

There's a Specific Kind of Joy We've Been Missing

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In late June, over 15,000 vaccinated people packed in to watch the Foo Fighters reopen Madison Square Garden. When the band brought the comedian Dave Chappelle onstage to sing the Radiohead song “Creep,” the audience erupted in the closest thing I’ve seen to rapture in a solid year and a half.

No one cared that Mr. Chappelle was off key. They were all participating in an experience that was unimaginable just months earlier. One day they’ll tell their grandchildren about that night, when New York City came back to life and their favorite band performed another band’s song, and they tried to carry a tune with a legendary comic doing lead vocals.

Most people view emotions as existing primarily or even exclusively in their heads. Happiness is considered a state of mind; melancholy is a potential warning sign of mental illness. But the reality is that emotions are inherently social: They’re woven through our interactions.

Research has [found](#) that people laugh five times as often when they’re with others as when they’re alone. Even exchanging pleasantries with a stranger on a train is [enough](#) to spark joy. That’s not to say you can’t find delight in watching a show on Netflix. The problem is that bingeing is an individual pastime. Peak happiness lies mostly in collective activity.

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