

*Section: Special articles***Joy, Coherence, and Dignity: A Transdisciplinary View within Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy**

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Abstract

Joy often appears quietly, when inner life begins to move in rhythm again. It grows when body, emotion, thought, and meaning start to work together. In Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy, joy is not seen as excitement or pleasure but as a steady state of balance that holds love, learning, and dignity within one movement. This article approaches joy as a meeting point between biology, psychology, and lived experience. It brings together ideas from neuroscience, psychoneuroimmunology, and Positive Psychotherapy to show how coherence in brain and body supports well-being. When such coherence appears, people feel more whole, more present, and less controlled by fear or defense. Philosophically, joy can be seen as the movement through which dignity becomes vitality. Across cultures, it links scientific knowledge with human wisdom and reminds us that resilience grows where connections are enduring. Joy, in this sense, is not a luxury. It is the quiet foundation of flourishing and a way of being in harmony with life.

Keywords: Positive Psychotherapy, joy, coherence, dignity, transdisciplinary view

Introduction

This article grew out of therapeutic and transcultural experience. People often describe their pain with clarity, yet when invited to speak about joy, they hesitate. The pause itself reveals something essential. We live in cultures that have developed a precise vocabulary for suffering but only a limited one for well-being. Joy, although vital to human growth, has rarely been examined as a foundation of psychological health. To speak about joy therefore means to return to the sources of vitality and to explore the inner rhythm through which the self restores coherence. Within Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy (PTP), joy is seen not as the absence of pain but as the balance that emerges when love and learning come into dialogue

(Peseschkian, N., 2012). Balance is not a fixed state but a movement in which emotion, thought, and reflection begin to cooperate. Through this interaction, a person grows in both body and mind, finding a sense of inner order. When basic qualities such as trust, patience, and the experience of time start to influence one another, reflection becomes more stable and a quiet energy returns (Kirillov, Efremova, Dobiała & Pleshakov, 2023). In such moments, joy is often sensed as inner harmony. Thinking and feeling fall into rhythm, movements become lighter, and life feels as if it breathes again. Joy in this sense is not a temporary feeling but a human strength that helps reorient meaning and renew vitality. Recent approaches in Positive Psychology and Positive Psychiatry describe mental health as something that develops

through lived experience, practice, and relationship rather than a static condition. Seligman (2011) posits that flourishing evolves incrementally through positive emotions, purposeful engagement, supportive relationships, and a sense of achievement. Messias (2025), Peseschkian & Remmers (2025), and Kirillov (2025) expanded this comprehension in Positive Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychology.

They define well-being as a continuous enhancement of the internal faculties that sustain human connection and purpose. Although these traditions differ in focus, both share a central view: people thrive when inner life and outer context remain in dialogue and coherence allows human potential to unfold. Neuroscience complements this psychological view. Damasio (1999) showed that feelings and awareness arise from the body's own biological processes. They are part of how the organism makes sense of experience, influencing both perception and behaviour. When communication between brain and body remains open, people often notice that their thoughts become clearer, emotions more stable, and the body finds a gentler rhythm of ease. Hüther (2016) related this self-regulating state to human dignity and to the lived experience of being autonomous yet connected. At the same time, Antonovsky (1987) identified a similar dynamic in his concept of the sense of coherence, which enables people to perceive life as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. Across these perspectives runs a shared insight. Joy arises when the systems of body, mind, action, and meaning begin to move together again. It signals the return of inner order and the quiet renewal of trust in life. This article explores joy through a transdisciplinary lens that joins Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy with findings from neuroscience, psychoneuroimmunology, and philosophy. The following sections trace how joy, coherence, and dignity form one continuum.

Methodology

2.1. The Science and Broader View of Joy

Joy arises from inner alignment. It appears when emotion, reflection, and memory begin to cooperate, when the different voices within us start to move in the same rhythm (Damasio, 1999). In this harmony, we sense clarity, strength,

and openness. Neuroscience describes this rhythm as coherence, a state in which body and mind communicate freely, each supporting the other. This coherence develops through lived experience, through moments that join feeling, value, and action into one movement of life (Hüther, 2015; Hüther & Hauser, 2019). When experience becomes integrated, thinking gains clarity, emotions settle, and the body begins to recall its natural rhythm of balance. In that state, reactions grow less fragmented, and actions emerge from an inner sense of order. The brain and the body stay in constant dialogue (Damasio, 1999). This conversation is not symbolic but physical. Every emotion and thought moves through networks of nerves, hormones, and immune messengers, and the body responds with its own language of breath, tone, and rhythm. What we live through is remembered not only by the mind but also by how we move, stand, and breathe. Affective neuroscience highlights the role of interoceptive awareness, the brain's capacity to sense what happens inside the body, as central to emotional regulation and stability (Craig, 2009). According to Hüther and Hauser (2019), this sensitivity forms a biological basis for learning and trust. When an organism feels safe, curiosity and openness emerge almost on their own. Such safety grows through emotionally meaningful experiences that are personally integrated rather than imposed from outside. Together, these perspectives show that emotional life, bodily regulation, and reflective awareness form one interconnected system. Each author highlights a different entry point, yet all point toward the same conclusion: coherence supports the restoration of psychological balance.

Scientific research in psychoneuroimmunology expands this understanding. Buric (2025) showed that mindfulness and positive emotions such as gratitude and compassion influence the communication between the brain, heart, and immune system. These emotions lower inflammation and help the body stay in balance. Slavich and Cole (2013) demonstrated that when individuals experience authentic safety and connection, the body's inflammatory responses diminish, facilitating the onset of natural healing. Across these disciplines, a consistent theme appears: emotional safety shapes biological communication. Whether described through

immune pathways, neural networks, or interoceptive signalling, each perspective reinforces the idea that coherence emerges through experiences of connection and recognition. Their scientific research elucidates that emotions are intrinsically linked to biology, influencing the body's mechanisms for restoring stability and self-regulation. As the feeling of inner order strengthens, the stress system starts to calm down. Breathing deepens, and the organism settles into its own slower rhythm. Medication can support body chemistry for a while, yet lasting calm arises through lived experience, through moments when a person genuinely feels secure. In that state, the body no longer needs to defend itself and quietly remembers how to rest. From such reorganization, joy grows as a sign that balance has returned.

Social molecular genomics further confirms that experiences of empathy, compassion, and gratitude can influence gene expression in pathways related to immunity and inflammation (Slavich & Cole, 2013; Cole, 2014). Emotional warmth does not merely feel pleasant; it changes how the body communicates with itself. When people experience kindness or belonging, their immune system tends to regulate inflammatory signals more efficiently. The organism interprets relational safety as permission to heal. From this perspective, joy functions as a biological integrator that renews the communication between body, mind, and environment. It restores the inner dialogue joining emotion, physiology, and meaning, and through that renewal, trust slowly returns, the foundation on which resilience grows. Joy belongs to everyone, yet its expression takes many shapes. In some places, it comes through laughter, rhythm, or shared celebration. In others, it is found in quiet gestures, gratitude, or simple calm. Behind these differences lies a familiar feeling: a sense of belonging, when life can be trusted, and the person feels at home in the world (Haidt, 2006).

Marseille (2025) reminds us that when cultural diversity becomes only a mental concept, we risk losing sight of the emotions that therapy seeks to reach. Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy encourages an encounter with these experiences in a spirit of humility and openness. Seen from this perspective, joy cannot be reduced to a single feeling. It is a way of being in real contact with life itself (Peseschkian, H.,

2022). In modern culture, joy is often confused with excitement or the visible signs of success. Many people run after recognition and stimulation, overlooking the quieter experiences that grow from inner coherence and genuine care. When attention returns to these subtle forms of joy, a sense of balance begins to reappear. This kind of joy lasts because it is lived rather than shown.

2.2. Happiness and Joy

Happiness and joy often seem close, yet they don't come from the same place. Happiness shows up when the outside world fits what we hope for, when effort brings a result, and calm returns for a while. Joy comes in another way. It begins inside, often unnoticed, when the body, the mind, and the sense of meaning start to move together again (Damasio, 1999; Hüther, 2015). In Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy, joy grows from a kind of balance between the capacity to love and the capacity to learn (Peseschkian, N., 2012). Positive Psychology, in Seligman's (2011) view, speaks of happiness as flourishing: a life with purpose, connection, and active engagement. The languages differ, but the core is close. Well-being seems to mature when inner and outer life begin to answer one another.

Philosophers have said similar things in other words. Aristotle called it eudaimonia, a life where reason and virtue guide action and help a person stay in tune with themselves and the world (Aristotle, 1999). Much later, Kant used the phrase *sapere aude* (Kant, 1784), the courage to think with one's own mind. It was a call for independence, but also for honesty, a way of turning thought into life. When reflection connects with experience, something in us steadies. A quieter form of joy appears, less like excitement, more like trust in being alive.

2.3. Joy and Dignity

Joy and dignity belong to the same movement of life. Dignity gives a person stability, joy gives that stability warmth and rhythm. When people are met with respect, something within them begins to breathe again. Dignity doesn't need attention; it needs to be recognized. Joy returns, almost like water finding its way back to its source, when a person feels seen without being assessed (Hüther & Hauser, 2019). In everyday life, small gestures, a calm tone, a pause, and an honest word can reveal

dignity. Such moments restore the trust that stress had taken away. In therapy, this shift can often be felt when laughter returns, not as avoidance, but as a quiet sign that vitality is returning and life is flowing again. It is the moment a person senses that life still responds. Both joy and dignity protect what is human in us. They open the space between control and connection, allowing people to relate without losing themselves. In leadership, this becomes visible in the way someone listens. A leader who values others not only for performance but for presence creates an atmosphere where worth is felt rather than measured (Hicks, 2011). Such recognition does not weaken authority; it strengthens belonging. Joy keeps dignity alive. Dignity, in turn, anchors joy so it can endure. Together they form a quiet integrity that allows human beings to face challenges without losing their warmth. When we protect dignity, we make room for joy. And when joy is tended to, dignity deepens within oneself and between people (White & Gonsalves, 2021).

2.4. Voices of Joy

Across cultures, people have spoken of joy as the quiet rhythm that gives life its harmony. Science helps us understand its mechanisms, yet poetry shows how it feels. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry once said that true happiness grows from the joy of doing something meaningful, of creating with care. In Persian thought, Rumi (2004) saw joy as the current that flows through us when being and doing move in one direction. Ferdowsi expressed this connection between joy and inner clarity in the Shahnameh through a short and evocative verse (Ferdowsi, 2016):

چو شادی بکاهد، بکاهد روان
خرد گردد اندر میان ناتوان

*“When joy diminishes, the inner life grows faint,
and wisdom loses its strength.”*

For Ferdowsi, joy was an act of understanding, not indulgence. It emerges when insight (kherad) and compassion meet. Where joy fades, clarity fades with it. His words remind us that emotional warmth and clear thought rise from the same root. Khalil Gibran (2019) expressed a similar truth: “The deeper sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.” East or West, ancient or modern, all these voices touch the same insight: joy is not a flash of pleasure but a

way of being, one that unites tenderness with awareness, and action with meaning

Discussion

Joy can be seen as a quiet coherence between body, emotion, action, and meaning. When awareness holds feeling and thought together, something in the body begins to settle. The heart and the brain start talking again, not through words but through rhythm. Neuroscience calls this coherence, the state in which inner and outer life stop working against each other and find balance once more (Craig, 2009).

Research in affective neuroscience and psychoneuroimmunology shows that emotions shape our physiology in direct and measurable ways. When people feel gratitude or kindness, the body starts to calm. A sense of belonging gives the nervous system a signal that it can rest again (Lang et al., 2023; Bower & Kuhlman, 2023). Long periods of strain often have the opposite effect. They keep the body on guard, tense and restless. Support from medication or therapy can ease the pressure for a time, yet deeper recovery tends to grow from what a person truly lives and experiences. Coherence grows when people live through moments of safety and recognition, when they notice that they can breathe again without defence (Antonovsky, 1987; Damasio, 1999). Joy often returns in such moments. It is not loud. It appears when reflection and emotion begin to move in the same direction, when breath slows and the body remembers balance. These experiences teach the organism how to return to calm more easily the next time. In therapy and in daily life, such moments are often subtle. They may arise while listening, walking, or simply feeling the presence of another person. Something within begins to align again, and the body seems to recognise the way home. Joy can also be understood as a biological and experiential flow. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described this state as one of full engagement, when thought, emotion, and action merge and the person feels deeply present in what they do. Some years later, Bonaiuto and colleagues (2016) found that these moments of flow not only foster personal growth but also reinforce a person’s sense of belonging and identity within their surroundings.

Ricard (2015) examined joy from a different perspective. For him, joy is a quiet kind of inner freedom, one that grows out of compassion and

the warmth we feel in human connection. As he explains, this joy unfolds gradually, as awareness reaches beyond the limits of the self and opens toward others. In such moments, empathy and care become part of one's sense of well-being. His view differs from that of Csikszentmihalyi and Bonaiuto, yet all three describe a movement toward the same center. Joy arises when inner life and outer experience begin to move in rhythm again. In this coherence, life does not become extraordinary; it simply feels balanced, meaningful, and alive.

One further dimension concerns the diagnostic and clinical relevance of joy, coherence, and the forms of dignity that support them within Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy.

3.1. Diagnostic Considerations

The way joy appears in a person's life can offer fine diagnostic cues. A noticeable reduction in joy often points to a system that has lost some of its inner coordination. Practitioners may see this in a narrower emotional range, reduced spontaneity, a lack of anticipatory pleasure, or a kind of muted engagement with topics that once carried meaning. Such patterns suggest that the two basic capacities are not working in concert and that inner coherence is still fragile. Excessive joy shows a different picture. It can appear in a form that is noticeably accelerated or disproportionate to the situation. The person may show enhanced activation and difficulty remaining in reflective or quieter states. Although lively on the surface, this form of joy often functions as a shield. This pattern often indicates that affect rises faster than it can be integrated, which points to underlying fragmentation.

Integrated joy, in contrast, has a steadier quality. Emotional transitions feel smoother, the body settles more easily, and responses to inner and outer demands unfold with clarity. This pattern shows that the capacities for love and learning are cooperating again, allowing autonomy to deepen and coherence to become more reliable.

3.2. Clinical Implications

In therapeutic practice, joy can signal when inner processes begin to move in the same direction. When emotional tone, bodily rhythm, and reflective awareness start aligning, practitioners often sense that clients have more

internal space for engagement. Joy supports the awakening of the two basic capacities in PTP. The capacity to love becomes visible in the quality of contact and resonance; the capacity to learn appears through steadier attention, curiosity, and clearer access to experience.

Dignity adds an important dimension to this process. When clients feel recognised without judgement, tension eases, and the nervous system settles. Small moments of dignity strengthen the capacity for contact, soften defensive patterns, and create conditions in which joy can appear with less effort. In PTP, dignity becomes tangible in attentive presence, healthy boundaries, and a respectful approach to needs and values. As coherence grows, the inner dialogue between body, affect, and thought becomes more stable. A therapeutic space emerges that can hold exploration and gentle reorientation. Balance Model tasks, storytelling, and resource-focused reflection become easier to integrate when clients find this steadier rhythm. Subtle changes in pacing, pausing, and interoceptive awareness often signal that an inner readiness for development is emerging. Joy is not pursued as a goal. It works more like a marker that helps practitioners sense timing and direction, because it often appears when inner order begins to form.

In Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy, this inner movement reflects the dialogue between two basic capacities, the ability to love and the ability to learn (Peseschkian, N., 2012). When a sense of safety returns, curiosity wakes up, and the capacity to love becomes active again. People begin to connect, to explore, and to trust their own rhythm (Flynn & Messias, 2025; Peseschkian & Remmers, 2025; Kirillov, 2025). Joy then works as a bridge between inner steadiness and outer participation. It gives life back a sense of movement and meaning (Antonovsky, 1987). Across cultures, joy wears different faces. In some places it lives in silence and gratitude, in others it rises in rhythm, dance, or laughter. Each culture has found its own ways to express belonging. Nossrat Peseschkian illustrated this insight in *The Merchant and the Parrot* (2016). Through stories from many traditions, he invited people to see their own experiences reflected in simple and vivid images that open space for gentle change. These tales remind us that humour, metaphor, and story can reach what analysis alone cannot. Whether expressed in music or stillness, joy always carries

the same essence: trust in life and the sense of being at home in the world (Haidt, 2006; Peseschkian, N., 2016). When people feel genuinely respected, the whole system softens. In this atmosphere of recognition, the body often responds even before the mind notices. The breath becomes steadier, the shoulders loosen, and a quiet calm returns. Studies in dignity neuroscience describe how even brief moments of recognition or genuine care can help the brain regain balance and make empathy easier (Hicks, 2011; White & Gonsalves, 2021). From such experiences, steadiness grows again, and joy begins to appear. Dignity gives ground, joy brings movement, and together they show something deeply human (Hüther & Hauser, 2019; Frankl, 2006).

This idea also appears in Positive Psychotherapy, where awareness and balance are seen as active forces that can turn conflict into development (Peseschkian, N., 2012). When people start to notice both what they feel and what they need, a small shift happens. It is not sudden. Something begins to loosen inside, and clarity grows from that space. Understanding appears in everyday gestures, in waiting a little longer before reacting, in really listening, or in asking instead of assuming. When people feel more at ease within themselves, they often stay open toward what is different. This kind of openness makes genuine contact possible. Sometimes it begins with a simple act such as taking a breath before speaking, slowing down the response, or listening with full attention.

These small moments bring reflection and feeling into contact again (Hüther, 2015; Hüther & Hauser, 2019). In groups, a shared smile, a touch of humour, or a few seconds of silence can do the same. Such experiences remind us that trust is not created by effort but grows naturally through presence. When joy is invited in this way, relationships deepen and the human capacities to love and to learn expand again (Ricard, 2015; Peseschkian, N., 1987). Joy moves like a quiet rhythm that ties the body to meaning and the self to the world around it. It takes shape in small acts of awareness and in how we meet one another. Through such experiences, resilience and dignity are no longer just words but become part of the way we live day by day.

Conclusion

Joy often returns in quiet ways. It does not rush in. Sometimes it grows in the middle of daily life, when body and thought begin to move in the same direction again. Nothing spectacular happens, yet something inside softens, and life feels a little clearer. It is not a state to achieve but a rhythm that reappears when balance is remembered. People often notice it when they feel seen or met with kindness. A steady breath, a look of trust, or a few words spoken with care can already change the air. For those who guide, listen, or simply stand beside others, joy is not a method. It grows where attention becomes gentle. It asks for no effort, only space and a quiet readiness to let life move again.

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Artificial intelligence use statement

The author confirms that the ideas, research approach, methodology, analysis, and interpretation of results presented in this paper are original and not generated by AI.