

BRINGING BACK THE JOY: A STUDY OF THE SHORT DOCUMENTARY FILM *THE LAST REPAIR SHOP* (2023)

Membawa Kembali Keriangan: Kajian Film Dokumenter Pendek
The Last Repair Shop (2023)

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Abstract: *This literature research focuses on discussing the conceptualization of joy in American short documentary film entitled The Last Repair Shop (2023). As a feeling that everyone needs in life, the concept of joy needs to be studied. It is also expected that the study can become an additional reference for future research and contribute to increasing understanding of the concept of joy and enriching theory in literary and cultural studies. The study aims at identifying how joy is portrayed and conceptualized through the documentary film. The Primary data for qualitative research is in the form of a collection of statements from actors obtained from documentary short films. This study also utilizes Hall's representation theory to analyze statements from actors to construct the concept of joy portrayed in the documentary film. The results of data analysis and interpretation show that the concept of joy can refer to the power to change a person's life because it can be a source of change or a result obtained from change. In addition, joy as portrayed through the documentary can also be conceptualized as kindness towards oneself and others.*

Keywords: *the concept of joy, short documentary film, the power to change, kindness*

Abstrak: *Penelitian kepustakaan ini befokus kepada pembahasan konseptualisasi kerriangan dalam film dokumenter pendek Amerika yang berjudul The Last Repair Shop (2023). Sebagai suatu bentuk perasaan yang dibutuhkan setiap orang, konsep kerriangan perlu dikaji. Kajian ini diharapkan bisa menjadi referensi tambahan untuk penelitian di masa yang akan datang dan berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan pemahaman tentang konsep kerriangan, serta memperkaya teori dalam kajian budaya dan sastra. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana kerriangan dipotret dan dikonsep melalui film dokumenter tersebut. Data utama untuk penelitian kualitatif ini berupa sekumpulan pernyataan dari aktor-aktor yang diperoleh dari film dokumenter pendek tersebut. Kajian ini memanfaatkan teori representasi dari Hall untuk menganalisis pernyataan-pernyataan dari aktor-aktor tersebut. Hasil analisis dan penafsiran data menunjukkan bahwa konsep kerriangan dapat merujuk kepada kekuatan untuk mengubah kehidupan seseorang karena itu bisa menjadi sumber untuk perubahan atau hasil yang diperoleh dari perubahan. Sebagai tambahan, kerriangan seperti yang dipotret melalui dokumenter tersebut dapat dikonsepsikan sebagai kebaikan hati terhadap diri sendiri dan orang lain.*

Kata Kunci: *konsep kerriangan, film dokumenter pendek, kekuatan untuk mengubah, kebaikan hati*

INTRODUCTION

The presence of various types of films in human life opens up greater opportunities for people to choose the kinds of films they want as entertainment media. They are free to select any genre fo films they are



interested in based on their needs One of the movie genres which is familiar to audiences is the documentary film. Even though documentary films might not be as popular as action, science fiction, horror, comedy or romance films, documentary films still have their own attractive points. With a number of themes taken from real experience such as true events, the life of important public figures, or the daily life of certain communities, etc., documentary films will never be underrated in the world of movie.

Besides functioning as entertainment media, documentary films can definitely enrich the audiences' knowledge and help them understand various realities of life. Therefore, documentary films are commonly associated with learning objectives, especially in the field of education (Rikarno, 2015; Sukamto 2023). In addition, according to Karlin & Johnson (2011) documentary films have often been used as a medium to encourage various kinds of changes in society and with the increasing development of Internet-based media, it can create more opportunities for documentary films to have an impact on people's life. A wide variety of experiences and living conditions of people from various backgrounds are can be filmed into a documentary which will be useful to help more people learn about life values. One of the basic values of life is having joy.

There has been evidence and also a number of theories which underline that joy as an expression of positive emotions is unique and essential to study (Watkins *et al.*, 2017). Joy is definitely a feeling that everyone wants to have and man people struggle hard to get it so that their life will be more meaningful. The importance of joy can be seen through Crongvist's study (2021) which suggests that school teachers must become facilitators to encourage the feeling of joy in their students. However, many people do not really understand the significance of the feeling of joy. Thus, the concept of joy still needs to be explored.

There are certainly many studies on documentary films that have been carried out by previous researchers. Most studies of documentary films tend to be about the relationship between documentary films and academy or education, documentary film making, discussion of certain values or elements in documentary films, etc. For instance, Fitzgerald & Lowe (2020) stated that there are possibilities and challenges in terms of innovation in the field of qualitative methodology, especially in the ethnographic approach, when documentary filmmaking practices are applied. Blum and Smythe (2021) also studied several international documentary films and their use for students with the finding that apart from gaining knowledge, watching documentaries also aroused feelings of empathy and gratitude and were encouraged to help others.

A study on the use of documentary films was also discussed by Sukamto (2023) who argued that the use of documentary films in teaching can encourage students to be enthusiastic and able to improve their achievements. Apart from that, there is also a documentary film study about the traditional Malay boat game from Riau called "Jong" which was discussed by Sembiring *et al.* (2019) emphasized that documentary films can be a means of introducing and preserving a culture. However, all of these studies are useful as references that are important to review so that they can be used to explain terms, the relationship between the object of discussion and another object as well as the novelty of this study. Even though research on documentary films has been

carried out before, this study can still provide novel values in terms of types of documentary films, analysis methods, issues in documentary films and research findings.

Apart from a number of definitions that have been put forward by researchers, perhaps the precise definition of a documentary film does not need to be debated. However, the nature of a documentary film must remain the basis for defining a documentary film. Documentary films tell directly about real events or situations, real people, and historical realities as they are without having to manipulate or add anything that is not yet valid (Nichols, 2010). So, according to Magriyanti & Rasminto (2020) the principle of documentary film emphasizes the spontaneity of objects that are filmed without needing to be contrived. Therefore, Rabinowitz (1993) has stated that a documentary film itself can also be considered a historical document because it has the status of a film that reveals the truth.

One of the interesting and important documentary films to be discussed in this study is *The Last Repair Shop* (2023) which won the Academy Award in 2024 in the category of the Best Documentary Short Film. Its success in winning the award shows that the people need to see a number of essential elements of the film by Ben Proudfoot and Kris Bowers. In other words, there are life values which can be explored through the film. Therefore, this documentary short film is worth discussing and studying in order to gain more knowledge. By utilizing the documentary film entitled *The Last Repair Shop* as the data source, this qualitative study aims to describe how joy is conceptualized in the film.

METHOD

The collection of the main qualitative data from the documentary short film *The Last Repair Shop* was carried out by taking note on a number of important points which generally took the form of statements or impressions from stories told by four talented musical instrument technicians and four students who loved playing musical instruments. The results of data collection in the form of notes containing a set of statements from the story narrated in the documentary short film were analyzed and interpreted using Hall's representation theory to construct the meaning of the text. According to Campbell (2017), the denotative and reasonable meaning of stories is meaningless if it does not involve connotative and interpretive reading. Further, In representation theory there is a constructionist approach which is emphasized by Hall (1997) that meaning is constructed by humans with a representational system involving concepts and signs. Hall's explanation means that any material cannot convey meaning because people actually use systems to represent their concepts. So, in the representation system, the text recorded when watching the documentary film is interpreted by tracing its connotative meaning to construct a concept.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Joy as a significant word in this study plays an important role and it is certainly interpreted in various ways by the main characters who appear in the documentary short film. Analysis of the data from the documentary film that has

been collected shows that there are two types of concepts that explain the joy depicted in *The Last Repair Shop* (2023). Because the documentary short film has a close connection to music, especially musical instruments, the concept of joy in this context needs to be linked to the use of musical instruments. A long-standing musical instrument repair shop in the Los Angeles Unified School District is an important place in the documentary and it also gives meaning to the conceptualization of joy in this study.

(a) The Power to Change

The joy studied in the documentary is basically linked to the ability to make changes for the better. Joy is conceptualized as the result of a person's resilience and struggle in changing for a better life. The perception commonly found in society is that a person's life must change in a direction that is in accordance with society's expectations in order to be called a normal life (Bühler et al., 2024). There are many things involved in change, including work methods, processes or forms. People usually experience changes after going through a major event in their life, but according to Luhmann et al. (2014) a person may experience changes in his life before major events appear in his life and even many small, unusual things or things that are not considered events can also influence him and change him.

Regarding changes in human life, joy can be seen as an impact or result of changes in a person's life for the better. The four technicians (Dana, Paty, Duane, and Steve) who are experts in repairing musical instruments for school students revealed their stories and experiences which showed big and good changes in their lives. The results of these changes can reflect joy. There are many expressions from the heart of the characters in the documentary short film which can be used to reflect how fundamental the process of change in their lives is which can ultimately bring joy to them.

Table 1. Words Representing Joy as Power for Change

<i>The Last Repair Shop</i> (2023)	
Characters	Dialogs
An African-American female student	If I didn't have my violin from school, I don't know what I would do.
Duane (woodwind department technician)	One instrument could change their whole life.
Steve (the supervisor and a piano technician)	After what happened in the past, I lost that urge to follow the music, to be in the music, to stay with the music. But life brought me back to it. End up being a piano tuner. See how life is.

The expressions of feelings from the characters in the documentary reflect that they face various difficulties and obstacles in their lives which of course affect their mentality so that they feel sadness, fear and anxiety. However, their words clearly showed a sense of relief and joy. This situation is certainly experienced

by many people in everyday life. According to Ott (2020), these are mental problems that can affect a person's sense of joy. Therefore, people who experience stress, sadness and fear must do something within their power to change their lives, including their way of thinking, to gain joy. However, there are many kinds of good changes in a person's life and that is why joy, be it its level or meaning, is certainly felt or responded to differently and this, according to Susniene and Jurkavikas (2009), is due to the many factors that influence a person's joy and it tends to be subjective. By having a strong intention and will and starting to do something to change bad things into good things and trying to fight, that can be seen as a sign of cheerfulness. This is because the desire for joy gives them the strength to fight for change.

Therefore, the joy discussed in this documentary short film can be conceptualized as a force for change because by making changes in life, a person will be able to feel joy and with this joy, a person's life will become more meaningful. The existence of a musical instrument repair workshop with four musical instrument technicians who have worked with full dedication has been able to make a difference in the lives of students learning to play music at LAUSD. The contribution of these technicians cannot be underestimated because these students who enjoy playing music find hope, love and dreams in the world of music and by playing music, their lives change for the better. The technician from the woodwind instrument department named Duane in the documentary short film said:

“In a way, you know you can feel like you're fixing the instrument for the future Grammy winner”.

Among the children who like playing music, there could be one or two children who might grow up to be great musicians in the future. His statement can actually reflect the joy he feels because he has helped children continue to learn music and achieve their dreams.

There are many studies that have suggested that learning to play a musical instrument or participating in musical activities can have an impact on a child's mental, emotional and abilities (Przybylska-Zielińska, 2018). This point shows that this documentary short film depicts the close relationship between music, joy and success. Students who like to learn to play musical instruments may have to stop playing music because their instruments are broken and there is not enough money to buy new musical instruments. Therefore, schools must be able to support and facilitate students who have a great interest in music and like playing musical instruments so that they can play music well and happily. The presence of a musical instrument repair workshop in LAUSD gives new hope to those who love music and want to continue playing music. The concept of joy constructed from this short documentary film also involves changes in human life. A person's will to change their life for good is interpreted as an inner strength to achieve joy in their own way and one of them is through musical instruments as represented by *The Last Repair Shop*. Students and musical instrument technicians at LAUSD find their joy through music because it has changed their lives for the better and more meaningful.

(b) Kindness

The documentary short film *The Last Repair Shop* also conceptualized joy as reflected in kindness. Kindness is definitely a value that everyone wants to obtain as a guide to life. However, not everyone can do or receive kindness in their lives. There are people who feel the need to be kind to others and there are also those who do not care about it. The worst thing is, there are people who do not treat others well. This is all often seen in everyday life. A lot of people perhaps often debate about what constitutes kindness and how to measure it. Basically, there are various versions of the meaning of kindness. Many studies have put forward different definitions of kindness. Kindness can be defined as a simple attitude or effort that benefits others and is seen as good by those who receive it (Hake & Post, 2023). So, people who receive someone's kindness feel happy and lucky because they have received something good.

The documentary short film discussed in this study captures the many kindnesses of people involved in musical instrument repair at LAUSD, especially musical instrument technicians. They are people who try their best to provide joy to students whose musical instruments have problems. The following statements were expressed by them:

Table 2. Words Representing Kindness

<i>The Last Repair Shop (2023)</i>	
Characters	Dialogs
Dana	Whatever you do, don't stop, keep going. Don't quit. Don't give up. Persist, alive, free to be kind, be loving, be authentic.
Paty	Even if they don't know me, I'm a part of that.
Duane	You do it. You do whatever it takes because for a young child that's interested in playing that one instrument could change their whole life.
Steve	That's why this is not just a musical instrument repair shop. When instrument breaks, there's a student without an instrument. No, no, not in our city.

The statements they expressed can represent a sense of satisfaction related to the feeling of joy and happiness that comes from what they have done for students who need their musical instruments to continue playing music. Even though the four musical instrument technicians experienced difficult times and went through many obstacles in their lives, they were ultimately able to do something that could bring joy to other people. They do their work professionally and happily because they realize that they are helping people to achieve their dreams and live better. This is also perceived as kindness.

The four of them worked in the workshop enthusiastically repairing the students' broken musical instruments even though the owners of the musical instruments did not know them. They feel happy and proud because they can continue to help people find joy by playing music. This also includes kindness. It is true to say that people often want to be praised for the kindness they show. They even want people who have received such kindness to know their names and hope they will return the favor. This way of thinking is often found in

society. Showing acts of kindness does not require praise from others. In fact, this is true kindness. Acts of kindness that are done silently without expecting praise from others can be called silent (quiet) kindness. This, according to Binfeet and Enns (2018) can be interpreted as showing attention or an act of kindness to someone secretly and the person receiving the kindness is not aware of it. This quiet kindness is visible in the efforts made by the four musical instrument technicians. They do their best to repair musical instruments.

Even though the children whose musical instruments were broken do not know them, their kindness will continue to direct them to provide joy for the children to continue playing music and achieve their dreams. The words of the four musical instrument technicians can represent an expression of sincere and infinite kindness that everyone needs to learn. No matter how small an act of kindness is done for someone, it will be an important seed that is useful for forming good personal qualities and that will have an impact on the life of the person who shows and receives that kindness (Wieners et al., 2021).

As an ethical value that comes from compassion and empathy, kindness means helping other people to grow well, feeling what they feel and respecting them (Malti, 2020). People who show kindness usually care about other people and by caring, they will feel more meaningful in their lives (Regan et al., 2022). The explanations above provide an understanding that although kindness can be interpreted differently based on a person's conditions, perceptions, and culture, kind people will definitely still show concern and care for others. This is the same as demonstrated by the four musical instrument technicians at LAUSD.

This reflects the connection between kindness and cheerfulness. By showing kindness to everyone, they can feel happy. Sadness and anxiety can turn into joy because of kindness. This pattern may seem simple, but not everyone can show genuine kindness. The relationship between kindness and joy is also expressed by Roldan and Pastrana (2022) in their research which stated that people who carry out acts of kindness feel happy or happier. The findings of this research suggest that there is a close relationship between showing kindness and joy. The interpretation above shows that the concept of joy can be related to kindness. Analysis of the short documentary film *The Last Repair Shop* shows that the meaning of joy can be constructed from the concept of kindness.

CONCLUSION

There are several points that can be concluded from the study of the documentary short film *The Last Repair Shop* (2023) which focuses on the formation of the concept of joy. First, the concept of joy needs to be discussed because it is a feeling that everyone wants to have in living their lives. therefore, people strive to find joy in their lives. Second, the results of the analysis of the documentary show that joy can be conceptualized as a power to change lives. Happiness can be simple or complex and can be found anywhere according to a person's conditions and various other factors. Those who are determined to change their lives for the better will find joy. Finally, constructing the concept of joy is also related to the concept of kindness which can be seen as an important

element in creating joy for both people who show kindness and those who receive the kindness of others.

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