mentally (a sense of well-being). He declares being associated with laughter not just by laughing but by being joyful in general:

“...that joy is expanding in my life just by being? And not necessarily laughing? ...I know it has changed my life, how people perceive me.”

According to Co-R1, LY came into his life to place the feeling of well-being upon an already satisfying life. He considers himself a lucky man!

Co-Researcher (6) (Co-R6)

Demographics and Background

Co-R6 is a woman, aged 56, currently living in Sweden. From her early years she was drawn to leave Sweden and come into contact with different cultures and people. She has lived in Switzerland, England, the USA, France, Australia and Belgium. She has studied International Business & Marketing, French and English law, Public health and she also has a teacher degree. Her professional background includes working in a family business, a textile company, a bank, a telecom firm, an export council, as a product manager and as a school headmaster. She is now employed in an education company, in business and marketing and she has recently become an ambassador for female entrepreneurship.

Fist contact with LY and current engagement

Co-R6's first contact with LY was through a television show in 2000; she was in a state of mourning several losses she had experienced in her family and friends' circle, and burnt out by her heavy work load. Her daughter encouraged her to get involved with LY and she got trained as a LY Leader in 2001. She has started her own Laughter Club in 2001, now meeting once a month. From 2001 until 2005 she was practicing LY alone and in her Laughter Club for her own well being and cure. In 2007 she got trained as a LY Teacher by Dr. Kataria. She has and still offers LY sessions to companies, organisations, health promoters and social events, part time, in her own company since 2005.

Responses to Core Issues

Perception of laughing as an exercise (self-Dutchenne laughter) in comparison to humour provoked laughter.

Co-R6 sees a difference between self-Dutchenne and humour provoked laughter in the following elements:

-point of reference; the former generates “from within” while the latter is based on a “punch line” and is “intellectual amusement”. She raises the issue of consideration that should derive from the people that do understand humour, to those that may not understand it and experience embarrassment.

-freedom of choice; she feels that laughing as an exercise is not so “sudden” as humour related laughter and that she can control it as a procedure and use by will, anytime.

Personal Definition of Quality of Life (QoL)

Co-R6 defines QoL:

- having social support,
- having a “sense of control” over life and making sure “it has some meaning”,
- an absence of pain, tension and mental illness,
- a presence of peace and
- freedom of choice.

Interconnection between LY and QoL

Co-R6 sees LY interconnecting with her QoL in two ways; regarding the service she offers to other people to “achieve another potential”, contributing to their positive state of mind. And also by the fact that she has seen mental health benefits by her practice, on the personal situation she was dealing with when she got to know LY. She feels that LY is a way for her to “reach [her VS] state of well being”.

Affect of LY practice on the sense of connectedness to other people

Co-R6 feels in a way “reconnected” to other people through her LY practice. Having been an international citizen in the past she had always carried a sense of connectedness, but now feels that she can “connect even easier than before” and even more with people she doesn’t know.

Personal Definition of Joy

Joy for Co-R6 is:

- “an intense well being feeling”,
- a feeling that is located in the body, coming from the heart,
- “a no-time consciousness” in terms of “being in flow”; not worrying for what the future may bring and not regretting for the past events life has brought.

Joy in relation to LY practice

Co-R6 categorises LY as a “body and soul” activity; laughter coming from the body and generating the feeling of joy. Along with other activities, like singing, dancing, painting, Co-R6 feels that “LY is to be in flow” and brings one back to the present moment.

Sense of belonging in a global community

The global LY community offers joy, strength and support to Co-R6. She gets a sense of belonging in “the family of LY people” that makes her overcome the difficulties

she may be experiencing in her country. Besides from the actual communication with LY Professionals she has actually met in her trips, she also receives this sense of support from the people that practice LY worldwide, that she may have not met, but observes their activity through the internet.

“It makes me happy [...] I feel good and glad within when I think about my laughter family!”

Connection between LY practice and personal sense of purpose in life

As the networking of LY unfolds for Co-R6 she feels that “it wants to grow within [her VS]”. She feels that maybe LY could indeed be a part of her purpose in life and that it is expanding as an activity at this period of her life.

“I’m not really sure that this is what I’m going to do as a full time work for the rest of my life, but it’s moving that way.”

The reasons why Co-R6 feels that LY plays an important role in her life’s purpose are:

- that it is a tool that “can help people to connect”,
- the fact that she can experience joy with unknown people,
- that it represents an “easy way” in combination with the strict and limiting procedures of the business world.

LY and coping with life’s difficulties and stresses

Co-R6 uses LY to overcome stressful situations in her life. She feels that it helps her remain peaceful and deal with difficulties in a more calm and balanced manner. LY helps her in conflict resolution, dealing with anger, worry or regression, in being more creative and getting new ideas. She also feels that one’s practice can also influence the attitude of the people surrounding him/her, as she has experienced firsthand with her colleagues.

Need to be a participant

Co-R6 doesn’t recognise a strong need to participate in LY sessions with someone else leading. Being the traveller that she is, she has visited several places outside Sweden, and has participated in other leader’s LY sessions. She makes herself the opportunity to meet with other LY Professionals, also in order to feel the supporting network she lacks in her country.

In conclusion Co-R6 has experienced mental healing and a change of perspective in life through her LY practice. She feels that LY has boosted her self-esteem in terms of permitting herself to act childlike and “do crazy things”.

“[...] put me in front of people and I can do almost anything now because I don’t worry about the outcome”, she says to support her self-accepting attitude.

Co-R6 can support experiencing physical changes by laughter, in terms of sleeping better and dealing with illnesses less often. Yet she believes that her perceived life changes are “more on the inside”.

4.5 Creative Synthesis

My indulgence with this project has resulted in this creative synthesis. In it, I see myself and the people that honoured me with sharing their stories. But in a way, I also see all human beings struggling with their inner sense of power and powerlessness.

A breeze in the field.

*

*

*

When waking up

In opening my eyes

I feel that neutral sense arise.

The past that haunts me

with fear, regret

with anger, sadness

with years that melt.

*

*

*

I’ tired.

Looking back

and chasing time.

Chasing dreams that are not mine.

*

*

*

By mere chance,

a twist of luck

a mirth

a smile

I open up.

*

*

*

What is there to find?

Confusion, guilt

I change my mind.

*

*

*

Where have you been for me to see?

For years I've walked through roads of healing

Before realising my laughter's meaning.

*

*

*

And bit by bit

I'm not afraid

To look the mirror where I prevail.

*

*

*

A maze

A cloud

of false and virtue

there, hope and sorrow blend into one.

Now that I've seen my true reflection

I will embrace it with affection.

Inside this mirror I saw me, laughing.

A strange behaviour

Am I a saviour and of whom?

As I look back at this reflection

The cloud refreshingly turns into rain

I realise my judgement was in vain.

*

*

*

My smiling self

a sense of joy

is present now

it feels the void.

*

*

*

Inside this mirror

I'm not alone

I see the world

no one unknown.

Where is the boundary
of “me” and “them”?
How can I laugh with them apart?

*

*

*

It starts alone
and ends in unison
as it is now there’s no confusion.

The path unfolding
with other hands

I feel them holding
with no demands.

*

*

*

At times I wonder still
Where can you take me?

Is the end near?
As I grow stronger

I feel no fear.

*

*

*

My feet walk on this ground
Where all of us are found.

*

*

*

To live, to laugh, to love and grow

And one day soon to truly know

The taste of love prevailing

when there will be no scaling.

*

*

*

Now come a time when I'll soon listen

To this true sound

Of your self laughing

inside my own.

And then in truth

no one unknown.

Chapter five

Reflections and Discussion

“This is the final chapter”, I find myself thinking with mixed emotions. Words are not enough to express my gratitude for doing this project. A journey commencing from the self, travelling, side by side, with potential participants and co-researchers, and resulting once again to the self. It could be well characterised as an interior and exterior struggle; working up to the last moment, facing technical issues, with a sense of enthusiasm and frustration at the same time. I feel that time was not enough, and that this project will continue working itself inside of me for a long time. As I walk on my path with LY, I can sense the presence of others walking beside me. The co-researchers, the global LY family, people in a far end corner of the world, that are laughing right now, and don’t know why! Essentially, self-Duchenne laughter is, one of the many, paths to reach self-knowledge and inner strength. This project made me realise that and, though I had already seen personal transformations, I was not able to recognise it for what it was.

While reading and rereading the texts, I feel that there was so much more depth in the interviews, so much warmth and sense of connectedness with the co-researchers. It is like the energy of laughter cannot be put into text with success. These people, and all the people that I came into contact with, but whose experience I could not incorporate in this essay, opened up their hearts to me. They shared their most personal life stories, their moments of weakness and fear. And they came about winners by choosing to laugh, alone and with other people. It was as simple and as complicated as that. Complicated because laughing as an exercise raises issues of criticism; from the person doing it towards him/herself and from the people that are surrounding him/her socially, that cannot exactly get why they are doing it for.

I took the initiative to transcend the categorisation of laughter to Duchenne and non-Duchenne (Gervais et al, 2005) and proposed a third type, self-Duchenne laughter. A characterisation that more or less describes laughing as an exercise; a self generated procedure with an analogous joyful emotional response.

Co-researchers in a way verify Dr. Selye’s findings (Kataria, 1999) and admit that self-Duchenne laughter has helped them change their perspective on life and feel good about themselves, accepting who they are and building self-confidence.

The core issues of the questionnaire have been examined, and the findings configure that LY has resulted in fascinating life changes for the co-researchers. There is a definite correlation of the findings with Beckman, Regier & Young (2007); though their sample had the common characteristic of working in an IT company instead of being LY Professionals, the findings nevertheless relate in terms of the practice bringing more optimism, awareness, acceptance to the participants’ lives. The project has shown that all co-researchers relate their practice with their QoL, with joy and being able to connect more with other people. They all have seen a change of attitude,

regarding difficulties and stresses, and have become more balanced and peaceful inside. Those that name LY as their life's purpose, and even those that don't, find that their practice entails characteristics (sharing joy and love with others) that makes them walk the path of life with greater confidence and support from the inside. A distinct emphasis was given by co-researchers to the issue of sharing their practice with the community, and in that way spreading joy and bringing happiness to other people's lives. A recent research (Fowler& Christakis, 2008) has verified the spread of happiness from one person to another in a social network, parallelising it with that of an infectious disease. This raises interesting issues on the effect one's personal happiness may have on his/her social circle; how can a group of people practicing LY affect the neighbourhood in which they practice it or even the entire city?

Still, there are a lot of issues that have been left untouched, some mentioned briefly in the interviews, but could not be examined due to time and world limit confinements.

-Health benefits and cures from diagnosed fatal diseases, on the physical level.

-The way a LY Professional perceives him/herself at the beginning of his/her practice and after a few years of practice, on a personal level.

-The way that a LY Professional is accepted socially and the consequences it has on him/her and his/her practice, on a social level.

I firmly believe that the issues mentioned above will be proven fertile, quantitative and qualitative, grounds for further research.

What else is left to do now than laugh for the sake of it?

Life is not funny but it can certainly be fun, if one sees the joy residing even in the darkest corners.

That joy's expression is laughing; alone and at the same time in unison with the ones that have opened themselves up to the possibility:

I laugh because I can and it makes feel good!

Because I am alive and growing!

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Appendix A

The following information is consisted of extracts from the Certified Laughter Yoga Teachers' Training Manual (version 2010)

“What Is Laughter Yoga?”

Laughter Yoga is a unique exercise routine, which combines unconditional laughter with yogic breathing (*Pranayama*). Anyone can laugh without relying on humor, jokes or comedy. Laughter is initially simulated as a physical exercise while maintaining eye contact with others in the group and promoting childlike playfulness. In most cases this soon leads to real and contagious laughter. Science has proved that the body cannot differentiate between simulated and real laughter. Laughter Yoga is the only technique that allows adults to achieve sustained hearty laughter without involving cognitive thought. It bypasses the intellectual systems that normally act as a brake on natural laughter.

Laughter Yoga sessions start with gentle warm-up techniques which include stretching, chanting, clapping and body movement. These help break down inhibitions and develop feelings of childlike playfulness. Breathing exercises are used to prepare the lungs for laughter, followed by a series of ‘laughter exercises’ that combine the method of acting and visualization techniques with playfulness. These exercises, when combined with the strong social dynamics of group behavior, lead to prolong and hearty unconditional laughter. Laughter exercises are interspersed with breathing exercises. Scientifically it has been proved that twenty minutes of laughter is sufficient to develop full physiological benefits.

A Laughter Yoga session may finish with ‘laughter meditation’. This is a session of unstructured laughter whereby participants sit or lie down and allow natural laughter to flow from within us like a fountain. This is a powerful experience that often leads to a healthy emotional catharsis and also a feeling of release and joyfulness that can last for days. This can be followed by guided relaxation exercises.

Why is it called Laughter Yoga?

The word “**Yoga**” arises from the Sanskrit root ‘**Yuj**’ which means to get hold of, integrate and harmonize. It means getting hold of our lives, integrating all aspects of life, harmonizing our bodies with our minds, spirits and society. There are many paths of Yoga. For example **Hatha Yoga** is concerned with balancing the energies through body postures or **Asanas**, **Karma Yoga** deals with actions of selfless service, kindness, and generosity (Mother Theresa was a famous Karma Yogi), **Bhakti Yoga** is Yoga of devotion, etc.

The primary reason Dr. Kataria named this technique “Laughter Yoga” was because he incorporated *Pranayama*, the ancient science of yogic breathing into laughter exercises. This has a powerful and immediate effect on our physiology and has been used for more than four thousand years to influence the body, mind and emotions. According to yogic philosophy, we are alive because the cosmic energy from the universe flows into our body through our breath which is the **Life Energy Force** or

“*Prana*”. The very essence of our life is breathing. Due to stress and negative emotions, our breathing becomes irregular and shallow, thus affecting the flow of *Prana* throughout the body.

From a medical point of view, the most important component of breath is oxygen. Dr. Otto Warburg, President, Institute of Cell Physiology and Nobel Prize Winner (Dr. Warburg is the only person ever to win the Nobel Prize for Medicine twice and be nominated for a third), said about the importance of oxygen:

“Deep breathing techniques increase oxygen to the cells and are the most important factors in living a disease-free and energetic life. When cells get enough oxygen, cancer will not and cannot occur.”

More Oxygen From Exhalation

The primary characteristic of yogic breathing (*Pranayama*) is that exhalation be longer than inhalation, thus ridding the lungs of residual air which is then replaced by fresh air containing a higher level of oxygen. A normal inhalation fills just 25% (tidal volume) of our total lung capacity. The remaining 75% (residual volume) remains filled with old stale air. Respiration becomes even shallower when compounded by stress. To keep our lungs healthy and provide enough oxygen for our bodies to perform at peak levels we need to take deeper breaths and flush the stale air from our lungs.

The secret to breathing deeper is to exhale longer than inhalation so that we can get rid of residual air in the lungs which has more carbon dioxide. In yogic breathing techniques people are taught to exhale longer by contracting the abdominal muscles which is not easy. Imagine what could be the easiest way to exhale longer? Just laugh. Laughter is the fastest and easiest method of exhaling longer and flushing our lungs. Therefore, deep breathing is not about inhalation; it is all about exhalation.

Training Your Diaphragm

Most laughter and yogic breathing exercises are intended to stimulate the movement of the diaphragm and abdominal muscles that help activate the parasympathetic system which is the calming branch of the autonomic nervous system. This is opposite to the sympathetic system which is the stress arousal system. The stress arousal sympathetic system can be turned off simply by learning to move the diaphragm. Two third of our breathing takes place from the movement of diaphragm and rest one third from intercostal and other chest muscles. Due to stress we stop using the diaphragm and our breathing becomes shallow and restricted to chest muscles only which leads to accumulation of carbon dioxide which can stimulate stress arousal system. Laughter Yoga focuses on training your diaphragm for breathing and laughing by using belly muscles. This is very much in accordance with yoga principles.

Laughter Yoga – Connecting People

Since meaning of yoga is to connect through unconditional laughter, the group members connect with each other quickly no matter which country or culture they belong to, what language they speak or how they live. Laughter Yoga promotes a strong union between those who laugh together resulting in family-like bond, providing social interaction and networking --- essential for happiness.

The goal of Laughter Yoga is to connect people with one another at heart level without judgment --- that is the true meaning of Yoga.

Inner Spirit of Laughter

Laughter Yoga goes beyond just laughter. With regular practice one can develop a positive mental attitude which will help people to go through challenging times or when it is difficult to laugh physically. This Inner spirit of laughter is your ability to stay alive and in positive mental state despite all challenges. Laughter Yoga can improve physical health, release negative thoughts and emotions, and helps to get in touch with the spiritual nature. It also helps to develop an attitude of forgiveness, generosity, compassion, and helpfulness while actively seeking the happiness of others.

Laughter Yoga often yields powerful unexpected changes --- these include:

A change from an 'I want'/taking/selfish state of mind to a loving/caring/giving state of mind with increased empathy and compassion towards the members of the laughter group and towards others as well.

A new ability to laugh at things that previously would have caused stress or anger, along with a new sense of forgiveness.

If you are happy and people around you are not happy they will not allow you to remain happy. A part of Laughter Yoga philosophy is to be mindful of bringing happiness to those around us --- this is essential for us to remain happy. The best way to make others happy is- appreciation and forgiveness. The Inner spirit of laughter promotes ideas of 'appreciation' and 'forgiveness' as powerful tools to connect with people and raise their spirits, thus increasing their happiness and also our own. Combined, these principles can provide a powerful life-changing experience.

Four Steps Of Laughter Yoga

Step 1: Clapping and Warming-up Exercises:

We clap with our hands parallel to each other for full finger-to-finger and palm-to-palm contact. This stimulates acupressure points in our hands and increases energy levels. Then we add a rhythm to the clapping to further increase energy levels and group synchronicity, often a 1-2, 1-2-3 rhythm.

Next we add movement. There are many variations, but most move hands up and down and swing from side to side, with corresponding movements of the legs and feet. By now most are already in a better mood and smiling.

Chanting and Moving: We add a simple chant to our clapping, normally HO, HO, HA-HA-HA. These are heavy exhalations that come from the belly to stimulate diaphragmatic breathing.

We move randomly, smiling and making eye contact with others in the group.

Many add dance movements to this sequence, which boosts feelings of happiness and joy.

Enthusiastic clapping, chanting and movement help build a positive energy, gets our diaphragm moving and creates a positive group dynamic, preparing us to laugh.

Gibberish Talking : Gibberish is a language of sounds without meaning. Children speak gibberish when learning to speak and during play. We sometimes use gibberish as a warming up exercise to help loosen people up and reduce inhibitions and shyness.

Some people find it easier if you tell them what to ‘talk’ about. Different emotions can be expressed including happiness, anger, sadness, romance and more. It is a playful exercise and helps cultivate childlike playfulness. Gibberish may be fast or at normal conversational speed and generally involves a focus on tone and hand and body movements to convey meaning. Silent gibberish is also fun and easier for some.

Step 2: Deep Breathing Exercises

Laughter exercises are interspersed with deep breathing exercises to help flush the lungs as well as bring physical and mental relaxation.

A typical deep breathing exercise:

From a relaxed standing position, bend forward at the waist to a point where you are comfortable (different for everyone) while exhaling through the mouth to fully empty lungs. Dangle your arms. Bending helps push the diaphragm up and empty your lungs. Hold briefly.

Straighten up slowly while inhaling through your nose and take as deep a breath as possible. Raise your arms to the sky, stretching your body slightly backwards. Hold your breath for 4-5 seconds.

Exhale slowly as you bring your arms down and bend forward. Try to exhale longer than you inhale in order to empty your lungs completely. Hold... then repeat.

A variation is to hold your breath a little longer, then letting the air burst forth in hearty laughter.

There is no necessity to do the breathing exercise after every laughter exercise. These exercises are designed to take a break and relaxation so that you don’t get tired doing laughter exercises continuously. You can decide according to your judgment after how many exercise to do these breathing exercises. You can do after two exercises or three exercises, depending upon the energy levels of the group.

Step 3: Childlike Playfulness

An objective of Laughter Yoga is to cultivate your childlike playfulness that helps you to laugh without reason. We sometimes chant after an exercise:

Very good (clap), **very good** (clap), **yeah** (swinging arms up into a Y shape with thumbs up in childish exuberance and exhilaration).

Chanting of very good, very good, yeah in between laughter exercises and breathing exercises the entire group keeps chanting very good very good yeah. This will help you to keep the energy levels and build up the enthusiasm. You can decide after how many exercises you should chant very good very good yeah.

Step 4: Laughter Exercises

They are divided into three types:

Yogic Laughter Exercises: Some exercises are based on yogic breathing (*Pranayama*), and a few are based on yoga postures, including the ever-popular Lion laughter performed with growling laughter.

Playful Laughter Exercises: These help to reduce inhibition and shyness and to convert simulated laughter into unconditional laughter. They often include methodacting techniques to shift our mindset, imagining and acting out a situation or a role. One-meter laughter, Milkshake laughter, Mobile phone laughter and Hot-soup laughter are especially popular.

Value-based Laughter Exercises: These are designed to ‘program’ positive feelings to gestures or situations while laughing, teaching our subconscious new auto-responses.

Visa card laughter, Appreciation laughter, Greeting laughter, and Forgiveness laughter are popular.

Physical Laughter Exercises: Some groups incorporate light physical exercises between bouts of laughter, especially when laughter clubs meet in the morning for seniors and special groups. Exercises chosen may promote mobility through stretching, ease cervical spondylosis, neck stiffness and frozen shoulders and other common complaints of seniors.

Some Laughter Yoga groups perform laughter exercises in a more energetic way and develop high energy exercises (like power yoga). This can be invigorating with very high levels of energy being generated.

Role of A Laughter Leader

Leadership Qualities: A successful laughter session requires a skilled leader. Their main function is to explain, start and stop different exercises, and to control and adjust the ‘pace’ of the session varying stretching and breathing with hearty laughter. The leader is an example to all and laughs more easily and infectiously than others.

In addition, a good leader is one who leads people from behind helping them to become leaders. In order to have a good relationship with other co-leaders, never find faults, instead look for positive qualities and profusely appreciate them. In other words, do not correct people; connect with them.

Motivate: The leader motivates others to drop their inhibitions and be more playful so that simulated laughter can change into genuine peals of hilarity using techniques including ‘motion creates emotion’. Be careful to interact with each person through eye contact and even physical proximity, especially those that require help getting into laughter.

Promote punctuality: Try to start on time and encourage your participants to be there. Punctuality is a sign of respect and getting to a session on time will reinforce their self esteem. However, if most people are unusually late one day due to a traffic jam, accident, sports event, etc., then ask the others if they mind waiting ten minutes to start (you will end late) and play a game to occupy and amuse those who have arrived.

Maintain discipline: Try to keep control through a loving attitude rather than through forceful behavior. Avoid confrontation during a session. If a member gets out of hand talk to them privately after the session and ask them to modify their behavior as a mark of respect towards the group.

Stay current and tune in: Laughter Yoga is evolving continuously worldwide. Try to keep up to date with improved techniques so you can deliver maximum benefit to your participants. Laughter Yoga International is building ways to capture the latest developments and deliver these to all Laughter Yoga leaders and professionals through a new website that promotes networking and sharing. We will also soon develop a continuing educational program. Please visit www.laughteryoga.org regularly and be sure to add your insights and experience so that all can benefit.”

Appendix B

Below you can find a copy of the Questionnaire:



Title of Study: 'Laugh for No Reason: The Effect of Laughter Yoga Practice on the Lives of Laughter Yoga Professionals'

Outline of Interview Schedule/Open-ended-answer questionnaire

Introductory Questions

1. Describe your first contact with Laughter Yoga (LY).
2. For how long have you been an active LY Leader/Teacher?
3. What would you say is your average engagement with LY within a time period of a week and in what type of activities?
4. What is your other profession besides LY?
5. Describe your perception of laughing as an exercise. Do you perceive it differently than humor-provoked laughter and in which sense?

'Laughter Yoga and Quality of Life' set of Questions

1. Define what the term Quality of Life means for you personally.
2. Do you recognize an interconnection between LY and your quality of life, and if yes, in which way? -The answer should cover: health, well-being, self-esteem, service to others, sense of personal achievement.
3. Would you say that your practice has affected the way you connect to other people?
4. Describe your sense of 'connectedness' to others before your engagement with LY and at the present moment.

'Laughter Yoga and Joy' set of Questions

1. What is your definition of Joy?
2. Is LY connected with Joy in your life and in which way? Helpful questions on this topic: Do you feel Joy only when you laugh? Do you see an interconnectedness between the presence of Joy in your life and the practice of LY?

'Laughter Yoga and Sense of Purpose in Life' set of Questions

1. Do you feel that you belong in a global community of like-minded people?
2. How does it affect you?
3. Do you see a connection between practicing LY and your sense of purpose in life?
4. Do you feel that LY is your purpose in life, and which components it entails make you feel that?

'Laughter Yoga and Life's Difficulties' set of Questions

1. Do you feel that your LY practice affects your approach towards life and its difficulties/stresses?
2. In which way?

Concluding Questions

1. Can you describe changes you have seen in your life since being a LY Professional, that you wish to mention and that have not been mentioned above?
2. What is your age or date of birth?

Appendix C

A copy of the recruitment email can be found below:

“Greetings to all Smiling/Laughing colleagues!

My name is Vasiliki Skrekou and I am a Laughter Yoga Teacher from Greece.

I am also a student in John Moores University of Liverpool, on my final year of obtaining an MSc in Consiousness and Transpersonal Psychology. This year is devoted in conducting a Thesis dissertation, and I decided that my research study should be, on what else? Laughter Yoga!

I have been a Laughter Yoga Teacher since 2007, and like most of you, have experienced magic life changes and transformations. My idea was to do a qualitative study on the effects of Laughter Yoga practice to us Laughter Yoga Professionals.

The title of the study is: 'Laugh For No Reason: The Effects of Laughter Yoga Practice on the Lives of Laughter Yoga Professionals'.

For this reason I invite you to participate, share your personal experience, and at the same time inspire others to open their lives to laughter!

The study requires 6-7 participants with good knowledge of the English language. In case you wish to participate you will have to give an interview through Skype (more like a conversation!) that will last approximately an hour. If you wish to participate but don't use Skype and prefer to write your views, I will send you a set of questions in which you can reflect and answer freely.

Feel free to contact me for details on: vasiliki@joyfulplanet.org or through skype at: vassilikiaegina (my skype id).

Last but not least! Thank you for making me acknowledge the sense of belonging to a global family of laughter promoters!

I await for your replies with great giggling anticipation!

With much Love and Laughter to all of you for the new year and beyond!

Vasiliki”

Appendix D

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Title of Project: *'Laugh for No Reason: The Effect of Laughter Yoga Practice on the Lives of Laughter Yoga Professionals'*.

Name of Researcher and School/Faculty: *Vasiliki Skrekou, School of Natural Sciences and Psychology.*

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide if you want to take part or not.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

This research project is the object of a Thesis dissertation, done to obtain the degree of 'MSc in Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology' in John Moore's University of Liverpool. It aims in examining the effects of Laughter Yoga (LY) practice in the lives of Laughter Yoga Professionals. LY, as a practice has not been researched a lot. The way LY Professionals perceive their practice has not been examined. This research project plans to recognize and analyze common characteristics and differences amongst LY Professionals and the way practicing LY has affected them & their lives.

2. Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do you will be given this information sheet and asked to sign a consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

3. What will happen to me if I take part?

This will be a qualitative research project, using the heuristics method to analyze data.

This means that you will have to give an interview regarding your experience as a LY Professional.

The interview will be held through the Skype software and you will have the chance to reflect and answer questions about your practice and how it affects your quality of life, your sense of joy, your sense of purpose in life, and the way it helps you handle with life's difficulties.

The interview will be held after having set an appointment, it will last approximately 1 hour and it will be recorded and then transcribed.

In case that you wish to participate and you don't have the means to give a verbal interview, a copy of the questions will be sent to you to answer in writing, with open-ended answers in the form of personal reflection.

The study will last from December 2009 until May 2010.

After the interviews have been transcribed and the first stage of processing has taken place, the first findings will be sent to you (around March 2010) through email, in order to get your opinion and feedback.

After May 2010, and when the Thesis has been awarded a mark, you will be sent a copy through email to keep in your personal file.

4. Are there any risks / benefits involved?

There are no risks regarding your participation. You will have the chance to reflect and put into perspective, the effects of being a LY professional in your self and in your life. Your participation in the project will help in the identification of common characteristics and differences amongst the way LY Professionals around the globe perceive their role.

5. Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Your participation will be strictly confidential. Your contact details will be used only to contact you during the research procedure and the sharing of findings. Any quotations that may be used directly in the Thesis dissertation will not identify you in any other way, than that of being a LY Professional.

Contact Details of Researcher

Name of Researcher: *Vasiliki Skrekou*

Contact Details:

[Primary email:vasiliki@joyfulplanet.org](mailto:vasiliki@joyfulplanet.org)

Secondary email: V.skrekou@2007.ljmu.ac.uk

Skype ID: *vassilikiaegina*

Appendix E

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Title of Project: *'Laugh for No Reason: The Effect of Laughter Yoga Practice on the Lives of Laughter Yoga Professionals'*

Name of Researcher and School/Faculty: *Vasiliki Skrekou, School of Natural Sciences and Psychology.*

Please mark with an X in the box if you affirm.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights.
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential.
4. I understand that my interview recording will be used only for obtaining findings for this research project, and that any verbal quotations used in the findings will be done so anonymously.
5. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant :

Date:

Appendix F

The following material concerning World Laughter Day has been retrieved on April 20th from: <http://www.worldlaughterday.org>

“World Laughter Day

History

World Laughter Day was created in 1998 by Dr. Madan Kataria, founder of the worldwide Laughter Yoga movement. The celebration of World Laughter Day is a positive manifestation for world peace and is intended to build up a global consciousness of brotherhood and friendship through laughter. Its popularity has grown exponentially with that of the Laughter Yoga movement now counting over 6000 Laughter Clubs in more than 65 countries.

The first World Laughter Day gathering took place in Mumbai, India, in 1998. Twelve thousand members from local and international laughter clubs joined together in a mega laughter session.

“HAPPY-DEMIC” was the first World Laughter Day gathering outside India. It took place in the year 2000 in Copenhagen, Denmark where more than 10,000 people gathered at Town Hall Square. It was the largest ever gathering that laughed and bonded together and the event went into the Guinness Book of World records.

Why World Laughter Day

One of Dr. Kataria’s objectives for Laughter Yoga is to promote world peace through laughter. Some people find this idea fanciful, but an understanding of the science of emotions and emotional contagion in particular shows how this might be achieved. The practice of Laughter Yoga causes the body to release certain ‘Feel Good’ hormones into the bloodstream related to feelings of happiness, warmth, unconditional love, bonding, tolerance, forgiveness, generosity, and compassion. Let’s call this a joy cocktail. The presence of this ‘Joy Cocktail’ of hormones and neuro-peptides precludes the production of other hormones and neuro-peptides that correspond with hatred, fear, violence, jealousy, aggression and the emotions associated with war and oppression.

By practicing Laughter Yoga in groups, the level of this Joy cocktail is raised to high concentrations through the multiplier effect: people leaving Laughter Yoga sessions go forth and interact with many people who are in turn affected to varying degrees by this powerful emotional state of joy. They in turn ‘infect’ other people they come into contact with. You can experience this ‘chain reaction’ after your very first Laughter Yoga session. Not only will you cheer up your friends and family but you may also cheer up the bus driver and others on your bus, the people you work with, the staff at the shop and more. They in turn will cheer up others, and so on. By having tens of thousands of laughter clubs all over the world, it will create a positive energy which will change the consciousness of the globe for the better. Actually, the formula for world peace is very simple – one person at a time multiplies it and spread it...

“When you laugh, you change and when you change the whole world changes around you.” Dr. Madan Kataria

Nowadays, people face enormous stress and are at war with themselves. Laughter is a positive and powerful emotion which helps people to change themselves and to change the world in a peaceful and positive way. Laughter is a universal language which has the potential to unite humanity without religion. It establishes a common link between various religions and creates a new world order.

Celebrating World Laughter Day

World Laughter Day is customarily celebrated on the first Sunday of May every year. This year on the 2nd of May, the world will once again come together to laugh and spread the word of happiness and joy. The Laughter Clubs movement is a global initiative to unite entire mankind through unconditional love and laughter. It is a non-religious, non-racial and non profit organization committed to generate good health, joy and world peace through laughter. This revolutionary idea has changed the lives of hundreds and thousands of people around the world and has helped them to attain a state of complete wellness.

Format

The usual format of WLD celebration is the congregation of laughter club members, their families and friends at some important landmark in their city like big squares, public parks or auditoriums and laugh collectively. They pray for world peace and read out the message from Dr. Kataria.

In India, laughter club members gather in public parks and take out a procession or a Peace march. They carry banners and placards such as -

- “World Peace Through Laughter”,
- “The Whole World Is An Extended Family”,
- “Laugh & Make Others Laugh”,
- “Join Laughter Club – It’s FREE!” etc.

During the march all chant **“Ho, Ho, Ha, Ha, Ha”** and **“very good, very good, yeah!”** clapping and dancing. After walking some distance, they stop to do a few Laughter Yoga exercises and then move on. At the end of the march, they assemble on a stage or platform where laughter leaders conduct a brief 10 min laughter session followed by reading of Dr. Kataria’s message for World Peace.

This is followed by a variety entertainment program of music, dance and laughter contests. One can organize contests with prizes like: Best laughing man / woman / child / senior, Horrible singing contest, etc. Winners are those with the most infectious, natural and effortless laughter for no reason.”