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ENJOYABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, a Life Concept

(Professor - 高等教育推進機構 ブリトンジョセフ)

Joseph Britton

ABSTRACT

Within the spoken word there are times when a nuanced adjective can elate, depress, exhilarate, or deflate us. This paper is an account of the reaction by people when the subjectively positive adjective `enjoyable` is conjoined with an objectively realized `accomplishment`.

A wide spectrum of people were asked to contemplate **“What are one or two of your enjoyable accomplishments in life?”** A majority of the answers were succinct phrases often accompanied by anecdotes, explanations and memories of emotions engendered during the process of accomplishing. In responding to the joining of these words `enjoyable` and `accomplishment` the participants pointed towards the core values that have shaped and given meaning to their lives.

INTRODUCTION

This research inquiry began with a simple question to a colleague, “What are one or two of your enjoyable accomplishments in life?” She responded by saying, “This is difficult to answer, but I need to answer it.” As it was springtime, and the renewal of life was present all around, the inspiration arose to look deeply at what are peoples` important life affirming moments that shape who they are. As a precursor to this study, several people were interviewed and asked to separately contemplate their moments of `enjoyment` and then `accomplishments`. The `enjoyment` answers often came easily and with enthusiasm. The `accomplishments` responses commonly included `times of focused effort with major obstacles to overcome`. These two feelings of `enjoyment` and `accomplishments` were different, but generally easy for the participants to internally access. This led to the study and focus of this paper, `What response would be evoked when these two different words and feelings were adjoined as `enjoyable accomplishments`?

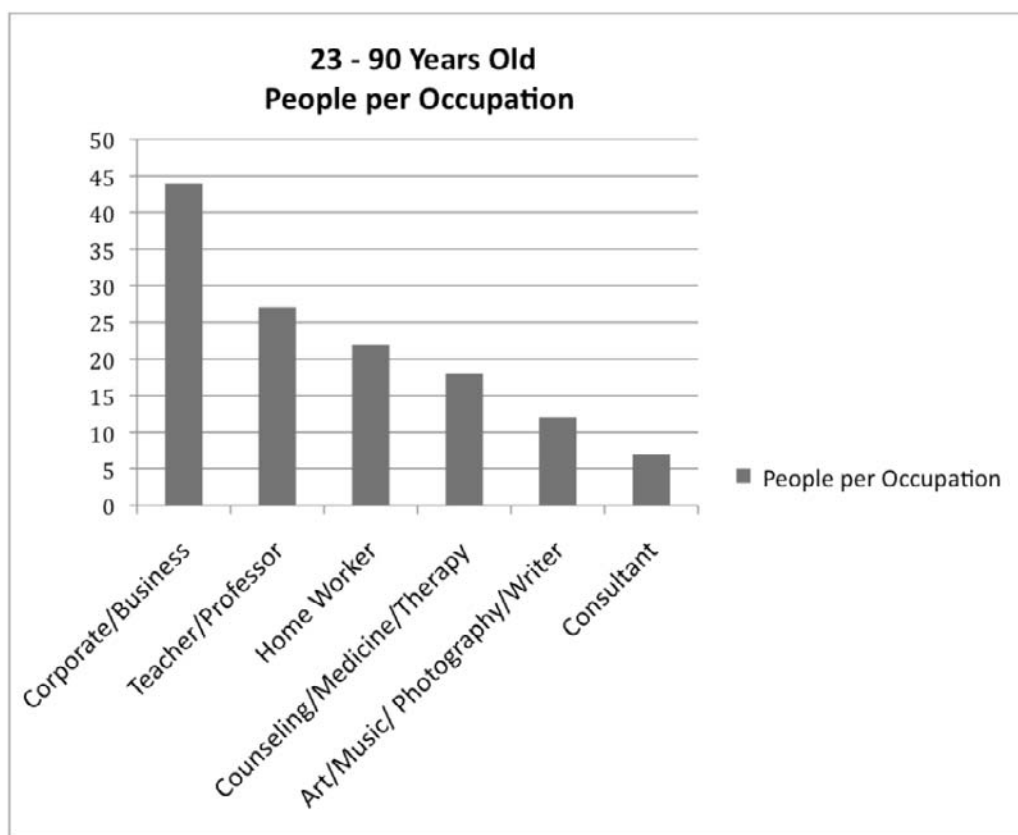
Perhaps, to some extent, the essence of life could be defined and framed in terms of what has wholeheartedly been pursued and hence presently valued. In following this line of inquiry, and in turn the resultant data, possibly common themes would reveal themselves.

What Gives Meaning to Life?

A project was then born: how, and in what way, do others answer this question, **“What are one or**

two of your enjoyable accomplishments in life? 380 people that this author knew, and thought might take the time to think about and write the answer, were asked. They lived in Germany, France, Spain, England, Belgium, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, South Korea, China, Japan and the USA. My expectation though was that maybe 20% would respond. To this author's surprise, 265 people wrote their answer, a 70% return.

The respondents were then grouped into the demographics of age and occupation. Due to differences in life experiences owing to age, two primary studies were carried out; one with the 18-22 year olds, and the other within the range from 23- 90 years old. The total number of participants were evenly divided between these two age groups. The results of the latter group are shown in the graph `People per Occupation` below.



Graph 1

The term `Occupation,` as viewed in the graph above, is defined as the primary work that they identified with at that present moment of inquiry.

In beginning with the **23 – 90 years old** group, **three issues** were considered:
first, who found this question difficult to answer;
second, if difficult, why did some find it easier to answer than others and;
third, what were their actual responses?

In looking at the **first question**, `difficulty in answering,` by far the Educator group i.e. teachers and professors, pondered and struggled the most. This was determined by their personal comments preceding their answers, along with the relatively long time to answer e.g. two to four weeks (examples included below in the **second question**). On the opposite end of the spectrum, those that quickly, immediately answered this question (within two or three days by email) were mostly in the Corporate/Business group, being executives or owners of a company.

The **second question** follows, `why was it easy for some and difficult for others to respond?` Several who took a very long time, with most being in the Educators group, as a lead-up to answering wrote `What`s the absolute deadline for me to gather my thoughts?` They often mentioned of `being hesitant to write anything.` As such, a typical response was they `would be marked for life,` and `what would others think of me,` or were just `unable to commit.` An assurance by this author, to all who expressed this concern, was sent out stating that no personal names would be attached to the comments without the consent of the writers. Their responses duly followed. As admirable as their `enjoyable accomplishments` may have been for this cautious few, privacy was an important concern.

Others in this aforementioned cautious group responded by having a visceral reaction of `Oh no, my life, what has it been about!` Often I received comments of `accomplishments, I don`t think I have any,` or `I`ve never been able to complete things.` A French professor colleague mentioned to me in a personal message that the words `enjoyable` and `accomplishment` don`t go together. This was echoed by several other educators. As the topic of this paper focuses on the feeling elicited by two words, it seems reasonable that educators would take the time to parse this combination.

In addition, the Educators were the only group in which this author was directly told, by three of them, `This is very difficult to contemplate and to give an answer, so I don`t know if I can do it.` In turn, that resulted in their `unable` to answer.

Quantifying these responses took careful analysis, but was attainable. The subject of each response, e.g. children, sports, creating a project, and so forth, was initially listed. All responses with the same subject were then placed in that subject group. What proved to be more challenging was attempting to sort out the psychological nature of those who struggled with the `enjoyable

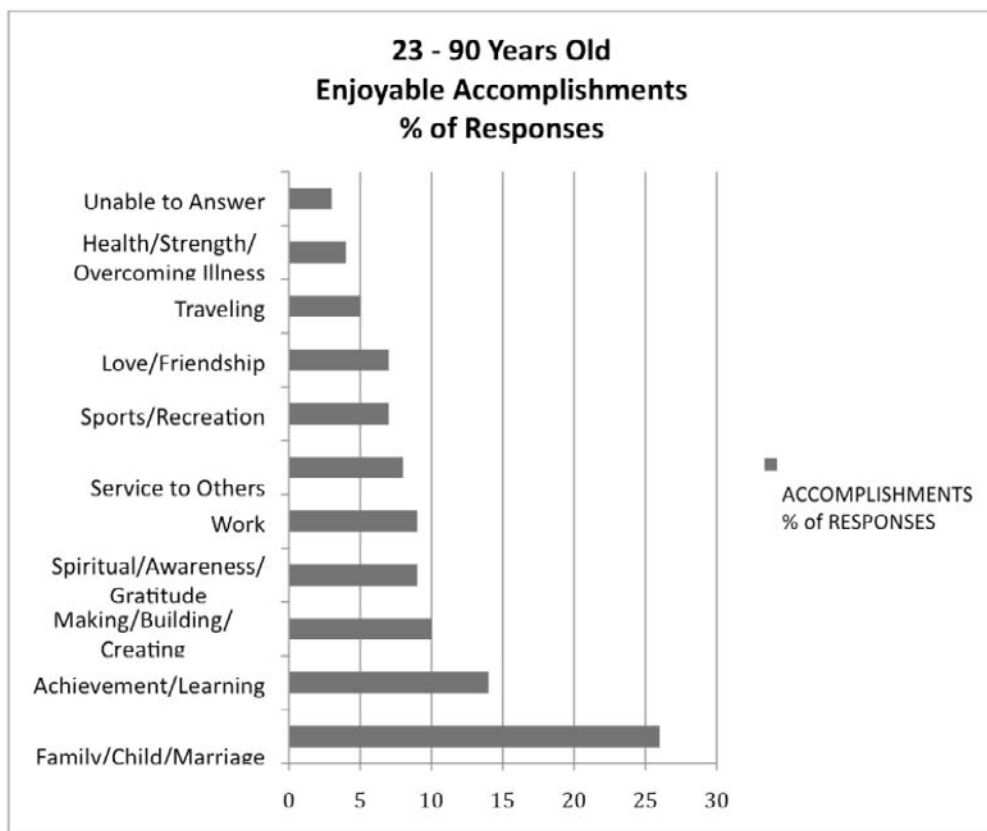
accomplishments` question. Not all `long time to respond` people were in the group of Educators, but on a more subjective level of analysis, those who spent a great deal of time (two to four weeks) to answer were possibly highly achieving perfectionists. Upon inquiry, most directly admitted to this.

In speaking with individuals in the corporate/business group, most tended to be able, willing and proud to look at a question or problem, break it down into its components, and quickly come up with an answer or solution. From a practical perspective, this approach to life seemed reasonable in how they, without hesitation, seemed to thoughtfully and confidently answer the question; in many ways, an asset to decision making.

A cross-group of people comprised the humanists, new-agers, and independent free-thinkers. They tended to be in the Spiritual/Awareness/Gratitude and Health/Strength/Overcoming Illness groups. Their answers were more non-specific, philosophical, subtle and, at times, esoteric. In reading their responses, one could feel their life-long exploration of life`s meaning and purpose. Often they spoke of tragedy, loss or over-coming great difficulties leading to a present sense of well-being and self-realization.

This subjective analysis was not the primary focus, but the willingness of so many in all groups to pour out their losses, struggles, defeats and, in turn, the personal rewards of reaching towards dreams and creative ideals turned this small question into deep moments of self-reflection and life review. Although the more objective analysis of looking at enjoyable accomplishments through the lens of occupations and age was more achievable, and thereby the focus, the relevance and importance of the feelings that individuals experienced in the subjective process of answering also became noteworthy in acknowledging as it brought to light how and what we appreciate in life.

In the **third question**, what is your `Enjoyable Accomplishment(s),` there were 222 responses, from 133 people, as some people wrote two. This Graph follows.



Graph 2

The category most frequently written about, `Family (Life)/Child(ren)/Marriage,` received 26% of the total responses. Within the three topics that comprised this category `Children` was the most dominant chosen theme, followed by `Family Life.` Although `How to make a successful marriage` is a popular magazine, book and cultural topic internationally `Marriage,` separated out, was considered in only 5% of the total survey responses.

The second highest response tally was in the `Achievements/Learning` category with 14%. As expected, `Achievements/Learning` of which included the three sub-groups of `Academics`, `Personal Development` and `Teaching`, was rated high among many. As a majority of the respondents though, that participated in this research, are teachers, consultants and leaders in business who often provide seminars and trainings, with only 1% of the total survey respondents choosing `Teaching` as an important `Enjoyable Accomplishment` was a surprise.

`Creating Something New,` and `Working` were two categories in which each received a tally and comments from 9% of the respondents.

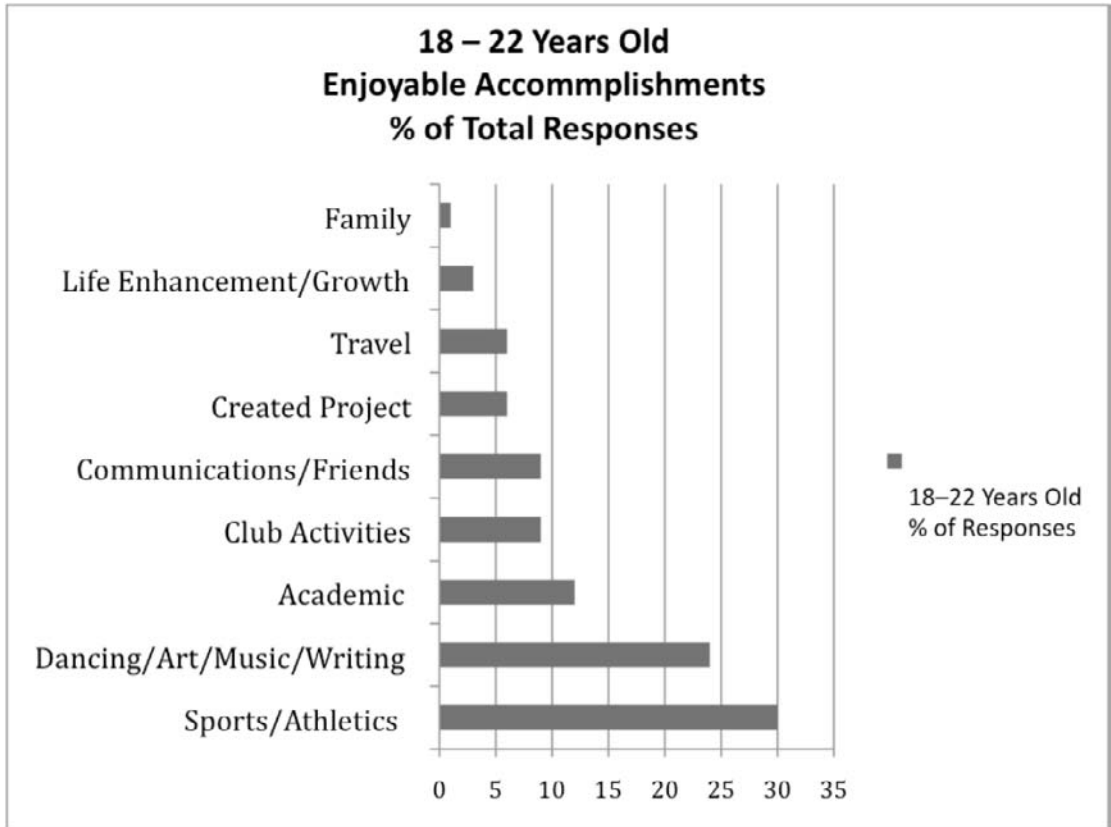
The highest ratings were generally given to categories where hard work, endurance, and a `keeping up` attitude were required. For the most part, the remainder categories involved an adventurous and a *joie de vivre* approach to goals and activities.

In conclusion, for the 23 – 90 years old group, in general, there was little correlation between one`s occupation and his/her Enjoyable Accomplishment(s) responses. It should be noted though, that if separating out the respondents by age only, rather than by `occupation,` with the increase in age of the respondents, there was a tendency to ruminate more about `family life` than those younger.

18 – 22 Years Old

Within the **18 – 22 years old group**, there were 140 responses from 131 participants. As stated previously, some people gave more than one response. The overwhelming majority were Japanese university students with whom this author had easy access to as a Professor and resident of Japan. In analyzing their answers, a major pattern began to develop. The following four categories (out of a total of nine) of `Sports/Athletics`, `Dancing/Art/Music/Writing`, `Created a Project`, and `Club Activities` comprised 70% of all responses. These were activities in which the success of the team or circle of friends was paramount. In looking at these four categories, 32% of their answers included “together...”or “we did...”; as a whole, within all nine categories, 25% of their total answers included these phrases. This was juxtaposed with all the participants of the older, international age group where only 3% of the total responses were formed around a “together...”or “we did...” answer.

In juxtaposition, the focus of the older group was primarily upon individual, personal accomplishments of “I did...”, regardless of the nationality or age.



Graph 3

For this younger group it appears that there were **three important reasons** for the **`together/we` factor** in their answers.

Firstly, though personal goals and strivings are formed through-out life they often do not become clearly developed concepts that have a beginning and a conclusion until one passes out of this age group. A sense of independence from family and social structures, normally, has yet to be fully developed. Activities are often a process of growth and learning to live in the present, together, with others. An example in this study is that several who mentioned getting accepted to a university (**`Academic`** category) wrote that it was accomplished together with the help of friends and family. For the older adults though, goals can become a personal internal process and obsession with individual (**`I did...`**) achievement.

Secondly, culture comes to bear on their responses. Japanese commonly identify with the group; thereby belonging, working together, and being a good member is paramount. As the success of a **`group`**, rather than that of an individual, would usually be recognized by the organization to which it

belongs, along with society in general, a person's identity naturally gravitates to the group. For many younger Japanese, a 'We did it!' attitude is significant for navigating and enjoying the challenges of life. As a note, in the 23 – 90 years old group, among the Japanese participants, only 6% wrote about 'together...we...' as being an aspect of their 'enjoyable accomplishments.'

Thirdly, from the moment a child enters nursery/pre- school, the group identity is being formed. This includes:

- a. class group, color coded, uniforms including hats;
- b. marching in formation from one area to the next;
- c. the teacher speaks followed by the entire class responding in unison; along with everyone exercising as a disciplined, coordinated whole;
- d. asking questions or challenging the teacher's comments, along with standing out in any way, are not encouraged;
- e. synchronized dancing and singing presently typified by the boys idol group Arashi and the girls idol groups AKB48, Morning Musume and including the radical, young girls BABYMETAL that has uniquely, in a fun way, fused heavy metal 'head-banging' and J-pop with choreographed dancing. In acknowledging the roots of these synchronized stage performances, it is critical to mention the world renown, century year old musical theatre of the all female, cross-dressing, Takarazuka Revue who are chosen among many at the age of 16-18 years old and remain part of the troupe until they reach their mid 20s;
- f. a child's box lunch, 'obento', that must, by all means, look the same in style, food choice and presentation as the other classmates' 'obentos'. Creating a different, unique lunch box style, usually made by the mother, sets the stage for great embarrassment by the child who woefully brought this lunch;
- g. and one of the most visible group mind settings is seen in Japanese youth sports as clearly presented in the Koshien national high school boys baseball tournament. All players have shaven heads, they practice marching together for pre and post game ceremonies, bowing in unison to the other team members, along with the fans forming highly visible, vocally loud, energetic, with drums and horns blasting, 'oendan' - a distinctly organized, motivated, enthusiastic cheering section.

These are but a few examples of Japanese youth identifying with the 'group mind'; for it has been an integral part of the upbringing of Japanese children for centuries. The historical evidence of this may be analyzed by this author in a follow-up paper.

For many Japanese youth, from a positive perspective, stability and security, along with a sense of well-being and belonging, can be found through the participation in, and in turn, the enjoyable accomplishments of their group.

CONCLUSION

This study was an affirmation of deep-seated human traits we intuitively know are true. Forging relationships brought joy and fulfillment with their accomplishments; with both arising from the eternal impulse to create and an irresistible need to bring to life a dream.

This survey began with the intention of exploring, discovering and then listing the enjoyable accomplishments of a wide range of people; and thereby extrapolating from the data what gave meaning to their lives. With the 23-90 years old group writing `family` or `achievements/academics` in 40% of their answers was expected as a healthy family and academic success are strongly held desires and motivators in most of the world societies. With only 9% of the respondents choosing `work` though, it was unexpected in these days of people striving so hard to get ahead and excel in their occupation. Their written answers implied that this was a result of `family` and `academics` having been noteworthy, joyful pursuits whereas `work` did not completely fulfill their dreams.

Regarding the youth, 18-22 years old, their often stated reason that their personal/societal `group` was the source of their `enjoyable accomplishment` provided a window into the dynamics and process of Japanese relationship development.

So, was there a common thread running through people that gave their lives meaning? Within this study, each person was striving to accomplish a goal to enhance the quality of life, sometimes for a few, and sometimes for the many. One might surmise that some of these goals and accomplishments were of a selfish nature, yet, in each situation, the joy, hope and determination in pursuit of their end goal inspirationally influenced the lives of others. Underlying the enjoyable accomplishments was the forming of enriched relationships with their family, friends, groups, and society all leading to self-development. The three prominent drivers behind these relationship growth factors were their: 1. social standing in their community; 2. contribution to the well-being of others; along with 3. imagining anew how to fully live and participate in this world; all providing the sustenance for enjoyable accomplishments.