

# Using Documentary Film for Authentic Representation of Phenomenological Research

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## Abstract

My search to authentically and visually represent a group of workers' lived experiences and -knowledge of their often interrelated personal and work-related strengths mediated by those experiences saw me combining a written research study with a visual, cinematic documentary resulting in the production of "Project Happiness: The Lived Experience". This paper overviews the methodological considerations involved when using a visual form of data presentation, specifically in terms of data collection, analysis and dissemination. I begin by describing the project's genesis and development, the theoretical (notably phenomenological) underpinnings and methodologies, including positive psychology measures and documentary-making, and how these played out in the data collection and analysis related with this project. A brief account of relevant research findings is provided. Discussion focuses on the interweaving of positive psychology with phenomenology and reflection on the crystallization and creative illustration of the research outcomes.

**Keywords:** phenomenology, documentary, authenticity, character-strengths, positive psychology, work

## 1. Introduction

As a teacher-educator of visual arts in a college of education at a research-intensive university in New Zealand, my strong interest in lifelong learning and its association with work satisfaction led me to consider the extent to which people bring self-knowledge of their strengths to the work they do and how they do it. A particular interest was to explore whether working from a “strengths” basis has the potential to promote happiness at work.

As part of a subsequent wider programme of research focusing on the interlinking factors of self-knowledge, personal strengths and work, I contacted people in accordance with university approved ethical procedures working in diverse occupations and interviewed them about what they did. Their stories, led me to conclude that, these people do not mind what they do workwise as long as it meets their self-perceived physical and emotional needs, allows them to bring their “best self”/“true self” forward, and thus aids their general wellbeing and life satisfaction.

This thinking aligns with Aristotle’s notion of eudaimonia—of being true to one’s inner self (Aristotle, trans. 1996) and thereby leading a “good life” (Seligman, 2002). Ryff and Singer (2008) write of dimensions of wellbeing related to eudaimonia as including personal growth, autonomy and purposeful living. Norton (1976) describes eudaimonia as the feeling of “being where one wants to be, doing what one wants to do” (p.216).

This project explored the connection between self-knowledge and work and focused on the question: How does who you are affect what you do? An audio-visual documentary presented the analysed data and formed the core component of the project along with a written report. Research bias was overcome in this study by a university colleague member checking and analysing randomly selected samples and for independent data analysis and the resulting evidence being compared. Because of my interest in visual media, I was also a participant. The project therefore related to my own reflections on finding purpose and meaning in life through work, of being able to bring my passion to that work, and thereby to become or be the best rendition of myself (Haines, 2011, 2013; Whitehead, 2009).

Robinson and Aronica (2009) clearly articulate this through their discussion of a notion they term the Element—“the place where the things we love to do and the things we are good at come together” (p. xiii). Finding the Element, they explain,

“is essential to a balanced and fulfilled life. It can also help us to understand who we really are. These days, we tend to define ourselves by our jobs. ... For many of us, our jobs define us, even to ourselves—and even if the work we do doesn’t express who we really are. This can be especially frustrating if your job is unfulfilling. If we are not in our Element at work, it becomes even more important to discover that Element somewhere else.” (p. 216)

The idea that finding meaning through work is beneficial, is not, of course, a new one (Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010). Judge and Watanabe (1993) concluded from their research on the causal nature of the job-satisfaction/life-satisfaction relationship between work and happiness that: “Overall this relationship is positive and significant, and the constructs appear to mutually influence one another” (p.947). Hartung and Taylor (2008) referred to Savickas’s (2002) and Young, Valach and Collins’ (2002) theories with their comment that “theories grounded in constructivism and social constructionism advance the view that career involves

active self-conceptualization to give vocational behavior meaning, direction, and purpose.” (p.76). Relevant also to this research is Savickas’s career construction theory (2005), which provides an overarching framework through the dimension of “life themes” and is explained as “the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals impose meaning and direction on their vocational behavior.” (p. 42).

Savickas (2002) explains “the premise of career construction theory is that *career* denotes a reflection on the course of one’s vocational behavior, not vocational behavior itself. This reflection can focus on actual events such as one’s occupations (objective career) or on their meaning (subjective career). From this perspective, a subjective career is a reflexive project that transforms individuals from actors of their career to subjects in their own career story. It tells one’s “own story,” usually by emphasizing a sense of purpose that coherently explains the continuity and change in oneself across time...” (p. 152).

Whilst this research did not use Savickas’s model, it did focus on telling the participant’s “own story”. Savickas (2005) wrote that “Counseling for career construction encourages individuals to use work and other life roles to become who they are and live the lives they have imagined. In doing so they will become people they themselves like...” (p.63). These ideas closely associate with Dik and Hansen’s (2008) conclusion that living the ‘good life’ also means living the interested life (p.95), and align with the field of psychology known as positive psychology founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work and play ... [It is] “the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive.” (University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Center, 2007).

Psychologist Martin Seligman, explains the “good life” as “using your signature strengths every day in the main realms of your life to obtain abundant gratification and authentic happiness” (2002, p.161). Seligman differentiates strengths from talents, describing the former as traits that have a moral underpinning and are valued in their own right. My reading of positive psychology and connection to Seligman’s (2002) notion of “good life” grounded my own assumptions and allowed me to position my new body of knowledge within the epistemologies and methodology of phenomenology. This construct served my interests as a researcher wanting to explore what van Manen (1990) refers to as the “lived experience”, which he argues is: “to transform lived experience into a textual experience of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is purposefully animated in his or her own lived experience” (p. 36). As my research did not solely rely on text but included visual representation it was an interwoven representation of the lived experience.

Phenomenological researchers identify closely with what they are researching; they cannot separate themselves, in a subjective sense, from their topic. By incorporating narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as a phenomenological tool for conducting my research, I hoped to make open and available for retelling and reflective practice my own story and, of course, the stories of the research participants. I would thus allow my own values and integrity to be “embedded within” and offer the participants a means by which to view (literally, through the documentary) and then review and reflect on their lived experiences at

work. As Richardson (1997) wrote: "... the experience of (re) narrativizing, like the experience of biological time itself, is open ended and polysemous, allowing different meanings and systems of meanings to emerge" (pp. 30-31). Therefore, the stories represented are the stories remembered – by both the participants and me.

Aligning with McIlveen and Schultheiss's (2012) social constructionist research methods, the participants were encouraged to share, develop and then reflect on their own stories using an approach that was phenomenologically informed (van Manen, 1990). Using a phenomenological approach to collect and interpret the data would also represent the knowledge—why we act as we do, a knowing that, a knowing how, and a knowing from within (Shotter, 2009)—embedded in the audio-visual portrayal, that is, the documentary. I anticipated that the documentary would show how some people seem able to blend these ideals together and live a purposeful, meaningful life that is authentic to themselves and their beliefs. Mutual respect and positive working relationships were also fundamental to me when creating the project. I agree with Drummond's (2005) assertion that "to misuse power is to fail to meet one's responsibilities towards others, and this kind of failure is sadly all too common" (p.136) and will return to this consideration later.

## **2. Participants, Data Collection and Analysis**

I purposively targeted people to participate in the project because I wanted to gather cases that were likely to be "information rich". My target sample was six people, (I ended up with eight) and to accommodate budget and time constraints I approached people near by my hometown. The intent was to have a group of participants representative of different occupations, who appeared to be happy in their work and an equal number of men and women. Diener, Lucas, and Oishi (2005) observe, "Scientists who study subjective well-being assume an essential ingredient of the good life is that the person likes her life" (p.63). This was a major contributing factor on choosing only people who were happy in their work. I accept that by restricting myself in this way and asking questions about 'happiness', denies me an opportunity to seek and acknowledge the difference between an existential problem and the socio-culturally constructed images of what happiness is. Whilst it was not my intention to be dismissive neither of this, nor of how we form our intersubjective understanding of successful life stories and happiness, in this study I did not choose to focus on this opportunity as it detracted from the lens I had decided to explore.

The documentary featured eight participants who, individually, had been working in a variety of occupations for several decades. Their work encompassed hairdressing, imagining, possum trapping, professional piano playing, student advising, business, performing, and directing a boarding school. Each person experienced two videoed interviews and was also filmed while engaged in their workplace. I conducted the interviews, and the film crew consisted of two camera crew who doubled as sound and lighting technicians.

Participation was voluntary and involved people whom others suggested as candidates or people I had read of or knew about. Initially, I made telephone contact, followed this with information outlining the research project and its compliance with ethical procedures, and then held a face-to-face meeting with each person to discuss their interest in participating. Having obtained written participation consent from all eight people contacted, videoed interviews were scheduled in locations the participants chose.

During the first interview, participants were asked to share their work biographies and to respond to 14 guiding questions relating to self-knowledge, strengths, internal and external driving factors and how these related to their work. The second interview took place after each participant had completed the Values in Action (VIA-IS; VIA survey) (Peterson & Seligman, 2002). The VIA-IS is a self-response online survey and positive psychology measure, which, once completed, provides respondents with a personal inventory of their 24 signature strengths, classified according to their responses and related to Peterson and Seligman's (2004) six virtues, listed as wisdom and knowledge, courage, love and humanity, justice, temperance, and spirituality. The VIA-IS assumes that everyone has the same 24 signature strengths, but that each person differs in terms of dominant and weaker strengths, and combinations of strengths. Participants were given time to review their strength profiles before the interview, and were then asked during it to comment and reflect on those findings relative to their work over time.

The audio components of the video-interviews were transcribed and sent to each participant to read through and verify as a true and accurate representation. Participants were invited to delete any information they considered did not represent them authentically or that they wanted removed.

Following Cohen, Manion, and Morrison's (2000) outline of Hycner's (1985) model for phenomenological analysis of bracketing data, I began by working with the reviewed transcribed interviews, scrutinising each transcript for a sense of whole and highlighting units of meaning directly relevant to the research questions. I then looked for themes among the units of relevant meaning, which I eventually sorted under three conceptual clusters:

- *Self-knowledge/Self-awareness*, which included responses to questions relating to internal and external driving factors, heart and passions, authenticity, strengths, and beliefs and values;
- *Work*, which included responses to questions relating to biographical information/hobbies and work journey/history; and
- *Connections between self-knowledge/self-awareness and work*, which included responses to questions relating to self-knowledge and links between self-knowledge/self-awareness/work engagement, work/life satisfaction and happiness/the good life.

After completing the analysis of the audio component of the video data, I turned my attention to dissecting the visual footage according to the themes and clusters that had emerged from the written findings. My intention here was to select footage that I considered would provide the best visual representation of those themes and clusters in the planned documentary. Throughout this process I was mindful of the need to focus on the phenomenological and positive psychology underpinnings of my research approach, which required me to represent the participants' lived work-related experiences as authentically as I could and to keep me on track with respect to reflecting on how this experience was contributing to my own work satisfaction. I also draw on guidance from several sources on using videoed data to create documentaries (Renov, 2004; Rosenthal, 2007; Wahlberg, 2008).

### 3. Presentation of the Visual Data

Once the audio data had been analysed I turned to the visual data and determined which footage I wanted to use for the documentary, I needed to determine how to present the analysed audio data in a way that would engage viewers, remain centred on my research questions and (most importantly) best serve the authentic lived experiences of the participants and followed the protocols I had set and outlined above. Here, I drew on Drummond's (2005) "ethical compass", knowing that because I was the one to choose what to include and what to discard from the video footage, I had the power to represent the participants in misrepresentative and biased ways. In the filmic re-enactment the visual presentation represents my own subjective interpretation of the 'slice of life' presented to me by each participant. Authenticity does not equal veracity and stories are told that support perceptions to the extent that they become reality. Truth is a slippery concept, and with the best of intentions and sincere efforts for an authentic portrayal, I was only working with the narratives presented to me.

Decisions were made as to whether to present the participants individually and to stagger each participant's comments or cluster them. Individual presentation would allow longer, uninterrupted periods of time with each participant whereas a more clustered approach focused on the questions and responses would allow each participant to share their responses, so making the analysed data obvious in the representation. This was a dilemma however after consideration and storyboarding both aspects, I chose the latter as can be viewed in exhibit 2.

Exhibit 1 provides vignettes of the three of the participants in order to give a glimpse of how the participants were presented in the documentary, and how well they thought the documentary served as an authentic representation of them and their work.

#### *3.1 Exhibit 1: Vignettes of the Filming and Editing Process of Three Participants*

##### 3.1.1 The Performer

When I first contacted J about the project, she was interested. I met with her backstage at the theatre where she was performing and she informed me, "I'll do it." Trust developed over several meetings as we got to know each other and then I interviewed her. Her story was that, from an early age, she imitated, loving the limelight and actively seeking it. Her main drivers she identified as "the applause", which relates to the need for acknowledgement and approval. Adventurous and curious, she followed many lines of interest within her work, being prepared to undertake controversial roles and to extend this sense of controversy to everyday life, where she is not one to cross. In her words she, "bats for the underdog and believes in karma... calls a spade a spade... and ...you gotta have a sense of humour". Her realistic approach to the performance industry aligns with her VIA-IS "judgemental" and "open-minded" character strengths.

J's self-knowledge is displayed in the content of the interview portrayed in the documentary. She gives her all to the task at hand, which aligned to the VIA-IS "zest" strength. She professes to self-doubt, which is evident in the documentary as the flip side of a very confident performer. However, she trusts in the knowledge that she is good at what she does and, if she does doubt, knows the anxiety will eventually pass. J made conscious choices to earn a more secure living than that offered by performing, but her sub-consciousness drives

her to seek what she loves. Her lived experiences centres on her passion for performing and her unconscious drivers follow her inner self. She is following a “good life” (Seligman, 2002), using her signature strengths to obtain gratification in all aspects of her life.

After the public screening of the documentary, J sent me a card of thanks, saying, “I cannot imagine what it was I was worried about.” This card demonstrated to me her vulnerability and left me relieved about my efforts to ensure she was authentically represented had been adequately met.

### 3.1.2 The Businesswoman

L is a business owner and is a prominent “face” around the city we live in. I telephoned her and explained the research project intentions. I then delivered the written information, including consent letters so she could further consider the project. L agreed to participate. Her first video-interview took place in her home and the second in her office.

L is very successful within the real estate industry and describes her job as “growing people”. Self-satisfaction is her driver. She describes herself as caring, disciplined, hard-working and as an excellent communicator with a strong work ethic. She understands she has an engaging manner and is relaxed and confident in herself, enjoying her work and having fun. Passionate in all facets of her life, she is driven by excellence. Values are very important to her, and she is “black and white” in her approach.

Her number one VIA-IS strength is curiosity, and her fifth strength is love of learning. She values people and honesty and is happy to make tough calls as required. She believes she is spiritual in her approach to work and honourable and loyal. She celebrates joy and is grateful for her “beautiful, abundant life”. She treats people with dignity and respect and feels sustained by her close, loving family and making people “feel good”. I align these aspects to her VIA-IS strengths of “capacity to love”, “hope” and “gratitude”.

After the screening of the documentary, L asked if she could use the documentary in her own training sessions. I conceded by providing her with a copy of her own contributions for her personal use. Her interest indicated an acceptance of both the process and the product.

### 3.1.3 The Imagineer

I met W by chance while working on a fundraising event. He seemed entrepreneurial and able to do many things well. I knew he had recently built prosthetic legs for a double amputee (resulting from a mountaineering adventure with frost-bite) and then climbed Mt Everest with the amputee to ensure the legs worked successfully during the climb. I contacted W and asked him if he would consider being involved in the documentary. He agreed without hesitation.

Filming his workplace was interesting, as at the time of filming, he was involved in a project he had designed that redirected a large body of lake water that had “died” by creating a weir and canal to force seawater into the lake and re-nourish the dead water. The initial interview took place in a natural setting and he was very comfortable there. We began in a paddock. However, the noise from a nearby highway and the overhead planes made filming difficult. We moved inside where I positioned him in front of a wall mural of an autumn scene.

W is creative and absorbing. He loves to fix things and to create prototypes, exploring possibilities and creating solutions that he then makes happen. He sees himself as an ‘ideas’

man who completes the job. He is self-employed and requires the freedom this provides. His work is eclectic and usually includes things he can fix. He has a philosophical approach to life, propelled by a wide knowledge base, which aligned to his second VIA-IS strength of “perspective”. He believes it is essential to be a “good rendition of yourself”, and says it doesn’t matter what you are but “at least going to the trouble of finding out who you are and not making it up” is important.

He sees his style of working as self-indulgent. Money is not a driver, and he believes he always has enough. Self-doubt is not a part of his psyche. He is confident, brave and willing to take risks. He did not want to view the footage and told me he “trusted me”. Self-satisfaction is a main driver. He sees no separation between work and life, and given the importance of life satisfaction, he does work that he loves. At the documentary screening, W said he thought I had given a very true representation of him, commenting, when asked, “Yes, it felt like me.”

### *3.2 Exhibit 2*

Exhibit 2 provides a montage of the participants in order to give a glimpse of how the participants were presented in the documentary.

Web link to a montage from the documentary Project Happiness - The Lived Experience, (Haines, 2012) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPHJSve1zF0>

## **4. Reflections on the Methodological Process**

The purpose of this section is to show the inside of my experience as a researcher, including the tensions and difficulties associated with that experience. It is not my intention to make my approach sound easy and straightforward. The strength of my work lies in my near achievement of a very ambitious aspiration; I struggled with dilemmas associated with realising that aspiration.

### *4.1 Developing and Gaining the Trust of Participants*

I was always aware of the huge potential for distortion of trust, especially in terms of not adequately portraying the information the participants had so willingly shared. I had committed myself to portraying each person authentically and to be authentic to myself by producing a valid representation of the data collected.

One aspect of maintaining participant trust meant keeping true to participants’ images of themselves. Jenlink & Banathy (2005) cite Bohm’s use of “collective communication” as communication that moves beyond the spoken word, “the basic idea is to suspend opinions as well as judgment of what others share ... [thereby] trying to understand” (p.5). One participant, for example, stated that visual recognition by others is an important aspect of her work. Looking attractive and well groomed was therefore essential. Her visual image was part of her “brand”. She was concerned, during the second videoed session, about looking tired, so I used B-roll (related supplementary footage used for visual interest) so that both the visual information and the spoken word were true to this person’s work-related self-image.

One of the major considerations in the interviews was the use of the camera and the defusing of its presence during the interviews. Whilst the positioning of the camera was important I saw it as being important to encourage the participants to focus on their responses and not to think too much about the camera presence. For many of the participants this was their first



filmed interview experience and the awkwardness of being on camera needed consideration. For others the camera provided a therapeutic function to perform to.

It is difficult to know if the presence of the camera filtered the responses or if the participants behaved differently as a result of being filmed. I had no comparative measure of the impact the presence of the camera might or did have on the participants. I did my best to put the participants at ease by being friendly and displaying a relaxed presence myself with the camera and filming process. I explained the intended interview format each time and encouraged and included the technical crew to be a part of the interview setup and portrayal. The videoed aspects of the interviews were not transcribed and analysed. Using these aspects could add another layer and dimension that could be used in future research projects. In this project the visual video elements of the interviews were used primarily to represent the written data analysis compilation.

#### *4.2 Authentically Presenting Participants and Their Data*

The example just given also ties in with ethical considerations pertaining to presenting and representing the documentary participants in ways that communicated the essence of the information they had provided while allowing me to sensitively explore that essence, within the contexts of my research questions and the medium of documentary. During the interviews, I invited participants to select their interview locations to ensure they were comfortable and within a “space” that was authentic to their self-perceptions as workers.

Building a relationship with participants *one conversation at a time* was perhaps the most important part of this process of validly representing the person and their work. Conversation from the time I first approached each participant was the means by which to develop trust and understanding, the means of collecting the data (i.e., through interviews), and the means of conveying that data during the documentary.

For Whyte (2001) “Conversation is the heart of human life” (p. 238). Scott (2003) offers an expanded definition: “The conversation is not about the relationship; the conversation *is* the relationship” (p.xvi). I allowed these conversations, triggered by my interview questions, to remain embedded in the digital portrayal. Showing my work in action was one of the aspects I had wanted to capture from the beginning of the project, and I also saw this requirement aligned with the phenomenological underpinnings of my study.

My intention was never to present what might be considered highly emotive or sensationalised viewing. I was aware as I selected and represented information that often what might make for the most emotive or sensationalised viewing did not represent my participants in their best light or in terms of authenticity. To give an example: several participants were moved to tears during the interviews as they spoke of previous aspects of their lived experience. I did not portray these instances, as I deemed them neither relevant to the stories they were sharing with respect to their work nor to the data as I had analysed them within the parameters of the research questions.

One aspect I really struggled with was the realisation that some participants might want to have themselves portrayed in the documentary in ways at odds with the reality of their situations, values, opinions, strengths and weaknesses evident across the two interviews and in their responses on the VIA-IS. How could I best represent these divergent data, and

maintain the participants' trust in me?

The divergence was especially noticeable when the participants spoke about money. One participant, for example, said money did not matter to him but later said his work had allowed him to acquire (buy) everything he needed. Of course, this could also be construed as earning just enough money to buy the basics of life, so is still in tune with money (and possessions) not being that important to this participant. Another said that money didn't "drive" him, positioning his work as a hairdresser as "helping clients with internal and external beauty" but then describing the hairdressing industry as "superficial, hair grows but it pays the [his] mortgage." Having reflected on this dichotomy, I decided that I had to present their self-commentary and let their responses to their VIA-IS profile data speak for themselves. So the documentary had to present participants' views of their respective realities, not mine - even though it was my selection, omission and placement of data that did in fact do just that.

#### *4.3 Accentuating the Positive and Eliminating the Negative*

During the course of the interviews, one of my participants came to understand that the impositions within her working environment conflicted with her strengths, producing a situation where the conversation allowed for a self-clarification. She realised how dissatisfying her role was in this respect and how this situation had adversely affected her happiness. She concluded that fault lay not with the job per se but with the "system", a conclusion that I considered reflected her key VIA-IS strengths of including fairness, honesty, and forgiveness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

I did not portray this participant's plight in the documentary for reasons of sensitivity associated with job issues in her workplace and at her request, however, I felt this situation provided supporting evidence for one my early hypotheses, namely, that if our strengths are out of alignment within our work, our happiness is compromised. (Permission was granted to include this information here).

Reference to the top five VIA-IS strengths for each participant gave me another means of not only accessing the essence of my participants but also of understanding how a person's strengths can play out in various work situations and contribute to that person feeling happy in their work. I also found that, for the participants, reference to these top five strengths could mean confronting previously held and seemingly erroneous ideals about themselves and their work.

One participant, for example, had long seen one of her main strengths as leadership, but her VIA-IS profile said differently. She was obviously disappointed by this discrepancy, so presenting this situation in the documentary was initially a difficult call for her and for me. However, closer examination of and reflection on her VIA-IS profile made evident that she did not lack leadership skills but rather that her other strengths emerged as more dominant in the survey (being curiosity). Her leadership skills had developed due to her curiosity, and her interest in "growing" people had developed as a result of being curious, and so on. She said during an interview: "Curiosity and interest is a fabulous thing but I kind of I thought, oh no, it should be leadership or perception or something like, so sort of like, overall curiosity. I thought, I don't know about that. But in fact I think it's a wonderful thing, and it's something I apply every day. I am constantly curious, deeply fascinated by people and how they do

things and how they avoid things, and how they succeed at things. What the difference is between success and failure, looking at different challenges—so it would be very fair to say that that [is the] particular strength I do apply, not just in my business, in my whole life.”

This process was useful in making clear to her and to me that different work situations can call on different strengths or mixes of strengths that did not necessarily tally with her self-perception but had much to do with her ability to accommodate and find pleasure in different facets of her work.

### **5. Making Research Accessible**

Another intention underpinning my research was that of bringing understanding, through an unusual medium within academia (audio-visual documentary), of work-related wellbeing to the wider collective. Ellinor (2005), argues, it is through seeking out multiple perspectives that we develop deeper levels of understandings—that we see “a larger whole from the collection of individual perspectives ... [and where] collective meaning creates a fuller tapestry” (p. 258).

Certainly, the documentary allowed me to explore a creative mode of making research data accessible to communities within and outside the academy. It also provided a way of giving back to research participants, of letting them see how the information they had provided could not only give them insights about themselves but also contribute to the collective good. By illuminating this and encouraging reflexivity in both the participants and the viewers, I aimed to encourage deep exploration of real life stories through the use of documentary and to align with Winston and the British Film Institute’s (1995) claims.

Representing lived experience through a phenomenological interpretation (van Manen, 1990) and revealing the participants’ essence through using phenomenological epistemologies and methodologies (Cohen et al., 2000; Titchen & Hobson, 2011) during production of “Project Happiness – The Lived Experience” also meant amalgamating existing boundaries and creating something new. Understanding of what I mean here comes from Titchen and Hobson (2005, 2011), who advocate taking a *direct approach* to phenomenological interpretations in line with the thinking of German philosopher Husserl (1889–1976). Husserl called for the lived experience to be reduced and represented while retaining the essential meaning; thus, perception is enhanced and understanding is made non-judgemental because the research questions “lead to the systematic study of the mental content of individual’s inner worlds” (Titchen & Hobson, 2011, p.124). In line with the precepts of phenomenology, my goal was to peel back the layers of the lived experience in order to find, as truthfully and authentically as I could, the underlying meaning of happiness relative to work for each participant, including myself. I found video interviewing both an interesting way to gather and represent data. And although analysing these data and then representing the analysis in a digital portrayal was challenging, I came to realise after viewings by participants and others of the documentary that personal narratives which engage and reveal personal life content are enabling and empowering to researcher, participant, and viewer (or recipient of the information). By striving, as the interviewer, to adopt a sensitivity and openness towards the participants, I consider I was able to make the participants’ dialogue about self and their work visually accessible. Presenting these narratives in an honest way required reflective engagement on my part from the beginning. Exploring what others knew challenged and

affected my own thinking and understanding and by turning the reflective gaze back onto myself, it ensured I was challenged and aware of my decisions. I learned my own top five VIA-IS strengths were constantly engaged.

## 6. Conclusion

‘Authenticity’ was the driving tenet of my project. Overall, I was satisfied that the content of the documentary represents and reveals each participant authentically and so aligns with my original intent. I credit this outcome in part to my VIA-IS strength of perspective. I began this journey with a tenuous idea of an alternative way of representing analysed data, undertaking phenomenological research and with limited film-making skills but have now completed a product that reflects what I hoped to set out to show. Making the best of what was available at the time (resources, sound quality, lighting) and realising the product, was a positive experience.

Whilst not affecting the research outcomes, every time I watch the documentary I am aware of technical aspects I would change given the chance (sound quality was at times poor, for example). I acknowledge that videoing the interviews meant “one-off” opportunities because once the interviews were filmed, there could be no retakes. This was limiting in terms of having participants sufficiently relaxed to impart information, of allowing spontaneous and discursive interviewing, and of capturing information whilst being mindful of the presence and impact of the camera.

Essentially, I have followed a standard methodological structure, utilised a purposive sampling strategy, conducted in-depth interviews (which were filmed), and analysed the data through thematic coding informed by phenomenological theory. I have developed this method to use documentary as a way to represent analysed data and have found this enables research findings to be more available and accessible to wider audiences. I found that using documentary as a means by which to conduct phenomenological research and represent data analysis is not easy. But my own knowledge of filmmaking has grown hugely and so made more evident for me how this method can serve qualitative research. I consider that exploring documentary film-making as a valid means of achieving the aims of authentic phenomenological representation is a journey worth continuing.

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