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How to be Happy by Calling for Change: Constructs of Happiness and Meaningfulness Amongst Social Movement Activists

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how social movement activists view happiness in relation to their political involvement. Interviewers asked activists questions about their personal histories and feelings. The phenomenological strategy involved focused on interviews with subjects who could speak richly about their commitments and emotions. The data from the 11 subjects revealed that there was no simple relationship between a commitment to social activism and subjects' experiences of happiness. Several subjects oriented their responses to the relationship between meaningfulness, activism, and happiness. In discussion of the analyzed data, the authors suggest that a relationship is evident between the positions articulated by interviewees and their levels of engagement in and withdrawal from activism

Keywords

Activism, Happiness, Commitment, Withdrawal, and Meaningfulness

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How to be Happy by Calling for Change: Constructs of Happiness and Meaningfulness Amongst Social Movement Activists

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This paper focuses on how social movement activists view happiness in relation to their political involvement. Interviewers asked activists questions about their personal histories and feelings. The phenomenological strategy involved focused on interviews with subjects who could speak richly about their commitments and emotions. The data from the 11 subjects revealed that there was no simple relationship between a commitment to social activism and subjects' experiences of happiness. Several subjects oriented their responses to the relationship between meaningfulness, activism, and happiness. In discussion of the analyzed data, the authors suggest that a relationship is evident between the positions articulated by interviewees and their levels of engagement in and withdrawal from activism. Key Words: Activism, Happiness, Commitment, Withdrawal, and Meaningfulness

Introduction

Happiness studies represent a growing area of interdisciplinary scholarship. It has two distinct streams. Philosophical works examine the history of ideas about happiness and champion their relevance (de Botton, 2001; McMahon, 2006; Nussbaum, 2001). The Greeks celebrated happiness as an enactment of the good life. For philosophy, this gives us some ideas about how we should live. A second smaller stream treats happiness as an emotional dimension of life. It is this stream that the authors are drawing upon. It groups together a small number of different kinds of studies in the social sciences and psychology. This paper is based on a qualitative study designed specifically to privilege individuals' accounts of their own understandings of happiness and their reflections on the part they think it plays in their own lives. This project was stimulated by the lack of qualitative, particularly phenomenological, research on happiness that could generate deeper insights into how people grapple with issues of happiness.

The two streams of interdisciplinary scholarship on happiness have, with a few notable exceptions, yet to show direct interest in political lives. Similarly, happiness is a neglected topic in another field, that of social movement research, which is also dominated by quantitative approaches. This is all the more astonishing as the few qualitative studies of other emotions in the sociology of social movements reveal an abundance of other emotions at play including fear, anger, hope, and despair (Pharr, 1981; Roseneil, 1995). Moreover, an increasing number of such studies are focusing on social actors' own interpretation of their own emotions (Davis, 2002; Suh, 2001). Brysk's (2000) study of transnational organizing amongst Latin America's indigenous peoples

uses a hermeneutic methodology to interpret interviews with leading Indian activists and advocates in order to bring out processes of identity formation. Sasaki-Uemura's (2001) programme highlights the participants' views in four Japanese citizens' movements. Maddison and Scalmer (2006) have produced a phenomenology of the practical knowledge of Australian activists. Yet, despite the growth of the number of studies of emotions and apart from the valuable studies detailed above, there is an absence of research regarding happiness amongst activists.

As an outcome of the rise of protest movements in the 1960s, many sociologists turned from analyzing such phenomena as manifestations of collective behavior and started to explore how their participants made sense of their experiences of activism (Gamson, Fireman, & Rytina 1982; Manbridge & Morris, 2001; Melucci, 1989; Morris & Mueller, 1992; Smelser 1963; Turner & Killian, 1972). Such research opens the way to a qualitative approach, where each individual's specific understanding of meaning and any connected emotions can be explored. Nonetheless, the emotionality of politics in general has not been widely explored, even in political sociology (Holmes, 2004a), much less the emotionality of everyday political life such as that found in the social movements.¹ The subcultures of movements are primed for research by scholars in the sociology of emotions. This field of research should turn its attention to social movements as a distinct kind of emotional crucible because it has always concerned itself with the nuances of affect in particular societal contexts. This emotionality, in the view of the current authors, calls for an interpretive approach in order to capture a spectrum of feelings described by activists.

A glance at the existing qualitative literature highlights the context-specific forms of emotion engendered in the milieus of social movements (Andrews, 1991; Cieri & Peeps, 2000; Crossly, 1998, 2002; Downton & Wehr, 1997; Holmes, 2004b; Marwell, Aitken & Demerath, 1987; McAdam, 1991; Tarrow, 1998). A further group of sociologists examine the ups and downs of what they characterize as a repeating pattern of protest (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Tarrow, 1989; Tilly, 1978). This so-called cycles-of-protest perspective is well-placed to research the cyclical nature of protesters' emotional reactions to campaigning, but does not. Indeed, few research programs rank happiness or the value judgment of meaningfulness as a prime concern of qualitative analysis. Opportunities have been missed or, more often, overlooked, due to a theoretical priority placed on identifying emotions and then explaining what causes them. The field is thus wide open to the employment of qualitative methodologies that can more richly catalogue the finely grained complexity of activists' emotional experiences and value judgments in social movements.

The current study focuses upon activists' constructions of happiness and the sense of meaningfulness that they develop through social movement activity. By meaningfulness, we mean the judgments that subjects articulate that their activism has a significant impact on those in their networks and possibly the wider world. When we come to the themes section below, we will distinguish between activists' self-understanding of being different from the rest of the world and meaningfulness stemming from sociability and camaraderie fostered through intense shared experiences. Those

¹ There is, of course, an existing body of studies that use quantitative methods to try and explore the nuances of emotional intensity (Klandermans, 1997) and the relationship between levels of political involvement of the citizenry and wellbeing (Frey & Stutzer, 2002).

results and findings were arrived at through a phenomenological approach to our guiding research questions:

1. Is there something that activists regard as “happiness” in what they and their comrades do?
2. How does that “happiness” relate to anger and stress?

Phenomenology is well-suited to exploring these questions with a small pool of participants, as it turns attention to everyday experiences in the individual’s lifeworld in which subjective meaning is developed and transformed (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). In this manner, following Liamputtong and Ezzy we have paid attention to emotions such as happiness and value judgments such as meaningfulness in the specific social context of activism.

The approach taken here is influenced by Ricouer’s (1988) notion of narrative identity, which presumes that identity is altered throughout a person’s life through a process of ongoing self-reinterpretation. How people change can best be understood through exploring their narrated personal history with them. The activists interviewed for this study are such self-interpreting subjects and so the interviews began with their life story. We were interested in how they narrated the meanings that they attach to their emotions and thus scheduled specific questions about happiness to follow on from the backdrop of their life stories. Ricouer’s understanding of phenomenology has appeal as it starts from the actor’s life. Like many other qualitative approaches, particularly grounded theory, it spurns deductive methodologies that privilege the structuring of research by strong pre-set hypotheses, and it is open to re-direction that results from consideration of subjects’ perspectives (Ezzy, 2002).

Our approach worked from this foundation, but also utilized some a priori conceptual development, which was built into our semi-structured interview process. We were mindful of striking a balance between our preparations for interviews and open-endedness in engagement with our subjects. Thus, the in-depth interviews touched on a variety of emotions felt and witnessed: anger, despair, guilt, and resignation, as well as happiness. The interviewers were interested in comments around the emotions identified in our preparation, but were nonetheless alert to other issues that emerged during the interviews and in the analysis. In discussions around these emotions, we found that respondents’ comments gave insight into both their sense of meaningfulness and their sense of connection with like-minded others.

Three aspects of the overall project are discussed in this paper; this study’s qualitative methodology, a discussion of the emotions specific to the subjects’ own experiences of the world of activism, and a profile of the emotions thrown up by relations with other activists that emerged from the interviews.

Method

Using semi-structured interviews helped the researchers open up conversations with activists about what they remembered of their endeavors and what general reflections they had on their political lives. The structure was set by a schedule of open-ended questions, by the researchers’ practice of reflecting subjects’ comments back to

them to verify that the researchers were clear in their understanding, and by the use of probes to focus particular points in the conversation. The veracity of memory of events in the interviewees' lives was not in question here. Instead, the emotional value they attached to what they have done was teased out. This section outlines our methodology, sampling technique, the project's ethical approval by our University's Ethic Committee, the sample's diversity, interview procedures, and finally, data analysis and thematization.

In order to reach the depth of emotional experiences the researchers were interested in, while keeping the research manageable in scope, it was decided to draw a small, though diverse, sample and carry out focused interviews. The sampling method was purposive (Ezzy, 2002; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005) and looked for information-rich subjects, who could reflect deeply on their commitments from the standpoint of an "examined life." We understand the examined life, a Socratic notion, to be one in which there is a strong sense of conscious self-direction (de Botton, 2001). In such a life, goals and premises are interrogated. Part of this involves questioning obvious, everyday things like emotions. Subjects who hold commonsense, taken-for-granted ideas up to scrutiny, and respect their complexity were sought after. The activists identified for this study were selected for what the researchers estimated to be their potential to give robust responses in an interview that dealt with complex issues about emotions and activist commitment.

Subjects were therefore sought out from the researchers' own networks on the basis of a clear rationale: their ability to elaborate rich responses on experienced emotions associated with social activism and on the emotions themselves as social categories. The fact that all were known to the researchers enabled us to estimate their potential for self-inspection. This method of sampling also entailed a risk that the activists could limit what they reveal due to an established familiarity with the researchers. Conversely, the method also took advantage of that familiarity. The researchers could walk into the interview with some confidence about what to expect. Trust is an important element for some activists who might be guarded about details of their activities, colleagues, and networks. Scholars who are also insiders are able to overcome barriers of reluctance or even suspicion.

This project's researchers are insiders well-placed to sample in this manner. Jeremy is an experienced activist, highly conversant in the activities of several social movement groups, though principally in a metropolitan context. Alice is well-established in literary and artistic circles in Ballarat, a provincial city, and circulates through several of its community groups. Both are sympathetic to liberal social movements. The main criterion of selection of activist interviewees was not, however, the interviewers' political sympathies, but previous indications that these subjects could reflect on their political lives; and, in fact, a diversity of personal histories as well as demographic backgrounds was obtained. We did not interview activists of political persuasions other than left wing, not because they were approached and refused to take part in our study, but because there were no corresponding activist movements to the right for us to explore. This can be attributed to the very long period during which a right-wing government had held power in Australia. Selected activists were contacted informally by phone and then formally by letter asking if they would be interested in participating. Ethics approval had been granted by the University of Ballarat, and the entire project was conducted in accordance with its requirements to protect the integrity of human subjects. This included full disclosure of all information in a plain language statement about the nature of the project and measures

taken to ensure privacy and personal security. Signed consent was obtained from each subject before the interview commenced. As part of the ethical protocols governing the project, subjects were offered the option of a pseudonym which most, though not all, adopted. Each subject was interviewed at times and locations of his/her choice. Six interviews were conducted by Jeremy. The other five were carried out by both researchers. Interviews lasted between three-quarters of an hour to an hour and a half. They were tape recorded and transcribed in full, with the inclusion of pauses, and laughter.

Eleven activists agreed to be interviewed over the course of 2003-2004. A diversity of subjects was achieved. Greens, Marxists, feminists, Christians, and Buddhists, non-aligned and community activists figured in the sample, with personal histories in anti-war, environmental, and community-based campaigns. Three had strong international connections with the Left in Chile, South Africa, and South Korea, as well as being involved in Australian movements. The age brackets reveal a good spread of subjects; some are approaching middle age and are seasoned, and others older, with track records that are decades long. Their ages ranged from the early 30s through the early 70s. Young and inexperienced subjects were not sought as it was considered that this was less likely to produce the effect of an examined life; that is, deep reflection on the nature of emotions and their relationship to activism. There was gender balance with six men and five women interviewed. Some outlined stories of social movements in metropolitan cities; others were involved in regional towns and cities.

The interviews generally explored motives for involvement and reflections on happiness and other emotions. An opening question acted as a prompt, "Could you tell me something about your history as a social activist?" What we found was that not only did each subject set out their personal history of activism, but that they told a great part of their life stories. The following schedule shows the questions that steered them from that point towards more specific topics of motivation and commitment.

1. Could you tell me something about your history as a social activist?
2. Thinking back, what led you to get involved?
3. What has helped you to remain involved? (If anger: Is it only anger that motivated? Did anger turn into something else?)
4. Do you think that activists look to get something personal out of their involvement?
5. Do you think active commitment in a way "nurtures" happiness? Does it "stress you out"? How?
6. What about those that you know and have worked with?
7. Does happiness aid your active involvement? Might it conceivably hinder it?

Each of these questions was put in this order in each of the interviews. The questions were designed with a subsequent process in mind of thematization of the data, which would occur in the third stage of transcription and analysis. The schedule gave us a basic structure common to all interviews, which would later help us sort the data into themes with relative ease. It also enabled us to compare varying responses of activists with similar political perspectives (for example, socialists and Greens) on emotional issues. Mindful of the goal in phenomenological research of exploring personal lived

experiences, we also presumed that not all relevant questions were evident in advance. Rigorous interviewing involves in-process constructions of meaning that involve both interviewers and subjects (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). We wanted to allow space for activists to elaborate their existing reflections in interaction with the interviewers. Therefore, we planned to allow for probes that could draw out unique aspects of the interviews. Following Rubin and Rubin (1995), we used six types of probes:

- Elaboration probes that seek more details. “JS: Does that move you to get involved, to seek connection?”
- Continuation probes that prompt a subject to keep going. “JS: That’s great. I want to follow that through actually...”
- Clarification probes that confirm understanding of what subjects have said. “JS: What’s the instinct?”
- Attention probes that indicate the interviewer’s alertness. “JS: OK, terrific.”
- Completion probes that seek a summarizing statement on a particular line of thought. “AM: So there’s a strong sense of making a difference in people’s lives.”
- Evidence probes that prompt a subject to check how certain they are of a statement.

JS: How did that lead you to social movement activism though? I mean, you might well conclude from that that, ah well, I’ve got to make sure that I get a good job and sort of set myself up in life and try and get ahead a bit...but how does it lead you to activism?

In addition, the researchers reflected comments back to interviewees to cross-check their certainty of their own statements, to prompt further reflection and, in some instances, to crystallize the meaning of statements being made. Cross-checking was done carefully and selectively. It acted to enhance the study’s credibility by seeking confirmation that a statement is mutually understood or can be re-summarized in a particular format. Participants were asked to confirm the emotions in play. “JS: ...at that heightened level of activity, stress is not a factor, as you said. What are the emotions that you feel during those periods?” Summarizing one activist’s feelings led to elaboration of a spectrum of experiences. “AM: I’m picking up a sense of grief...Carol: Yes, profound and deep...” Focussing one interviewee who hesitated in discussion around motives for involvement with a summary reflective of his comments to that point led soon enough to an elaboration of his particular notion of happiness. “AM: You’ve talked about things that made you feel sick or things that you just had to shift. So, perhaps just to go over it again, what’s kept you involved? It’s been a long time.”

At the outset, the intention had been to hone in on happiness as a key emotion. In this sense, our methodology entailed some planning. In doing, however, so we have been mindful of a key principle of phenomenological research; researchers’ beliefs and intentions should be bracketed in order to maximize the opportunity for interviewees to discuss the life worlds that they construct and live in (Crotty, 1996). In other words, prior suppositions should not hamper the interview process once it is underway, even though a semi-structured schedule is unavoidably influenced by the researchers’ conceptual formation. The purpose is to ensure that researchers are open to what they hear from their

subjects irrespective of the own preconceptions. The credibility of a phenomenological study can hinge on analysis of the full range of unanticipated findings as well as it might on data that confirms prior expectations.

The current study's researchers showed good faith to the practice of bracketing. This was the case in two particular areas. We found that we had to suspend our limited understanding of Buddhism to hear clearly what one respondent was saying. More significantly, we had to put aside our expectations about the socialist subjects in order to pick up their different constructions of happiness (which emerged despite closely shared political values). Generally, we gave free rein to the activists to talk about their emotional experiences in the context of their life stories, and then by incorporating those comments into the thematic analysis (a stage described below). The interviews flowed into sometimes surprisingly detailed discussions of a number of feelings and unforeseen responses to questions. Sentiments of grief, disappointment, elation and euphoria, caring, anger, stress, and burnout were all freely aired. Interjectory and ad hoc prompts invited nuanced expression of views on these feelings. Other unscheduled questions enjoined subjects to reflect on their own phenomenological understanding of their unique reactions, again emphasizing the importance of self-interpretation in the activists' development of their life stories. Yet, other queries sought cross-cultural comparisons with countries where some had personally been involved: Chile, South Africa, and Korea.

All interviews were transcribed shortly after the date they were carried out either by a research assistant or the researchers themselves. Once transcribed, the data underwent examination. The transcripts were read and re-read several times. Both researchers also returned to listen to all taped interviews. Once we felt satisfied that we had an intimate knowledge of the interviewees' key messages, we then set about thematization of the data. Close textual comparison and contrast between different responses to set questions in the semi-structured schedule allowed the researchers to extrapolate themes that reflected the emotional dilemmas activists described. Short researcher memos were made that helped us connect thematic points. This was done by taking key phrases from the transcripts that were highlighted and linking the essence of their meaning to a particular theme. One illustration of this approach relates to activists' comments on sacrifice. In responses to question four, Katherine and Key-Huik, who share a socialist outlook, spoke differently about the terms of sacrifice that confront activists. Katherine lamented that "I talk to comrades who dropped out...they've said that they didn't have time to have kids or they didn't have the time or the money to. And they feel like they're a bit cheated out of those things." In contrast, Key-Huik takes what appears to be a Korean view that personal regret is self-indulgent and indeed culturally-specific "...a lot of Western activists come in and out of the movement...motivated in many ways by individual self-centered consciousness...In Korea, there's very little possibility to do that." We picked up these responses in the course of reading the transcripts and highlighted them in the process of comparison. In developing memoranda, we highlighted a theme of sacrifice to return to. We soon found comments in other interviews along these lines.

The process of thematization also helped us identify unique experiences. Probes and comments that were reflected back to the subjects were also incorporated to give full weight to unforeseen statements made about the rich breadth of activists' conveyed histories. Thematization involved crystallizing the essential aspects of what was

reportedly felt by the subjects. Believing our subjects to have examined lives, we had questioned them on happiness, and in some instances stress and anger, but they often disclosed a far more extensive range of emotions.

Table 1
Expressions of Thematized Emotions

THEME	SUBJECT	COMMENT
Anger	“Carol”	“I think anger is very destructive. I’ve struggled with it myself at times.”
	Barry	“...at public forums, I used to get really wound up to a point where I wasn’t effective, when I was actually in a white rage, but was trying to pass myself off as calm.”
Family and the domestic sphere	“Andrew”	“...you would just never do it with an adult, but people do it all the time with children and, I don’t know, it just feels like all that sort of stuff is so sad.”
	“Janet”	“I wanted my children to see their mother, not just as a housewife I suppose...but that you can fit in and be part of something socially beneficial.”
Sacrifice	“Katherine”	“I talk to comrades who dropped out...they’ve said that they didn’t have time to have kids or they didn’t have the time or the money to. And they feel like they’re a bit cheated out of those things.”
	“Cebe”	“They lose their job, they lose income, they lose health...in the end...when I finally quit a situation which I just I just had to, had to because I could go no further”
Meaningfulness	“Jose”	“if I don’t achieve in an area where I think I could be having an impact or doing something useful, that can be as much a source of, or even greater source of unhappiness.”
	Ron	“...when you’re talking about practising this, you know, these values that you’re striving for...called compassion and altruism, it’s how to take those actions that you think are the most pivotal and the most likely to actually foreseeably begin to make a difference”.
	“Andrew”	“you need to have like a sort of a more ongoing vision of like, of what, you know, of what, of there being an alternative and your activism is going to mean something...”
Healing and caring	“Keiko”	“...for me, like caring is really important. That sort of, to me, that’s a really important value and, um, and politics is for me a very serious way of expressing that value”.
	Carol	“I don’t see myself as an activist, I see myself more as somebody who cares”.
Friendship	Andrew	“I don’t feel like, you know, being involved in activist politics is an automatic ticket to...having those sort of...boundaries...um, collapse, even though there’s definitely a camaraderie, you know.”
	Katherine	“It’s so nice to be past that and think well, ‘I don’t give a bugger what they think, this is what I think’ and I know afterwards we go and have a drink and it just doesn’t matter if you’re friends...if there are friendships, they’re unaffected, completely...by political discussions within this organization”.
Satisfaction	Key-Huik	“I sort of wouldn’t be satisfied with my own life if I wasn’t engaged with that with some sort of project for that sort of change.”
	Keiko	“...a more glorious and recent memory brings to mind an antiwar demo...On a peak like that—with something like that, it’s just totally, you just hack in it. It’s all the good emotions that you can think of.”

By examining the responses, the researchers reached agreement on thematic currents through a process of discussion which led to consensus. The themes brought together different statements of participants as to how activism made them feel at different times. The interviews were then reexamined to check the validity of the provisional list and a selective range of data was singled out. A modified list of ten such themes was consolidated. It included: anger, family, the domestic sphere, sacrifice, unity, meaningfulness, healing and caring, friendship, play and activism, and satisfaction. Once this list was drafted, we returned to the transcripts. At this stage, we produced a fresh synopsis of each transcript to capture all the major ideas expressed by the activists. The list was then cross-referenced against the synopses as a final checking mechanism. After further discussion, we reduced the number of themes to seven with three being subsumed under other themes in the following ways. At first, healing and caring had been regarded as separate themes. After a fresh synopsis was generated, it was felt that healing and caring would be more meaningful if banded together. With regard to the themes of unity, play and activism we felt, on reflection, that the emotions discussed were the main focus, rather than those particular themes themselves. It was at this stage that we decided upon meaningfulness as the value judgement of most importance to our study; this term encapsulated what all of our interviewees said was important to them personally about their activism. Brief quotations are given in Table 1 grouped under the final headings of these seven themes.

This also informed a lengthier discussion between the researchers about the key themes which is reflected in the next section.

Themes

All of the subjects in this study manifested to a greater or lesser extent of the “examined life.” As an initial measure of the examined life, the interviews contained none of the jargon associated with impersonal reflections on social and political issues and all were willing to mention aspects of their career as social activists that caused them grief and frustration. Thus, all were willing to make their own lives the central point of discussion for the interview. The pacing of some subjects’ responses also suggested examination of what they were saying in the moment. Key Huik in particular spoke in exceptionally well-considered phrases with long pauses in between his sentences; this should not be ascribed to his being Korean and possibly having English as his second language, as he spoke much more quickly and without these long pauses in the more casual parts of the interview.

Some of our subjects showed far less evidence of pausing and reflecting on their lives in the moment than Key Huik did. This, however, by no means indicated that they did not have examined lives. The most ardent and fastest speaker among our interviewees, Ron, several times “lost the thread” of his argument, but he had enough insight into his own process to comment that “I tend not to think lineally”; even the semi-structured interview format was too structured for him to cope with its demands on lineal thinking. Nevertheless, Ron was one of the clearest examples of the examined life in the sample, as he says of himself,

creating your own personal story which doesn't just become a fixed dogma, a fixed position, a fixed story, but very much in a form of somebody like William Blake...you are inventing your own personal mythology [whilst] not be being trapped by the process and you are seeking above all to share it.

Finally, the examined life was evident in the subjects' willingness to revisit their own past and reassess it. Janet, for example, reflects on her change of beliefs and values in the course of her lengthy activist career.

and to me that is rewarding, that you have done everything you can and then you let it go. And we all let it go. Sometimes I had to realize, I mean, I've been a sort of activist in my thinking that I could carry something through with others or make a difference. But sometimes there's a limit and you can't. And I've come to learn that that you can't always make it happen.

Such reflection demonstrates an openness to change, an ability to notice inner change as it occurs and a willingness to maintain scrutiny of one's life.

An examined life does not in itself entail the gaining of wisdom, but it does at least raise issues of meaningfulness, as all the interviewees testified to in different ways. At the most general big-picture level, Ron proclaimed as a life principle that,

human beings need to live their lives in terms of a story that's everyday as well as teleological, in terms of a life meaning, so that they need to be both immersed in an everyday story that's dynamic and interesting and provides purpose like you know, in all the hours that they are actually awake as well as having long term goals and purposes.

Ron has an orientation to reinterpret life that is consistent with Ricouer's (1988) notion of narrative identity. One of our less articulate subjects, Andrew, makes the point more specifically in terms of a (negative) concrete example.

Andrew: I think some of the most demoralizing, frustrating, demoralizing things like I just think going to see my... um, uncle and aunts and cousins and ...grandmother for instance is one, is like this epitome ...of...a meaningless life

(laughs) where ...there is nothing to talk about, or ...nothing gets talked about...

Jeremy: mmm

Andrew: ... other than meaningless things (laughs).

Andrew has turned to activism partly as a way of producing that meaningful human interaction that he values as worthwhile and that in turn evokes a sense of happiness for him. His interview abounds with statements of confusion, disillusionment, and frustration, and of all our subjects his appeared to be the least examined life, prone to

passing value judgments on others' behaviour rather than his own (there are 29 separate occasions in his hour-long interview when he does this). Another of our interviewees, Janet, exemplifies the lifelong discipline of passing value judgments on her own life rather than those around her (there are 20 such value-laden comments on her life in this interview). She finds meaningfulness in the activist activities in which she was engaged, but, as an older woman, is happy to stand back now from the causes she once fought for. Meaningfulness here is an internal rather than external value, giving her a far greater range of occasions for happiness than Andrew appears able to muster. She expresses this as follows and then responds to Jeremy's reflection back to her.

So I developed my skills, the underdeveloped ones that I had to bring out, I sort of thought that with the circle that you always use, of the developed up here and the underdeveloped down there, where I'd like to move it around, like with the needing to be more organized and so on.

Jeremy: That's a learning process, isn't it?

Janet: Yes!

All of our interviewees reflected on the meaningfulness of their activism both personally and as a contribution to the cause of social justice, but there is no simple equation between their expressed happiness as activists and the expressed meaningfulness of this aspect of their lives. For the Buddhist, Carol, for whom life is understood as suffering,

What keeps me involved is a sense of connectedness that everything, all living creatures have a place and a process and the thing that makes it a positive experience, 'cause it's pretty brutal out there, and the Buddhists, you know, fundamentally they talk about the suffering of sufferings.

She distinguishes happiness as the individual focus on the moment (of taking a bath or enjoying a cup of coffee) from meaningfulness as contribution to the cause of social justice, while finding meaningfulness in both. Happiness for Carol arises through meditative detachment from the troubles of the world, the very opposite tactic from that of the social activist who cares, sometimes, like Andrew, all too sharply, about the injustices that abound in society.

Much of what our interviewees said to us concerned the emotional component of their level of involvement in activism, ranging from hurt retreat to happy commitment. While interviewees also commented on other aspects of their lives, sometimes happily and sometimes ruefully, this was always within the general focus of a consideration of their experiences of being activists. One of the more strongly expressed themes for several of our interviewees was the lack of hoped-for happiness in their activist experience and a consequent hurt retreat.

In our sample, Greg best articulates this construction of happiness; he does so six times in a 20 minute interview. He represents himself as a man who constructs happiness as something external to himself, something that he had hoped to find in the pursuit of activism.

(T)he realist in you looks at how much shit you're trying to push uphill, how much power the people you've got are battling and how they can use that...Sometimes however...how very few people either understand or want to understand, or couldn't give a rat's (couldn't care – authors) so when, when you look at it in that perspective you may as well slice your throat because you really, you're battling enormous odds, especially in this country.

This pressure makes his commitment to the social movements disillusioned and unhappy: “Well that actually brings you down here and sometimes I think why, why the fuck am I doing this.” It discourages him from sociable engagement with the “mainstream” of society. He forces himself on, nonetheless, drawing what solace he can from the awareness that there are others (often fellow travelers) who go through the same distress about being publicly known as an activist. Greg, who knowingly craves the intimacy of other activists who are his familiars and whom he believes in, looks beyond the boundaries of his networks and sees an uncaring public. His construction of happiness, evident in such conflicting comments as “I suppose I joined the Greens in order to try and um encourage er the optimist in me” and “I'm not stupid enough to be an optimist” virtually guarantees his distress.

Andrew is a persistent socialist who, like Greg, hungers after the betterment of human relations. His politics are resolute, yet he is also one of the shakiest of our sample, in the sense that according to his own account, all of his major life decisions have been the outcome of others' influence, including his commitment to social activism. On his first day at university, he was completely uncertain which subjects to enroll in,

and I was sort of going round, asking everybody everything ...and I ended up hanging out for quite some time on the table of the Arts Union...now I basically came along...and basically asked them how do I fill in this form...and ended up sitting down and just talking to them at which point two Resistance members approached with a socialist journal and said do you know you can have a look. . .

His reflections on his success as an activist suggest an inner lack, “the times that feel worst, which I guess I've got clear memories of, some incidents, um, but I guess often it's been when I feel like I haven't done...as well as I could've or as well as I should've or...” The interview did not probe from whose point-of-view or by whose standards Andrew was found wanting, but his phrasing suggests a dependence on an external approving or disapproving judgement.²

From Andrew's perspective, the inhumanity of capitalism is starkest in the sphere of the personal. Although he argues eloquently about capitalism's constitution and constant revolutionizing of subjectivity, he also speaks in more general terms about the deficit of meaning at the mundane level of everyday life. He speaks of his own family as loving and supportive, but as with so much else in this interview, at least part of this judgment comes from an outside source, his mother. “...puts a strong argument that my

² A more extensive analysis of Andrew's comment based on a neuropsycholinguistic approach is available in Mills and Smith's (2007), “Strategies of social activists: An NLP interpretation,” *Borderlands E-Journal*, 6(1).

Dad in the very early years had a positive impact on us as well ... although (laughs) ... he went off the rails.” In this section of the interview, Andrew is adamant that honesty is missing from the world. It is drummed out of children through the authoritarian institution of the family and we are all poorer for it.

(P)eople’s lives...could be so much better...in their relationships, in their relations with their children, relations with their friends, feels like there’s so much bullshit and bluff and bluster...it feels to me like a lot of people have a lot of trouble saying what they think...saying honestly what they feel.

After discussing his own childhood miseries, Andrew puts forward an indictment of society at large, “given the fact that (laughs) this society is so fucking cruel and horrible...” This aspect of the system moves him more than any other in the interview (he uses the word “cruel” five times in the interview). It perplexes and worries him. The mainstream appears foreign to him, even though he is unquestionably deeply committed to changing it. It is foreign in the sense of the extremeness of its manifested hostility to Andrew himself and what he stands for. He speaks forcefully about the cruelty of “random interactions you might have on a bus, um, or see in a school yard” and the “extremely cruel and vicious and just almost unforgivable” responses to his attempts to sell socialist newspapers on the street. His feelings of alienation from the world make the struggle for a better form of sociability difficult for him. Again, as with Greg, Andrew’s construct of happiness comes close to guaranteeing personal unhappiness for himself. Rather than being sustained by feelings of happiness, he finds himself constantly buffeted by disappointment and relying on influential others for happiness. This is expressed from the outset of the interview (where Andrew took Jeremy’s opening question about his background as an activist and extended it immediately to a discussion of his entire life; a course of action that Jeremy did not inhibit).

Um, I put a lot of, ah, store on my Mum’s influence on me [...]I remember that from like very early on, I said something like that, made a [political] comment like that at school one time, and the teacher sort of chastised me...Children just get so...um, ignored, people talk about them, you know, in a way that just, in a way that you wouldn’t ever consider with an adult, just talking about somebody in front of them, but not addressing them directly, not including them in the conversation, you just would never do that with an adult but people do that all the time with children, and, I don’t know, it just feels like all that sort of stuff is so sad, it feels like it generates, and then, what it means is that those children grow up, and they sort of live in relationships that are so, I think, (laughs) I look at most partnerships and I sort of think, oh it’s so sad (laughs).

This is in contrast to Greg who differentiates the wider public from the intimate understanding he finds in his networks. For him, the feeling of not quite belonging in the world leads to self-reflection which, in turn, is regularly modified and reconfirmed through encounters with related activists. He is compelled by this to work on bettering his

relationships with his activist friends. Beyond the bounds of this immediate environment, he imagines that there is cold indifference to the global causes that he champions. This condition is unacceptable and he bemoans it. For Greg, despite this, judging that his activism is meaningful compensates for a great deal of unhappiness, “There’s a whole heap of learnings. There’s the community thing and able to pool resources and to listen and learn and then also to be able to add into that experience.”

In contrast, Andrew’s interview is characterized by both the vehemence of his accounts of unhappiness, and a conflict between his hopes.

certainly if you raise children anew in a better social environment, then all this shit that we see now will disappear, but even the people apparently perpetrating all the shit if we put them in a different social environment and they will, you know, they will personally change as well...and a more despondent judgement that even if we had a socialist revolution tomorrow we’d still have shit in our heads before we died, and that we will never be fully cured, we will never, none of us will ever be fully cured of capitalism.

Some of our other interviewees made the opposite case to this, that activism in itself is satisfying enough to give lifelong happiness. The second theme that the researchers garnered from the responses is relationships with movement networks, which might be described as a special type of connectedness fostering something akin to a “community” of activists. In two particular cases, activism does indeed relate directly to a tangible and bounded face-to-face community. For them, it might be said that activism is vocational; the link with others allows for a distinctive species of understanding of a shared mission. One can and should commune with like spirits who also bear the burden of ethical duty.

Andrew’s interview offers a good point of contrast, when he reports a comment from the historian Humphrey McQueen to the effect that he’ll “know we’re living under socialism when I find it easier to make friends.” For our second group of interviewees, it is living within the activist networks of society that provides the happiness of sustaining friendships. Ron is the clearest instance of activism virtually equating with happiness (again for him an external construction of happiness based on contact with like-minded others). Ron characterizes his lively Melbourne district as a place of activist “clubs” in which “the minority view is actually the majority view.” He is ambivalent about the place of club life. On one hand, he sees in it a place in which people console each other for what they acknowledge to be a minority status. In this regard, the clubs simply reverse the majoritarian culture of Australian society. On the other hand, they are a real part of a lively community and make an essential contribution to a democratic municipal public sphere. Ron chooses to live here for this decisive reason.

(T)he clubs are in the dominant public position and I love it I mean, I think that’s great...I’d classify it as a Voltairian situation. I disagree with everything you say...but I defend to the death your right to say it...that’s part of the vitality and the aliveness of Sydney Road and Brunswick, which I also love...that’s why people belong to those groups, and there’s

this incredibly strong nexus between Brunswick and Melbourne Uni(versity) for that reason.

The nexus between the suburb and the university means that the activist sub-cultures also cultivate intellectual intimacy to varying degrees. It is logical for Ron to move smoothly from a discussion of the suburb of Brunswick to the University of Melbourne and still talk about a “congregation of minds.” To be sure, this is an unusual situation. Activism occurs in a locale in which there is an atmosphere of whole-of-community engagement in the forms of sociability that the social movements generate. There is little risk in conjecture that this attracts movement activists to the area.

Carol’s coastal community also attracts activists, especially environmentalists. Like Brunswick, it has local groups. However, the comparison ends there. The community is small and its associations are principally concerned with local planning and developmental issues, rather than global matters. Neighborliness characterizes interactions between people, offering an undemanding familiarity, but also a comforting distance. This balance is to Carol’s liking, “I really like the sense of community, of people who you don’t have to explain yourself to... you’re allowed to be yourself...without having to feel that you have to protect yourself, or a sense of being guarded.” The especial sharing that Carol finds in her activist friends supports the pervasive conviviality that she feels with regard to those who live in her community, but also to others with whom she is allied from other places. It can be argued that, for Carol, the movement is an end as well as a means to ends. Its end is in the common experience of activity, being wounded, and caring.

(I)n all battles there’s a sense of camaraderie, of the warriors with their backs to each other and then there’s the battle and you go and look after each other afterwards you come off the battle field wounded...those people who are really angry aren’t seeing those pluses, that sense of being connected, of sharing and it’s not, I deliberately don’t say sharing a common cause, I just say sharing.

Out-and-out conflict hurts, she says, but healing is important and appreciable. Reflecting on the angered, she notes that some people are blinded as well as deafened by their anger. Anger dissociates, but disclosure of one’s pain is more than a survival strategy in intense times. In the terms in which she couches the process, it appears also as a utopian stance in its own right; a statement about the ways things ought to be between people.

While Carol, Ron, Andrew, and Greg all tend to look for happiness in their activist or at least politically aware milieus, they differ in the importance they put on the place of political ideals in their own lives. For Andrew, the failure of ordinary everyday existence to conform to his utopia is a source of lifelong pain. For Carol, the utopian informs everyday interaction in a happier and more sustaining way. Rather than being a function of gender difference, this is explicitly attributed by Carol to her Buddhism. In general, we did not notice gender differences in the responses of our subjects apart from the importance put on the upbringing of children in Janet’s interview. Others that we interviewed were also conscious of strong (but not gender-specific) sources of happiness

beyond the political realm, amounting to a further theme to be found in our sample, that of attempted detachment from both the happiness and the hurts of social activism while still remaining engaged with the process.

One answer to the hurt is to drop out (a further research project would entail interviewing social activist dropouts on the same topics). Many of our subjects talk about demoralization, echoing the dilemmas thrown up by being committed to social causes that they perceive to be outside the mainstream. Detachment, that elusive sense of equanimity, is aimed at, but not quite achieved, by several of our interviewees. For Katherine, as an example, the cost of social activism is a nagging sense of missed opportunities in life. The issue of life choices in the face of hurt (whether felt or anticipated) had not figured in our conceptual discussions at the onset of the project. Nonetheless, it came up in interviews with two activists who have the same political affiliation; both gave different responses to clarification probes from Jeremy. Katherine is a thirty-something member of a left-wing political party and has been an activist since entering university. She enjoys her commitment and is circumspect about the twists and turns that it has taken her through. Nonetheless, she has worried about what-might-have-been for her and has adjusted the course of her life accordingly by giving more space to her personal priorities. Here meaningfulness and happiness are in potential conflict.

...I don't want to get to 50 or 60 and think, the party stole my life because I didn't do the things I wanted to do...I certainly don't want to put myself in the situation where I've sacrificed so much that I'm going to be resentful.

Katherine ponders how to maintain the space of her independence and, as a result, has established a thick boundary demarcating herself from the collective. Keiko, a Hobart-based medical practitioner, also wonders what she has foregone and aims for detachment. Like Katherine, she has developed a thick boundary.

...to me I sort of I realized you're just going to have to develop a thick skin because politics is just like this and there's just no way around it. You've just got to get over it. And get over the fact that you just want everyone to like you, or whatever (laughs). There are just things you've got to do.

Like Katherine, Keiko is not totally detached, but frets about the life she is not leading, and the cost of her choices. "(I)t was just this feeling that, oh I wish I could be doing four or ten or who knows how fucking many, I wish I could be lots of people and just live all these full lives." This echoes an enthusiasm to grasp the world and all its branches of knowledge. She knows that she cannot fulfill that fantasy, but, unlike Katherine, she reconciles herself to it. Resolution is found.

...to just think, Look, just be happy there are people living those lives, there are people studying that stuff and even if that's not me, even if that's not my identity, someone's doing it and let them do it for me. They can

contribute to human knowledge, and that's good, but what we need is more social activists.

By this maneuver, meaningfulness and happiness can be reconciled and Keiko is clear that political activity and her professional work are things "...which I just totally love." Comfort is regained when she elects to be active, feeling that her choice fulfils the greater human need. That option weds her to the intimate connections that she is comfortable with. The sacrifice is modest, as she remains a working professional.

Barry is also an activist in full-time employment. He teaches at a regional university, but was first active in Melbourne against the American war in Vietnam. He contemplates the sacrifices made by an activist friend who has immersed herself in Papua, New Guinea and is now cut adrift from the securities of Australian citizenship (which she has renounced). In contrast, he has held on to the comforts of academia in the First World. He sees little of his friend's courage in others around him, or perhaps within himself. "I admire people who can go out on a limb in that way," he remarks. Still, he has confronted the possibility of sacrificing personal life. At stake for him are habits and routines that are life-sustaining and edifying, and that he judges to be of paramount worthwhileness.

I've come to realize that happiness...resides in your own head and in the end if you haven't got your family together or you haven't got your head together or you haven't got your garden together or you haven't got your house together, how on earth do you expect to make a difference to other people...I think it's actually quite radical to think that the dailies are quite important, you know the washing up, feeding the chooks, watering the garden. To me they're fundamental things that are sort of sacred...But it's from that sort of base that I can actually graze in the community.

Barry knows and feels the other personal things that ontologically ground him in his world: his garden and family, part of the pastoral world that he has retreated into, but that also serves as a quiet place from which he can venture out safely from time to time, nourishing his more sporadic community connections. He has decided that his version of a personal world must come first; otherwise, any activity over the long term is not viable (such was, in his estimation, the mistake of the "tragic radicals" of his generation). This is a move away from a more widely dispersed form of activism that in the past connected Barry with the sixties generation of radicals. He now inhabits a concentrated locale of networks, in which he feels that change is more achievable, and he has a strong internal locus of happiness independent of his activist experiences. These tactics could be interpreted as a retreat from activist engagement, or they could be seen as a form of detachment that allows him to engage politically from a position of personal strength, rather than hoping for happiness from the act or outcome of political engagement.

Our first interviewees volunteered the topic of anger among activists, and we pursued this topic in subsequent interviews, as it provided some different perspectives on detachment and withdrawal as social activist tactics. Carol gave a response that went to the heart of the issue of relations with others.

...people who are motivated by anger as activists, I'd probably have nothing to do with. Because I can't communicate with them, because they're not prepared to listen, so they don't hear me. And all I hear from them is their negativity...I tend to separate from people like that.

Anger deters and perhaps even frightens Carol. She removes herself from the space around those angry activists and wants no overlap with them. Like Barry, Carol constructs her happiness by tactics of moving away from the role of activist. Only one of our interviewees found a strategy that happily combined the personal with the public in ways we had not anticipated in our conceptual discussions at the outset of the project. The private sphere has been traditionally treated as a place of intimacy. Family ideologies that we were mindful of cast it as a shelter from the public world of work, business, politics, and civic obligation. No such division exists for Janet in her world. She is now an older activist and partly defines herself through her family and its political history through the generations. The boundary between public and domestic spheres is highly blurred for her and labor politics has always seemed to be a household activity. Conversation at the kitchen table was passionate, but politely informal also, so much so that a child could feel no hesitation about participating.

...anyone who crossed the threshold, they would be having it out, you know. And they could always quote all these frightful things that (former Australian Prime Minister) Robert Menzies said...And they never repeated themselves. I knew that. And I remember as a very little child, saying "what's the government?" because I'd heard about the government all the time and that's one of the first things I asked. How could they explain when you are so little...You see that was stimulating then, to me.

Janet has, in turn, parented with this model of domesticity in mind. She has more deliberately politicized it, however, by bringing to bear the lessons of her involvement in the women's movement. Thus, she wishes to be an example to her family and to others as a mother and housewife whose activity is "socially beneficial." Her lifelong commitment is a pondered one and it encompasses all facets of the world that she moves through. Whereas Barry regarded his private and pastoral household as a place of self-cultivation that empowered him to act publicly, Janet sees a seamless flow of political conversation and activity crossing the threshold of her front doorstep. She lauds and celebrates this interactivity. "But, in little ways, what you're doing is, you're doing for your neighbourhood, your life, your family, and where you can lend yourself further out, like the antiwar movement, well, you do it."

Janet's example introduces a final theme in our investigation that of deep and concentrated connection with other trusted activists. There is a surprisingly broad spectrum of associations in the interviews. Activists that we interviewed spoke at length about a tangible sphere of community networking distinct from the home, even if only loosely. Greg lives in the same community as Janet and they are close collaborators. He finds comfort in the campaigning that they have done with others. "It's a real community thing...you form allegiances." But it is hard work, especially given that a number of them are committed also to issues extending beyond their community, such as opposing war

and global environmental degradation. The overwhelming sense of being in the honorable minority spurs Greg on. He is partly immunized from the stigma attached to activists in an allegedly conservative regional city by the spoken and unspoken understanding that he shares with others.

See, there was only four or five of us but mostly on email, and it's, it's just that excitement. Somebody finds out something and you share it and then somebody will add to it yeah, so it's a real community thing you know which is a really cooling ideas. It's like you form allegiances.

Our subjects thus produce a rich variety of instances of conflict and its resolutions, based on sometimes deep deliberation on accumulated memories and experiences. Happiness is not a self-evident concept for them, nor is its attainment unproblematic. There are times when they interface with fellow activists is overwhelming and seems to threaten suppression of the self, even if only temporarily. Some respondents report periods where the sacrifices called for appear too great or, alternatively, where opportunities foregone earlier in life are sought again at a later age.

For our sample, activism is in part, reflected as a matter of self-contemplation or inner dialogue. Such internal conversation is a way of arranging and processing outside experiences and imagining responses. Within that conversation, certain feelings are formed. For the activists, to be the voice of dissent and express a difference from what is thought to be the conventional can manifest as a burden. It leads to moments of intense self-reflection on the subject's life in which an awareness of separation from the world is accentuated. One thing the interviews show is that such reactions are occasionally discussed with others, but though emotional contemplation may seep into dialogue with others, this process never appears to be complete. Some of the feeling, decision-making, and thinking are reserved for the self only. Our subjects reported inner dialogue about happiness with regard to their activist lives, as well as the dilemmas of personal sacrifice.

Activists do not just enact a politics of confrontation; resist withdrawal, and sense feelings of wider responsibility. They also construct concepts of happiness and sadness. The authors propose that happiness and sorrow are part of the subjects' own interpretation of their experiences both as activists and in life outside activism. If the sphere of politics is one of passions, as Max Weber (1991) suggests, then the emotional lives of activists are lived largely through the passions of the politics of social reform and radical social change. Consequently, the interpretation exercised here focuses on how they construe the world around happiness and suffering. It was found that whenever statements were made about the nature of politics or the difficulties in remaining committed or the necessity of answering the call of duty, there were also messages about either the suffering that motivates them or the happiness that they pursue in their own projects. All describe their worlds in these terms. Some had experiences of anguish from which they distance themselves. Wounded by life in the social movements, they temporarily vacate the public sphere. For others, politics is perceived as the wellspring of happiness. They speak about connecting energetically with networks and throwing themselves into activity. The act of throwing themselves in links their emotions to the intense relations with others that they experience in the movements. Many back away

only for a short time to contemplate the lessons of their experiences and to recuperate their energies.

Most of our findings are in accord with the literature on social activism and emotion, but one of our subjects, a particularly articulate and thoughtful activist, offered a novel turn to the topic. Jose is a Chilean Australian in his late 30s. He uses phrases like “frustrated happiness” to describe the problem discussed by Andrew. The example of playing soccer illustrates his point that politics leads to ambivalent feelings.

(W)ith politics...it’s as much the source of unhappiness...as of happiness, in that if I don’t achieve in an area where I think I could be having an impact or doing something useful, that can be as much a source, or even a greater source of unhappiness, immeasurably greater source of unhappiness than not watching a video, losing a soccer match, or any of the things that I get happiness out of... So...politics is a source, is the fountain, of both in a certain sense.

Play is contrasted with commitment here. Each vies with the other for attention and the two seem to be in competition, as work and play are for so many people. Politics, though, is the centerpiece. If not all is right in his political world then the possibility of finding joy in something else is frustrated. That said, his perspective develops sophistication beyond the comparison of activism and play. Frustrated happiness is, in fact, the preferred state of living.

I think that you can have a frustrated happiness because I think it is made possible by some sort of active commitment...in social change: basically a frustrated happiness because it’s a happiness you have sometimes when you get a small...glimpse of what things could be like.

Jose perceives an ontological limit; the happiness he is moving towards is circumscribed by limits, but that is what defines it as happiness. His model is neither the utopia of unbridled bliss nor the detachment of meditative withdrawal, but the balance of dedication and fun, all contextualised by purpose. Such a model of happiness holds in creative tension and all the issues that our other subjects bemoan and relish, in particular their sense of meaningfulness, and offers a graceful solution to the problematic happiness in a life of social activism.

Conclusion

The breadth of emotions accumulated and expressed by this collection of activists surprised the researchers. Through their remarks on happiness and resignation, they convey concerns about the value (meaningfulness) of their activism (and of their lives, overall). The world’s apparent response to their efforts, even sometimes the hostility shown by others in activist networks, compels some of them to withdraw or to set the world at a distance. Other respondents seek deeper engagement when they witness or are subject to confrontation, leading to a strange bond with the antagonistic. All of them are driven by a sense of responsibility that is bigger than they are. This feeling of obligation

abides irrespective of whether they are in a state of full commitment or at least partial detachment. They recognize this feeling of responsibility in others who are like them and it can be the basis for implicit trust.

However, some also see the hurt in their colleagues. They are able to identify with feelings of being overwhelmed by the magnitude of their ambitions and by the sense that they oppose a majoritarian culture that cares not for them. Out of the forms of sociability that their networks generate, some of them find a kind of happiness within themselves. Some find it amongst themselves. Some develop it in the ontological stance they take towards the occupational hazard of confrontation with society, that is, with others who disagree with them. Others encounter and feel anger and sorrow. They share it with their comrades at times and seek mutual healing in doing so. The relationship between a sense of meaningfulness and happiness is always central to our subjects' reflections about their lives as activists, sometimes voiced as acutely problematic and sometimes celebrated.

Social activism provides a particularly clear opportunity to explore the relationship between meaningfulness and happiness. In this respect a new opening exists in qualitative research. With this study, we have sought to enter that opening in a modest and limited way. We aim to conduct more extensive research in the area in future. One of the limitations of our current study that we hope to redress is our method of recruiting interviewees. This was a pilot study based on purposive sampling from our own networks. Future studies will involve advertising for subjects, a process which we would expect to bring in a different and broader range of activists. For the current study, oppositional activists were selected; consequently, they were leftists since a distinctly right wing government had held power in Australia for 11 years. It may also be possible, with the recent change of government in Australia, to recruit a reflective group of right-wing activists who are now oppositional in their stance to compare with our subjects on the political left. Despite its limitations, our method of sampling has delivered a pool of subjects able to reflect deeply on their emotional history. Many of the variables in our study might prove worthwhile foci for further specific studies, in particular those that compare regional and metropolitan and those related to era (the generations of the 1960s and 1980s, as an example). The current project does amply illustrate the emotional conflicts of activism and the value judgment of meaningfulness and experience of the specific emotion of happiness. This conclusion should draw the attention of social researchers to the complex feelings of activists, their place in the scholarship on happiness and that of the social movements deserves to grow.

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