

## Emotions Kill. Unpacking the Flip Side of Christmas Weddings and Funerals

**Wendy Thomson\***

*Department of Applied Psychology, University of Portsmouth, England, UK*

**\*Corresponding Author:** Wendy Thomson, Department of Applied Psychology, University of Portsmouth, England, UK.

**Received:** December 05, 2018; **Published:** January 25, 2019

### Abstract

This article is concerned with the form and the content of family events.

Celebrations whether they be Joyous such as marriage, Christmas or the celebration of life are highly charged emotional events. But should we assume that with emotionally charged situations and events there is the inevitability of fractions. If so, what do we need to do to avoid them?

**Keywords:** *Expectations; Emotionally Charged; Alcohol-Disinhibition; Latent Scores to Settle; Costly in Terms of Time; Money; Thought Processes; Biblical and Religious Overtones; Personality*

### Introduction

As a family therapist I can't stop myself from observing and attempting to unpack family dynamics and trying to come to some understanding of separate events at least to my own satisfaction. Recently I've observed at close quarters the anguish caused by three events which should have been celebrations, but which turned out to be disconcerting to all those involved: Christmas, a funeral, and a wedding. In each event there was a polarisation which forced those intimately involved to: take a side, to be defensive, or to take the middle ground by sitting uncomfortably on the proverbial fence. Those on the periphery and non-family members were blissfully unaware of the issues being fought out prior to the event.

The first event to unpack is Christmas. Christmas was historically the celebration of the birth a baby born in a manger. Change in society around the year 336 AD caused the date of December 25 to become established as the day to celebrate Jesus's birth. The bearing of gifts most probably originated in the story of the three wise men bearing frankincense, incense, and myrrh, symbolic gifts to the baby Jesus. The legend of Santa Claus can be traced back hundreds of years to a monk named St. Nicholas. It is believed that Nicholas was born sometime around 280 A.D. in Patara, near Myra in modern-day Turkey. Much admired for his piety and kindness, St. Nicholas became the subject of many legends. Now he is principally associated with the bearer of gifts to children at Christmas.

Christmas has now largely lost its religious meaning to worship and give thanks for the birth of Jesus a gift to the world. It is estimated that only ten per cent of western populations centre Christmas around church going. Christmas has become a more pagan festival for family get together and extremes of indulgence.

Originally these celebrations would have a short preparation time. For example, Charles Dickens portrays the Cratchit family as buying the turkey on the same morning as it was eaten. Nowadays The countdown to Christmas begins usually in November - some six weeks before Christmas Day. Similarly, in keeping with all these celebrations they now have a much longer gestation period. Christmas marks the end of the year when summer has finally gone, and we are propelled into the realization that we have to face six months of cold weather,

darkness, dampness and snow. Impelling us to alter course and prepare. Shops seduce customers to buy presents, decorations, food and drink and begin preparations. Partying begins well before the 25<sup>th</sup> December as competition for office parties are booked well in advance to avoid disappointment. Christmas usually lasts for two days but for some even boxing day is given over to shopping and taking advantage of the sales. A lot of time, thought, and money is invested in the preparation, for these two days.

People order furniture, and shops set deadlines and promise to deliver “in time for Christmas”. As the big day draws near the atmosphere becomes charged to reach the day fully prepared, and with great expectations. There is only so much food, that can be eaten, or drink that can be drunk and outlets, such as sports, and hunting take place as a healthy antidote to all the excesses on Boxing day.

Some people spend more than they can reasonably afford and only in the New Year when bank statements arrive will the expenditure become a reality. Christmas Spending Statistics ‘Tis the season to be spending. New research reveals that 36.3 million Brits plan to spend an estimated £14.2 billion this festive season! Despite all the sometimes-painful memories of former years and mistakes made often the expectations of all this time and money will fall short and the new year will begin with regrets and bills.

Not unsurprisingly with such huge investment Christmas is also a time when emotions come to the fore lubricated by alcohol and unrealistic expectations. Every emotional arousal calls for pre-determined coping strategies to be employed to escape the aftermath and repercussions of hostilities and slights which result from these festivities. For the long term good and for the cohesion and survival of families compromises have to be made. However unpalatable to join with in-laws and family members with whom we don’t get on. Or just to support all the endeavours made by those hosting the event and for the long term good. Alcohol fuels the pleasure and the shortcomings of Christmas. Some according to their personalities their choices and resultant behaviour will spoil the celebrations and sabotage the event, with the outpouring of anger, prompted by jealousy, envy etc.

### Weddings

A wedding: the celebration of two people to be legally bound in marriage: a contract. This too has biblical origins, but once again these are largely bypassed. It is not unusual for the wedding to be planned years in advance. The time gives the family time to save for the wedding. The average wedding in the UK now costs £30,355, a new survey has revealed. According to Bridebook.co.uk’s National Wedding Survey 2018, the cost of getting married has hit an all-time high, up by £3,365 - or 12 per cent - from **£26,989** the previous year.

While many family members may agree to put aside their differences on the wedding day, this isn’t always the case. In many complicated family situations. Emotions tend to peak around major family events-and the wedding is no exception. Family get togethers are becoming fewer as people move around the globe. A consequence is that on the few occasions when families do get together old score erupt although few would consider a wedding is the right time to settle scores, to sort out a family feuds and sabotage the occasion.

Families are estranged and the untangling of relationships at a wedding is difficult. Divorce brings to the fore righteous indignation and the tangles which ensue. These tangles unfortunately need to be anticipated and managed at a wedding sad as it may seem. Divorced parents may issue ultimatums such as I’ll only attend if that person isn’t invited or stipulate, they will attend only if their parents’ new spouse is invited. These selfish demands put pressure on the couple being married to focus on the demands of their families rather on the importance of the ceremony and the commitment they are making to each other. At a time when they should be surrounded by the love and support, they need from their families to have a future together.

### Funerals

Funerals are more sombre but nevertheless intended to celebrate a life with the expectation by some that the person will inherit eternal life. The average cost of a funeral in the UK is **£4,798** for a burial, with average cremation funeral costs at **£3,744**.

The relationships with the deceased will determine such matters and decisions concerning whether to attend the funeral service and then deciding whether to go to the wake after the funeral. Break-ups, Divorces, And Re-marriages like Christmas and weddings will complicate between duty and genuine sadness. Family rifts again come to the fore. The rector of our church surprised me by saying that it is not unusual to have a police presence at a funeral when different factions between family members were anticipated. Inheritance and the unfair distribution of wealth inevitably starts at a funeral, having been contained during the lifetime of the departed.

Relationships and grudges surface during a funeral. The reasons and causes may appear meaningless in comparison with the death, in some cases the death ignites the hostilities, while in others each party goes their separate ways never to meet again.

All family events.

The next question is are there commonalities in these events? The most obvious are:

1. Alcohol disinhibition
2. Highly charged emotions.
3. Long gestations.
4. Investment of time, thought and money
5. Cessation, conclusions, and departures.

So, if these are the events what do they have in common and why do they provoke such outbursts of emotions and repercussions which undermine the very purpose of organising them in the first place.

Alcohol is the most commonly used mind-altering substance. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) reports that over half of all American adults were current drinkers of alcohol at the time of the 2015 national survey. Having a beer or a glass of wine with dinner is common, and millions of adults regularly enjoy alcohol responsibly [1].

Alcohol is definitely part of celebrations even though alcohol is a depressant substance, it also acts on moods, emotions, actions, and reactions. It is often used to get the party going. When people drink, they say and do things they would not normally do they become disinhibited. The more alcohol the less inhibition and potentially the less control over actions. Alcohol changes brain chemistry, which in turn impacts moods, behaviours, thinking, memory, physical movement and bodily functions, which may have costly side effects.

Alcohol shrinks the brain, making memory, mental illness, and learning worse over time. symptoms coupled with reduced mobility, is caused by thiamine deficiency, which may be triggered by drinking too much. Even moderate drinking, which is 1 - 2 servings of alcohol per day, may cause damage to cognition and memory. These are the health consequences as important as they are here, we are concerned with undermining of personal and social relationships. Clearly there is no dividing line between the two.

Just recently the newspaper reported the death of a young man who under the influence of wine for a dare swallowed a slug which happened to be crawling over the table. Months later he is dead - the slug caused an infection in his brain which killed him.

A few drinks make everyone more sociable and increased camaraderie, but it increases the likelihood of drinking to excess, becoming aggressive, and unable to remember what happened the next day. Celebrations can end up as far from convivial occasions.

### Conclusion

Briefly we have unpacked the negativity of these events what we see is that underlying all the behaviour and content in all these celebrations are the emotions. Defined as a strong feeling deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others.

Emotions unleashed in the lead up, during, and in the aftermath of these specific occasion. Celebrations are undermined by the personalities and behaviour resulting from highly charged emotions often lubricated and released with the consumption of alcohol.

So, what is the answer how should we deal with these emotions we don't want and what are they? There is no denying that emotions are good and necessary, but we are focussing on the negative emotions that threaten to destroy celebrations intended to celebrate. Emotions such as anger, jealousy, guilt, hostility, aggression. Every emotion has its own costs and benefits Lazarus [2] "The danger is that the feeble gains derived from aggression arising from anger, envy, and jealousy will blind us to the far more damaging losses that are more often its harvest". In my own work Thomson [3] I was not surprised to see how prominent emotions were in the aetiology of mental illness.

So, what is the answer. Well to start it knowing ourselves. It takes courage to unpeel the layers we have formed around us to protect us from the truth. Knowing our shortcomings and anticipating them involves planning ahead. Asking ourselves such questions as: In the past have we suffered the consequences of being the life and soul of the party, is it comfortable and what have the consequences been. Or have we become angry and said things so cataclysmic that the consequences are irreparable. Taking a decision whether to attend an event at all. Or how much to drink. Or who best to go with and who to accompany home.

These are soul searching questions which can only be decided sitting down quietly alone. Emotions are obscure but if they are reoccurring it is worth examining. Take anger, if anger is an emotion experience repeatedly something has triggered that anger such as feeling vulnerable or slighted that can then lead to inappropriate acts. Envy is when you want what someone else has, whereas jealousy is when you're worried someone's trying to take what you have. Identifying patterns may be helpful in avoiding situations with the potential to trigger unwanted emotions. For example, if they occur after a few drinks then the trigger is the release of inhibition by the alcohol. Or they may occur in certain company in which case they can be avoided [4-7].

This honesty is transferrable it can then be used to understand others who most likely suffer the same problem. They in turn will know exactly how to trigger negative behaviour which then boosts their egos. But most importantly this insight places control where it should be within ourselves. Emotions do kill!

### Bibliography

1. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.
2. Lazarus RS and Lazarus BN. "Passion and reason making sense of our emotions". Oxford University Press (1994).
3. Thomson. "Sabotaging The Self - A Trait? and It's Relationship with Neuroticism". *Clinical and Experimental Psychology* 3.4 (2017): 175.
4. <https://www.history.com/topics/christmas/santa-claus>
5. Sun Life's 2018 Cost of Dying Report. Those costs factor in the person's burial or cremation, funeral director services, and doctors' and celebrant fees (2018).
6. emotion | Definition of emotion in English by Oxford Dictionaries.
7. jealousy - Dictionary Definition : Vocabulary.com

**Volume 8 Issue 2 February 2019**

**©All rights reserved by Wendy Thomson.**