



JOY Intelligence™ (JQ) and the JOYELY Theory of Joy™: An Integrative Framework for Emotional Well-Being

Introduction

Emotions have long been studied through various theoretical lenses, from classical "basic emotion" models to contemporary constructivist and neuroscientific frameworks. Joy, in particular, has been treated divergently across these theories – sometimes as a discrete universal emotion, other times as a culturally shaped experience or a byproduct of cognitive interpretations. The **JOYELY Theory of Joy™**, core to the JOY Intelligence™ (JQ) framework, offers a new perspective by reframing joy not as a transient reaction or a solely culture-bound label, but as a *sustainable neurobiological state* arising when certain conditions are met. Specifically, JOYELY theory posits that *emotional safety* and *presence* are prerequisite conditions that allow **joy** to emerge reliably and persistently. This perspective shifts the focus from joy as one emotion among many to joy as a foundational operating state of human consciousness once basic regulatory needs are fulfilled. In doing so, JOYELY theory builds upon and integrates insights from legacy emotion models – including Ekman's Basic Emotions, Plutchik's Wheel, Tomkins' Affect Theory, Barrett's Constructed Emotion, and Damasio's neurobiological framework – while addressing their limitations in explaining how a durable sense of joy is achieved. The following sections compare these influential models and describe how the Safety-Presence-Joy (SPJ) model advances the understanding of joy as an attainable, trainable baseline for well-being. The tone throughout is grounded in current scientific research and clinical insights, aiming to position JOYELY's SPJ model within academic discourse on affective neuroscience, psychology, and youth emotional development.

Legacy Emotion Models and the Conception of Joy

Basic Emotion Theories (Ekman, Plutchik, Tomkins). Classic basic emotion theories assert that a set of fundamental emotions are biologically hard-wired and universally expressed. In Ekman's model, for example, **joy** (often labeled as "happiness") is one of a handful of basic emotions evidenced by distinct facial expressions recognized across cultures[1]. Joy in this view is an innate affect program – a discrete emotional category triggered by certain stimuli (e.g. achieving a goal) and accompanied by a characteristic pattern of physiology and expression. Plutchik's psychoevolutionary theory similarly includes joy as one of eight primary emotions (opposing sadness on a polarity), conceptualized in his Wheel of Emotions as a basic survival-oriented state (e.g. joy is linked to affiliation and reproduction)[2]. Plutchik's model adds a dimensional component, wherein emotions vary in intensity and can mix to form complex feelings, but joy remains a core primitive emotion in the wheel framework[3]. Even earlier, Silvan Tomkins' Affect Theory identified "enjoyment-joy" as one of the two positive innate affects (the other being interest-excitement) among nine hard-wired affects present from infancy[4]. Tomkins described enjoyment/joy as a biologically programmed response (accompanied by smiling and feelings of delight) triggered by experiences like



comfort or satiation. In all of these classic models, joy is treated as a *distinct emotive unit*—a fundamental feeling that is part of our evolutionary endowment.

While basic emotion theorists convincingly argue for universality in the expression and physiology of joy to an extent, this approach has limitations. It tends to view joy as a *momentary reaction* (to a positive event or the fulfillment of a need) rather than a *sustained condition*. Joy is categorized alongside other survival emotions (fear, anger, disgust, etc.), implying that like those, it is an episodic state bounded by specific eliciting circumstances. The JOYELY Theory of Joy™ acknowledges the evolutionary roots of joy but reframes it as more than an ephemeral burst of "happiness." Instead, JOYELY theory asks: what if joy can be cultivated into an ongoing baseline mode of functioning once an individual's nervous system achieves sufficient safety and present-moment awareness? By treating joy not just as a discrete affective reaction but as an *integration of multiple systems in balance*, JOYELY builds upon these basic emotion models to explore how joy might operate as a sustained *trait/state* that supports resilience and optimal functioning.

Constructed Emotion Theory (Barrett). In contrast to basic emotion views, constructivist theories such as Lisa Feldman Barrett's **Theory of Constructed Emotion** argue that named emotions (like "joy") are not universal, dedicated neural events but rather emergent interpretations of more fundamental affective ingredients^[5]. Barrett posits that the brain continually makes meaning of core affect (intrinsic states of valence – pleasant or unpleasant – and arousal) by using concepts shaped by culture and experience; an emotion is "constructed" when we categorize these feelings as, say, "joy" or "anger" based on context and learned knowledge. From this perspective, *joy* does not have a single fingerprint in the brain or body; instances of joy can vary widely – there is no specific module or circuit purely for "joy" that always activates. Rather, joy arises when an individual experiences a positively valenced, moderate-to-high arousal state and interprets the context as one that calls for the label "joy" or "happiness". Barrett's view also emphasizes that emotion categories are socially and linguistically influenced; what one culture or person calls "joy" might be parsed differently elsewhere, casting doubt on joy as a monolithic entity.

The JOYELY framework aligns with Barrett's theory in recognizing that *context and interpretation matter* and that there is a dimensional aspect (joy as high-valence) to the experience of joy. JOYELY Theory of Joy™, however, takes a further step in integrating this with neurobiological conditions: it suggests that beyond linguistic constructs, there are real physiological states (driven by the autonomic nervous system and brainstem modulation) that underlie a sustained experience of joy. In other words, JOYELY theory agrees that one must have a core state of positive affect (in Barrett's terms, a core affect with positive valence and calm or vital energy) to label the experience as joy. What JOYELY adds is an emphasis on how one *reaches* that core state reliably: by attaining emotional safety and mindful presence. This introduces a more prescriptive, regulatory dimension to the constructed emotion view – it's not just that the brain categorizes an internal state as "joy," but that individuals can actively foster the conditions (via nervous system regulation and attention training) that make that positive core affect state occur regularly. Moreover, JOYELY Theory reframes joy as *less variable* than Barrett might imply: while the expression and context of joy can differ, the **neurobiological profile** of sustainable joy (e.g. parasympathetic activity, hormonal balance) might have commonalities across humans, which JOYELY seeks to leverage. In summary, JOYELY Theory builds upon constructed emotion theory by grounding the *construction* process in the body: cultural concepts of joy are acknowledged, but the focus is on an underlying



embodied state (safety and presence-induced) that transcends cultural definitions and is trainable across populations.

Damasio's Neuroscientific Framework. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio offers another lens, treating emotions as grounded in homeostatic bodily processes and feelings as the conscious experience of those physiological changes[6]. In Damasio's framework, core emotions (e.g. fear, anger, happiness) arise from neural circuits (particularly subcortical structures) that detect situations relevant to survival and adjust the body's internal state accordingly; the feeling of an emotion (such as joy or sorrow) comes *after* the brain monitors the body's changed state (racing heart, hormonal shifts, etc.). Critically, Damasio underscores that emotions are integral to decision-making and adaptability – the somatic marker hypothesis proposes that emotional signals from the body guide reasoning, especially in uncertain or social situations. In this view, what we label "joy" would correspond to the conscious feeling of a beneficial physiological state (for instance, the *well-being* that accompanies optimal homeostasis). Notably, Damasio links positive feelings to the idea of the organism's physiological balance: "*Homeostasis in good or even optimal ranges expresses itself as well-being and even joy*", he writes, suggesting that joy is essentially the mental indicator of a thriving internal milieu. Furthermore, positive social emotions (like the happiness from love or friendship) are seen as contributing to health by improving homeostatic regulation. Thus, Damasio's work frames joy as both a *result* of a body in balance and a *cause* of further stability (through health-promoting effects).

JOYELY Theory of Joy™ is strongly aligned with Damasio's neurobiological approach. It explicitly identifies joy as a *neurophysiological state* of coherence and parasympathetic activation (rest-and-digest dominance) that signals safety and optimal functioning. JOYELY's assertion that emotional safety and presence facilitate sustainable joy resonates with Damasio's idea that only when the organism is not under threat can it afford to experience and maintain positive feelings (i.e. when homeostatic parameters are favorable). Additionally, JOYELY extends Damasio's insight about emotions aiding decision-making: by *operating from joy*, individuals may engage executive functions and social cognition more effectively, similar to how Damasio's somatic markers help people navigate choices[7]. In other words, JOYELY's SPJ model implies that a foundation of safety and present-centered awareness yields a physiological state (joy) that can serve as an "intelligence" guiding better decision outcomes – a concept consistent with the view that emotion and cognition are deeply interwoven in the brain. The JOYELY framework builds on Damasio by providing a practical roadmap to achieve the beneficial homeostatic state: training techniques to down-regulate stress responses and cultivate present awareness, thereby intentionally invoking the positive feeling state that Damasio would identify as reflective of optimal internal regulation.

Summary of the Need for a New Framework: Each of the legacy models contributes key understandings – the universality and communicative value of joy (Ekman/Tomkins/Plutchik), the contextual construction of joy (Barrett), and the bodily basis and functional role of joy (Damasio). However, none alone fully explains how to consistently foster a *sustainable sense of joy* that coexists with life's challenges and supports long-term well-being. Basic emotion theories don't address how to move beyond fleeting happiness; constructivist theory doesn't specify how to reliably bias one's core affect toward the positive; and while Damasio recognizes the physiology of well-being, his framework doesn't provide an applied method for attaining that state intentionally (aside from avoiding pathology). **JOYELY Theory of Joy™** emerges to fill



this gap by synthesizing these insights into a actionable model centered on *Safety*, *Presence*, and *Joy* (SPJ). Rather than treating **joy as one item on the emotional menu**, JOYELY elevates joy to an indicator of optimal neuropsychological functioning – a state one can cultivate through building safety and presence. In the next section, we outline the SPJ model and its principles, highlighting how it reconceptualizes joy and its role in emotional development.

The JOYELY Theory of Joy™ Framework: Safety– Presence–Joy (SPJ) Model

JOYELY Theory of Joy™ proposes that **sustainable joy** is the natural outcome of a nervous system that is in a state of *emotional safety* and *mindful presence*. The framework identifies three interlocking components – *Safety*, *Presence*, and *Joy* (SPJ) – as a sequential process: first establishing a foundation of safety (at both neurobiological and psychological levels), then fostering active present-moment awareness, which together allow joy to emerge as a stable embodied state. Importantly, JOYELY theory positions joy not as a fleeting emotion to be chased, but as a *skillful state of consciousness* that can be strengthened with practice, yielding broad benefits for mental health, decision-making, and social connection. The following core principles summarize the SPJ model:

- 1. Joy as Neurophysiology of Coherence:** Joy is understood in physiological terms – a state of autonomic *coherence* and biochemical balance. Research shows that experiences of joy and contentment correlate with specific patterns in the body and brain: for instance, lower levels of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, higher levels of oxytocin (a prosocial bonding hormone), and increased heart rate variability (a marker of parasympathetic nervous system activation)[8]. These changes reflect a shift into the body's restorative mode. When one is joyful, the parasympathetic "rest and digest" arm of the autonomic nervous system is engaged, producing calm yet alert states characterized by neural integration and adaptability. High heart rate variability (HRV) in particular has been linked to positive affect and resilience, indicating the heart-brain communication is tuned for flexibility. Elevated oxytocin accompanies feelings of trust, safety, and emotional warmth, suggesting that social joy (e.g. joyful connection with others) is chemically supported by bonding pathways. In short, JOYELY theory frames joy as an *embodied condition* of neurobiological well-being. Joy isn't merely "in the head" – it is reflected in the entire organism's physiology moving toward equilibrium and health. This principle is supported by evidence that positive emotional states can down-regulate the HPA (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal) stress axis. For example, individuals who report more frequent positive emotions have significantly lower daily cortisol output and reduced inflammatory markers, even after controlling for life stressors. Such findings reinforce that *joyful states literally restore the body*, and conversely, that fostering the body's physical conditions of safety can enable the experience of joy.
- 2. Joy as the Natural Output of Safety and Presence:** The JOYELY model posits that when a person's environment and mindset are fundamentally safe and

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3. present, **joy will spontaneously arise** as the default state. Emotional safety refers to a condition in which one does not feel under psychosocial threat – the brain's defensive circuits are not chronically activated. Presence refers to full engagement in the here-and-now, with mindful attention to one's experience rather than ruminating on past or future worries. Neuroscience research emphasizes that our brains continually scan for safety vs. danger (a process termed neuroception) and shift our physiological state accordingly[9]. When the context is perceived as safe, the ventral vagal complex of the parasympathetic system dominates, supporting social engagement, openness, and play. Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory demonstrates that feelings of safety unlock the capacity for positive social emotions and communication – in safe states, we can listen, empathize, and connect, behaviors often accompanied by feelings of warmth and joy. JOYELY Theory builds on this: it argues that you *cannot reliably access joy if you are in a protective survival mode*. Thus, establishing emotional safety (through supportive relationships, secure attachments, and self-regulation practices) is the first pillar. Attachment neuroscience shows that when a child (or adult) feels securely attached and interpersonally safe, it not only buffers stress but actively facilitates curiosity and positive exploration[10]. As Schore notes, consistent attuned interactions that generate safety also "amplify positive affects" – in other words, safety breeds joy and interest in both children and adults. Presence, the second pillar, complements safety by aligning attention and awareness with one's immediate somatic and sensory experience. Mindfulness research has found that present-moment attention practices increase activity in brain regions associated with emotion regulation and decrease default-mode network activity linked to mind-wandering and anxiety[11]. Being present calms the mental noise that often triggers negative affect, thereby allowing the intrinsic positivity of an undistracted mind to come forward. In JOYELY's view, *joy is the baseline when the mind-body system is not disturbed by threat or abstraction*. A practical illustration is that simply helping individuals feel safe (e.g. via deep breathing to signal "no danger" to the brain) and centered in the moment can lead to spontaneous smiles, uplifted mood, and a sense of ease. Joy requires neither a special occasion nor a forced euphoria – it is the **spontaneous result of a well-regulated nervous system**. This reframing contrasts with legacy views that treat joy as a reaction to external success or reward; JOYELY suggests instead that joy is accessible "from the inside out" by meeting the conditions of safety and presence.
4. **Joy as Integration and Wholeness (Beyond Triggered Emotions):** Traditional models often classify joy as an affective response **to** something (you win a prize, you feel joy; you see a loved one, you feel joy). The JOYELY framework reconceives joy as an **integrative state** that represents *wholeness* in one's emotional life, rather than a mere reaction. Rather than being directly caused by an external trigger, joy in this model arises when an individual's internal systems (biological, psychological, social) are in harmony. This means a person can experience joy even amidst challenges, as long as they remain grounded and supported. Joy becomes more akin to an ongoing *trait* or orientation – a backdrop of contentment and openness – that can be present alongside fleeting emotional reactions. For example, an adolescent might feel nervousness about an exam or sadness about a loss, but if they have cultivated a strong baseline of safety and present awareness, a sense of underlying joy (in terms of gratitude for life, hope, or connection) can coexist with those specific feelings. JOYELY Theory thus does not treat joy and distress as mutually exclusive opposites (as Plutchik's wheel

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might suggest with joy vs. sadness). Instead, it asserts that **joy can accompany all emotional states**, infusing them with resilience. This concept is supported by findings in positive psychology showing that people can experience “mixed emotions” and that positive affect can counterbalance negative affect’s effects without canceling it out. Fredrickson’s Broaden-and-Build theory, for instance, notes that mild positive emotions (joy, love, interest) broaden one’s thoughts and coping strategies even during adversity, building psychological resources over time. JOYELY theory embeds this idea: joy is viewed as the *integrative backdrop* that “completes” other emotions by providing a steady sense of meaning and connection. Thus, rather than striving for constant happiness in lieu of other feelings, the goal is to develop an underlying joyful disposition that can **“sit beside” fear, anger, or sorrow** and help process them. Clinically, this resonates with approaches in psychotherapy that aim to build a client’s capacity to experience positive affect alongside working through trauma or pain, thereby avoiding emotional overwhelm. In summary, JOYELY’s integrative view of joy expands upon older theories by removing joy from a zero-sum competition with negative emotions; it becomes an ever-available aspect of consciousness given the right conditions.

5. **Joy as a Trainable Skill and Conscious Practice:** Departing from the notion that emotions simply happen to us, JOYELY Theory emphasizes personal agency in cultivating joy. Joy is framed as a *skill* that one can strengthen through deliberate practices that reinforce safety and presence. This principle is supported by contemporary neuroscience which recognizes the brain’s plasticity in emotional learning: exercises in mindfulness, gratitude, loving-kindness meditation, and cognitive reframing have been shown to increase positive affect and improve emotion regulation capacity over time. JOYELY operationalizes this through practical techniques (e.g. the “Chair of Joy” exercise, which involves a brief sequence of somatic settling, breathing, positive reflection, and feeling) designed to quickly shift the nervous system from stress to calm and invoke a joyful state. By repeating such techniques, individuals effectively train their autonomic nervous system to recover more quickly from negative arousal and to seek out a joyful equilibrium. This is analogous to biofeedback or resilience training: with practice, the baseline emotional set-point can gradually move toward positivity. The idea of *joy literacy* or *joy competence* dovetails with social-emotional learning research in youth – studies have found that adolescents can learn strategies to manage emotions and that doing so improves their overall emotional well-being and social functioning. In educational contexts, programs that encourage daily practices of positive emotional focus (for example, identifying “three good things” each day, or brief mindfulness sessions in class) have documented improvements in students’ mood stability and pro-social behavior. JOYELY Theory provides a structured way to think about these improvements: by seeing joy as a skill, we can measure and develop it just like we do with IQ or EQ. Notably, JOYELY introduces the concept of JQ – Joy Intelligence™ – defined as the ability to intentionally access, sustain, and apply joy as a guiding force in life. This means individuals high in JQ can self-regulate into a joyful state even amid stress, use that state to make clear and creative decisions, and radiate a calming, uplifting influence on others. JOYELY’s approach is to treat this not as a fixed trait but as a learned proficiency. Over time, practicing joy (through safety and presence exercises) can rewire neural pathways, favoring activation of frontal regulatory regions and vagal pathways instead of habitual fight/flight reactivity. The outcome is greater emotional resilience: studies indicate that people who

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cultivate positive affect skills recover cardiovascular equilibrium faster after a stressor and have lower risk of anxiety or depression relapse. In short, JOYELY Theory's fourth principle asserts that *joy deserves a place in curricula and training* – much as we teach math or empathy, we can systematically teach practices that reinforce the neurobiological patterns of joy.

6. **Joy as a Core for Decision-Making, Creativity, and Connection:** Finally, JOYELY Theory of Joy™ integrates joy into the broader landscape of cognition and social behavior. Rather than seeing joy as a *byproduct* or reward at the end of an endeavor, JOYELY positions joy as an *input* – a resource that actively enhances other functions. This perspective is supported by research in organizational psychology and neuroscience. For example, positive mood has been linked to improved cognitive flexibility and problem-solving, as well as increased creativity in teams. Leaders who foster a joyful, positive climate tend to see boosts in team performance and innovation. At the neural level, joy and associated positive states likely engage dopamine-mediated reward circuits in constructive ways, promoting motivation and a sense of reward during effort, not just at the outcome. Decision-making neuroscience, going back to Damasio's work, has demonstrated that when people cannot sense emotional cues (as in certain frontal lobe injuries), their decisions become poorer – they struggle with indecisiveness or risky choices. By ensuring one's baseline is joyful and not dominated by fear or anger, JOYELY suggests that decisions will be more aligned with one's values and long-term well-being, essentially because the brain is not in a survival mode but in a thriving mode. Thus, JQ (Joy Intelligence) contributes to wiser decision-making: a joyful mind is less biased by threat, more capable of considering broad, creative solutions (consistent with Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory)[12], and more attuned to ethical or cooperative outcomes (since oxytocin and trust hormones are likely elevated, biasing toward prosocial choices). Moreover, joy as a shared state can build social capital – groups that regularly share joyful experiences develop stronger bonds and communication. On a neurobiological level, this might correspond to synchronized brain patterns or hormonal releases (like collective endorphins) that increase group cohesion. JOYELY's framework implicitly incorporates these findings to argue that *joy is not a luxury*, but a foundational aspect of human design that optimizes how we think, feel, and relate. By reframing joy as the grounding for emotional skills, JOYELY theory stands in contrast to any implication that joy is trivial or secondary in serious contexts. On the contrary, cultivating joy can lead to **better stress tolerance, enhanced executive function, and deeper empathy**, which are all critical outcomes for youth development and leadership.

Integrating Core Affect, Embodiment, and Development: Implications for Youth Emotional Growth

Because JOYELY Theory of Joy™ bridges biological, psychological, and social dimensions, it offers a comprehensive framework for emotional development, particularly in youth populations. Traditional emotion theories have not typically been translated into **practical curricula** for developing emotional skills in young people – at least not with joy at the center. The SPJ model provides a scaffold to do so. It resonates

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with the **core affect** approach (valence and arousal) by acknowledging that a general positive-low arousal state (safe calm) is ideal for learning and growth. It draws on **decision-making neuroscience** (as discussed) to encourage youth to notice how feeling centered and positive leads to better choices (e.g. avoiding risky behaviors because they are already satisfied and do not seek maladaptive thrills). It leverages principles of **embodied regulation**, teaching techniques like deep breathing, posture (e.g. sitting upright in an open, "joyful" stance), and sensory grounding to directly influence physiology toward safety. Such bodily-first approaches align with trauma-informed practices that help kids self-soothe through tapping into the vagus nerve, etc., and they complement cognitive strategies. Finally, JOYELY theory dovetails with research on **emotional skill development** and social-emotional learning (SEL). It emphasizes creating environments of safety and belonging in schools or programs – essentially priming the "safety" component of SPJ – as a precursor to any effective learning. Indeed, developmental studies indicate that adolescents learn emotional skills best in contexts that feel secure and supportive, where they can take risks in expressing themselves without fear. By prioritizing emotional safety (through supportive peer and mentor relationships) and presence (through mindfulness and engagement exercises), youth programs can dramatically improve participants' openness to learning new emotional competencies. Larson and Rusk (2021) note that high-quality youth programs often implicitly do this: they establish a safe, trustful climate and encourage youths to be "in the moment" via experiential activities, which together allow young people to actively practice managing emotions and even *enjoying* positive emotional moments as a group. JOYELY's contribution is to make this process explicit and systematic – to treat *joy as both the means and the end* in youth emotional development.

In practical terms, integrating JOYELY Theory into youth development might involve: (a) training educators and counselors in the neuroscience of safety and how to help students feel safe (for instance, through predictable routines, warmth, and unconditional positive regard); (b) incorporating mindfulness or "presence breaks" during the day, teaching students to check in with their breathing and senses; and (c) introducing simple joy-cultivation exercises (like sharing something they feel grateful or joyful about each day, or the Chair of Joy® practice adapted for age-appropriateness). Over time, these practices can increase students' **Joy Set-Point** – a term one might use to describe the typical level of joy a person can access. A higher joy set-point would manifest as a student who is more resilient to stress, quicker to recover from setbacks, and more inclusive and empathetic with peers. These are not speculative outcomes; they are aligned with known benefits of SEL programs and positive psychology interventions in schools, which find improvements in academic performance, reductions in bullying, and better mental health when students' emotional well-being is prioritized.

Ultimately, JOYELY Theory of Joy™ positions itself as a unifying framework that reframes earlier emotion theories in service of human thriving. By focusing on *emotional safety and presence as the neurobiological keys*, it explains why joy has been elusive or treated as merely episodic in the past – because our models and methods did not center the conditions that allow joy to flourish. In a sense, JOYELY theory suggests that *joy has been hiding in plain sight* as a natural state accessible to everyone, but our culturally and evolutionarily inherited biases toward threat (the "negativity bias" in the brain) have made it harder to remain in joy. The SPJ model offers a corrective by training individuals, especially youth, how to shift out of that survival mode and into a state of growth. In doing so, it integrates the categorical clarity of basic emotion theories (yes, joy is real and distinct), the fluidity of constructivist views (joy can be cultivated through mindset and



context), and the embodied wisdom of neuroscience (joy is deeply physical and regulatory). This integrative approach aspires to create a **practical, scalable system** for enhancing emotional well-being – one that speaks to scientists, clinicians, educators, and individuals alike.

Conclusion

The evolution of emotion theory reveals an increasing appreciation for the complexity and malleability of our emotional lives. The JOYELY Theory of Joy™ emerges in this landscape as a novel paradigm: it reframes joy from a peripheral positive feeling to a central indicator of neurobiological safety and wholeness. By explicitly comparing JOYELY's SPJ model with legacy models, we see both continuity and divergence. Joy is indeed a basic human affect – but it is also a *trainable state of consciousness*. It is shaped by culture and context – yet it rests on universal neurobiological foundations that, when understood, can be nurtured in anyone. Joy feels good – and, critically, it *does good*, contributing to better health, decisions, and relationships.

In enhancing the scientific tenor of this discussion, we grounded JOYELY's claims in established research: from the role of the vagus nerve and oxytocin in positive emotional states to the importance of secure attachments and present-focused awareness in development. The JOYELY Theory of Joy™ thus stands on a rich interdisciplinary base (affective science, developmental psychology, and neuroscience) while offering an actionable framework. For youth emotional development, this means we finally have a theory that not only explains what joy is, but also how to practically help young people *live in joy*. Going forward, empirical studies will be valuable to further validate the SPJ model – for example, measuring changes in cortisol, HRV, or academic outcomes in schools implementing JOYELY-based curricula. Such research will inform refinements of the model and fortify its credibility in academic and clinical circles.

In conclusion, by building upon Ekman, Plutchik, Tomkins, Barrett, and Damasio, JOYELY Theory of Joy™ encapsulates a paradigm shift: **from joy as a discrete or fleeting emotion to joy as a foundational state of being**. It challenges us to prioritize emotional safety and presence as prerequisites for any meaningful education or intervention, positing that joy is both the path and the destination for a flourishing life. This integrative approach invites further scholarly dialogue and, more importantly, offers a hopeful, evidence-informed roadmap for enhancing human potential through the art and science of joy.

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