A narrative analysis of four UK community project founders: A generativity perspective

As part of the UK government's 'Big Society' agenda, increasing policy drivers have encouraged partnerships between commissioners, service providers and local-level organisations and charities to organise and deliver educational, practical, and emotional support to vulnerable people within communities (National Council for Voluntary Organisation, 2016). Community-based projects require leadership to initiate and enhance service provision, hence the need to explore the experiences of founders of existing projects in order to uncover their accounts of their motivations. In this preliminary study, four project founders (aged 44–69) completed in-depth semi-structured interviews, to identify the events that precipitated their involvement and the experiences that sustain their practices. A narrative analysis identified prominent themes and these were linked to ideas about generativity. This revealed that their leadership roles evolved in response to 'crisis' points in their life histories, located in tensions between personal values and dominant discourses. Leadership emerged as a way to navigate these conflicts, with participants drawing upon 'what worked for me' to create a community project that would embody their values in an enduring way. This study concludes that the narratives of the four community project founders are consistent with theories of generativity, and future research is needed to fully recognise and nurture leadership figures within communities.

Key words: generativity and communion; project founders; volunteer organisations; narrative analysis; community leadership.

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As part of the UK government's 'Big Society' agenda (Cabinet Office, 2010), in which its political ideology combines a free market system with individuals' responsibilities to promote social solidarity, an increasing requirement has been for healthcare and social services to be delivered at a community level. This developed in response to the 'austerity' discourse, introduced following the financial crisis of 2008 with its aims to reduce budget deficits through spending cuts to public social services. The *Guide to community-centred approaches for health and wellbeing* (2015) published by Public Health England (PHE) and NHS England, calls for collaborative partnerships between commissioners, service providers, local services and local leaders. Providing social services at local level, volunteer organisations and charities are encouraged to organise and deliver support to vulnerable sections of the population, playing a very important role in the structure of society (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2016). Research into participation and wellbeing has identified strong links between volunteering and community cohesion (e.g., Gilster, 2012; Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007); and evidence from research into community-based interventions has reported increased levels of confidence, wellbeing and positive mental health in both service users and volunteers (e.g., Fegan & Cook, 2012; Holtgrave, Norrick, Teufel & Gilbert, 2014).

  Whilst in the popular management literature there appear to be many sources that promote the leadership skills that may be acquired through volunteering (e.g. Cummings, 1998; Wilson, 2012), there is much less research into leaders' practices in volunteer organisations (Posner, 2015). Catano, Pond and Kelloway (2001) identified differences between volunteer leaders in Canada and other leaders, finding them more psychologically

involved, sensitive to transformational leadership and relational aspects. Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom and Siddique (2011) identify community leadership fundamentally as a 'relational concept' rather than an individual skill and assert that it is a dynamic process that "can be nurtured, though, and it is quite possible for different people to assume leadership at different times and in different ways" (p. 53). If public health services and interventions are to be community-centred and delivered in partnership with community-based projects, potential community leaders will need to be identified and nurtured to step forward and engage with their communities in ways that complement and enhance existing social and healthcare provision. Therefore, understanding the motivations of current UK community project founders could make a valuable contribution. This paper presents a preliminary study that explores what motivates and sustains the work of existing community project founders, to speculate on what might inform further community development.

Literature Review

In this section we review the literature that identifies people's motivations to volunteer and show that some of the work has been limited by quantitative approaches. We then turn to narrative accounts of generativity that appear to have relevance. In particular, we argue for the importance of a qualitative inquiry into the topic, and consider the peculiarity of adopting a generativity lens to study motivations and meaning-making of community project founders.

Motivations of volunteers

There is a substantial body of research examining the motivations of third sector volunteers and employees. The majority of these studies use survey data to seek underlying

motivational factors and measure outcomes of volunteer experiences (e.g. Clary, Snyder,

Ridge, Copeland, Stukas & Haugen*,* 1998; Perry & Wise, 1990; Perry, Coursey*,* Brudney &

Littlepage, 2008). Two of the most used and frequently cited measures of volunteering and

public service motivation are the Public Service Motivation model (PSM) (Perry & Wise,

1990) and the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (Clary *et al.,* 1998).

Perry and Wise's (1990) review of the PSM model describes how previous research

identified three distinct categories of behavioural drivers: norm-based, affective and

rational. Norm-based responses are proposed to derive from conformity to social norms,

affective responses are said to be triggered by social contexts, and rational drivers are

grounded in individual utility maximization, for example personal interest in a policy or

programme.

The VFI (Clary *et al.*, 1998) identifies six individually-focused psychological motivations

associated with generic volunteerism. These are: the expression of values; understanding of

self and/or others; socialization opportunities; career development; self-protection; and

self-enhancement. Two additional more societally-focused roles were subsequently

identified as: "… the role of community concern as an important motivator of volunteer

service, as well as the role of community connection in drawing people into volunteer

service, in sustaining their participation, and in promoting their effectiveness" (Snyder &

Clary, 2004, p.229).

Recognising the complexities of volunteers' motivations, Wilson (2005) called for a

more nuanced approach, since survey data and statistical analysis can obscure social

relations and social structures. Perry, Hondeghem and Wise (2010) also recommend

more refined research methods, capable of measuring shifting values and incentives; and

taking a more holistic approach to volunteering research, to explore situational and contextual matters. These may be crucial to understanding the cultural values and narratives that shape the ways of constructing concepts of volunteering, public service and community work. Qualitative approaches offer a way of unpacking these roles and the meanings and impact they have throughout the lifespan of individuals within a given culture. In short, quantitative research into volunteering and public service motivation may identify aspects of such activities, but do not provide the rich data that qualitative approaches may generate.

Phenomenological perspectives of community work are often neglected in psychological studies of volunteering and public service. A small number of studies have used qualitative methods to investigate the motivations and experiences of individuals working in community projects. Those that do, appear to target specific types of organised volunteer activity (e.g. Jager, Kreutzer & Beyes, 2009; Merrell, 2000). Much of this research does not include sample groups from the UK, or the perspectives of project founders on community leadership.

Generativity and narrative accounts

The importance of a psycho-social theory of lifespan development was first posited by Erikson (1950). Erikson's theory proposed a series of sequential stages, each having a specific existential challenge to be resolved to lead to progress to the next stage. He used the term 'generativity' to describe the core achievement of the mid-adulthood stage. For Erikson (1963), generativity is an important contributor to adult identity, once earlier developmental conflicts have been resolved. Generativity is concerned with building and creating a positive environment for future generations (McAdams, 1988; Snyder & Clary,

2004); including activities such as: childrearing, mentoring, voluntary work, leadership, and political activities. These activities are shaped by religious practices, economic and political forces and social institutions, thus providing a cultural framework for behaviours (Kotre, 1984).

More recent research into generativity has adapted Erikson's original concept to explore embedded cultural influences (e.g. de St Aubin, McAdams & Kim, 2004). For example, Kotre (1984, p. 259) explains that people become consciously aware of cultural influences when:

> One becomes aware of and identifies with the symbols of one's culture of birth or when one discovers a new culture in adult life. A specific kind of *nourishment,* conscious and unconscious, becomes available at this moment: a map of existence for the intellect, heroic figures and great deeds for the imagination, guidance for the will, and a people to belong to.

Cronk (1999) describes culture as socially transmitted information that is subject to contestation and revision. Thus, it is emergent and more than the sum total of social interactions. Culture, or ways of doing things and making meanings is not static, and new meanings can be made from existing information systems. According to McAdams and Logan (2004), generative adults seek to pass on the most valued skills and traditions associated with a culture. However, whilst generativity includes the upholding of traditional values and customs in society through teaching and mentoring, it can also be witnessed in challenges to the status quo and in the transformation of social institutions for the benefit of future generations (de St. Aubin *et al.*, 2004).

Theories of generativity contain strong links with ideology, social environment and contested claims to institutional authority, but this is an underexplored area in community leadership research. An exception to this is a narrative enquiry into the motivation and

sustained involvement of women in community leadership roles in the U.S. (Bond, Byrne, Babchuck & Kirton-Robbins, 2008). The findings support McAdams *et al.*'s (1998) model of generativity that prompts initial engagement and sustained involvement. Interestingly, they report that few of the antecedents of volunteerism identified in previous studies emerged in their discussions with participants. Whilst family socialisation and an ethos of care was common factor in all the findings, the more individually-focused motivations of career and personal development functions of the VFI (Clary *et al.*, 1998) and the education and income predictors of the PSM (Perry & Wise, 1990) were largely absent; calling into question these models of volunteerism as the most appropriate or reliable tools of measurement of engagement in community leadership roles.

   Whilst there are many common factors in motivation between generative acts of service and volunteerism there also appear to be differences. Indeed, Snyder and Clary's (2004) comparative evaluation of volunteerism and generativity highlights future-orientated differences between the two activities, both in terms of intended beneficiaries and projected outcomes.   While both are concerned with connecting with others to benefit communities, generativity focuses on providing for the future needs of society and those yet to be born into it (Kotre, 1984).

   The life stories of adults contain generative themes and scripts (McAdams, 1988; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams & Logan, 2004). Common themes include stories of personal struggle and sacrifice in order that the future will be good (McAdams, 1993). Transformation is one of the key themes in generative narratives and is often concerned with the transformation of less desirable or 'bad' aspects of society into something 'good'. Progress or improvement is frequently viewed to be difficult, often involving a struggle with

opposing or resistant forces (McAdams, 1988). Themes of transformative change are frequently linked with stories of redemption, where there are sequences in which a bad scene or scenario is salvaged and made better by subsequent events or actions. Kotre (1984) reports that generative narratives contain culture-rich stories including protagonists who embody certain characteristics and perform specific roles such as: 'mentor' – a teacher, facilitator or guide; 'keeper of the meaning '- preserver of cultural traditions; 'intergenerational buffer' - someone with experience of a culture's destructive tendencies who acts as a buffer for those younger; 'fellow traveller' – peer group member who supports others to a creative breakthrough. McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) report that generativity involves a seemingly selfless offering up and letting go of that which has been created and nurtured; and McAdams and Logan (2004, p.16) observe that the "task of letting go, of granting autonomy to one's biological, parental, technical, and societal progeny, is one of the greatest tasks of generativity''. The storied nature of generativity developing through life stages and contexts is thus well suited to narrative investigation.

Highly generative adults tend to express especially strong needs for both agency and communion in their narrative accounts of their lives (de St. Aubin & McAdams, 1995; Mansfield & McAdams, 1996). Agency has been described as self-orientated: self-expression, self-expansion, self-protection, self-development; whereas communion is other-related: sharing the self, merging the self in community, giving up the self for the good of something beyond the self. Leonard (1997) proposes that agency and communion should be seen as interrelated and not in opposition, since the social practice of one may facilitate the other, with social context and resources central to understanding the intersection of the two. McAdams and Logan (2004) observe that generativity straddles the seeming tension

between these conflicting desires – the narcissistic pursuit of self-orientated goals and the altruistic nurturing and caring for future generations. Given the interesting findings of the above narrative enquiries conducted in the US and Canada, this study adopted a narrative approach in order to probe the sense of self and the worldviews of UK community project founders, through their stories of actions and relationships with others.

Methodology

The present study used a narrative enquiry, grounded in a phenomenology of lived experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Narrative research has its roots in the hermeneutic traditions of Ricoeur (1991); with an emphasis on interpretation of recalled events. It is distinguished from other forms of qualitative research by its focus on narrated texts, representing aspects of lived experience (Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson & McSpadden, 2011). Narrative psychology embraces the storied nature of life experiences through which researcher and participant construct a sequence of events set in context (Riessman, 2008). These stories may include cultures, key characters, turning points and plot twists that intersect in people's lives (Kotre, 1984). The sequential recollection and ordering of affective events can illuminate perceptions, values and social motivations (McAdams, 1982). Thus, it was anticipated that the use of this approach would uncover some of the dialectical tensions between individuals and their social environment; factors less visible and under explored in the existing body of literature in this area of research.

Sample

The sample group was four community project founders; two male and two female (ages 44 – 69), all working within a radius of thirty miles in North and West Yorkshire. Participants

were recruited purposefully through their work incorporating student placements or through references of other informants. The first researcher is currently volunteering at one of the projects. Pseudonyms have been used to disguise participants' identities.

Alan is the founder member of a community trust organisation on the outskirts of a city centre. He initially started a youth club for younger people but the project expanded over a period of several years to include mentoring and support for families, activities for older people, and help with training and employment. Victoria is the founder member of a city centre faith-based organisation serving vulnerable adults and the homeless. The project is a drop-in centre, opening one day a week to provide food, healthcare, rehabilitation facilities, spiritual support and signposting to services. Max is the founder of a community-based mental health arts-focused project. The main purpose of this project is to support people with severe and enduring mental health problems and learning disabilities, aiming to re-engage them with their communities. Jan is the founder of a community-based project in the form of a 'soteria' (Greek word for 'deliverance') house. The project was set up in order to provide support for young adults experiencing psychosis for the first time, with the aim of providing an alternative form of support that might minimise the need for institutionalised mental health care.

Data Collection

Participants were initially approached in 2015 by email to ascertain their interest in taking part. Interviews were arranged at a time and location to the convenience of participants. The longest interview lasted 58 minutes; the shortest 37 minutes. The participant with whom the researcher is currently working provided the shortest interview, perhaps

presuming that she did not need to expand further due to shared knowledge, even though she was asked the same questions as other participants, to prompt further elaboration.

The semi-structured interview design was constructed purposefully in a non-linear fashion. Firstly, participants were invited to talk about current activities at their project before being asked to give a biographical account of the events leading up to their initial involvement. Finally, they were asked about the future directions of their projects. The order was to enable the development of rapport between the researcher and participant by encouraging participants to give details about their projects, before moving onto accounts of personal experiences (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Questions were grouped into four areas of research interest, three of these relating to the project and the community it serves; the fourth was concerned with the developmental trajectory and subsequent actions of the participant. It was anticipated that responses might provide an indication of cultural norms and expectations and how these played out in subsequent life stages.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted through the relevant university committee. Participants were provided with informed consent documents and post-interview contact details, including a support contact number being provided in the event of personal issues arising during the interview process. Interviews were recorded and transcribed in a play-script format (Gibson & Hugh-Jones, 2012) and the names of participants and organisations were anonymised to provide confidentiality. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the research and to edit interview transcriptions before these were analysed.

Data Analysis

The first stage of the narrative analysis involved a chronological re-structuring of participants' responses to reflect a sequential ordering of life events and history of the development of their projects. In this way, it became possible to configure a phenomenological unfolding of events in time and context in their narrative (Riessman, 2008). The re-ordering of events was then followed by repeated readings of the transcripts to enable the identification of themes (Riessman, 2008) and these were subsequently grouped into categories to enable a synthesis of meanings. The findings were then considered from the perspective of a generativity framework, including sensitivity to 'growth' perspectives in the narratives, one of the core concepts of generativity.

Findings

What follows is a summary of the key aspects of each participant's narrative, including relevant references to literature supporting the concepts.

   Alan is the founder of a community trust organisation. An analysis of the interview transcript revealed a number of generative themes and a generative script that included a redemptive sequence (McAdams, 1998). Alan describes his younger self as someone who could have been 'a service user of one of these places' and observes 'I think I'm paying back society for what I've done'. The narrative contains a series of events in which he overcomes many obstacles in order to get a share of resources for his community. This involved not only crossing social divides in terms of education, income and power, but also a battle with some of the residents on his estate who turned against him. These struggles are consistent with McAdams's (1993) research into generativity which proposes that generative scripts contain themes of struggle against opposing forces and personal sacrifice in order to pass on that which is deemed to be good. In transforming his community Alan also transforms

himself and subsequently creates a new identity as a mentor through his work in the project

he builds and the skills and training that he passes on to others. This is consistent with

Kotre's (1984) generative identity role of 'mentor' – someone who teaches or facilitates

others' development.

Victoria's narrative can be described as a script of 'paying back into society' (McAdams,

1988). She describes herself as someone who benefitted from a privileged upbringing. Faith

is an integral part of Victoria's identity and is a theme that underpins her narrative and

informs her actions. Prior to setting up her project she had been involved in charitable work,

but had had no direct involvement with one organisation. Retirement from her role in

business presented her with the opportunity to witness social deprivation from a closer

perspective. The role she takes corresponds with Kotre's (1984) proposed cultural role of

'keeper of the meaning' – someone who embodies the traditional values associated with a

given culture. In Victoria's case, she is living out the cultural values of her faith, namely, to

serve others less fortunate than herself.

Max is the founder of a community-based mental health arts project. Music, performance

and participation are recurring themes in Max's narrative, suggesting that they are an

integral part of his identity. Max's narrative contains a generativity script of 'turning bad

into good' (McAdams & Logan, 2004). This is where a negative life experience – in Max's

case, workplace 'burnout' – is transformed into a more positive experience. Max explains

this workplace withdrawal as being motivated by self-preservation together with a chance

to capitalise on another opportunity, which presented itself by 'fluke'. He describes this

move as being 'as much for me as for anybody else'. These sentiments align with what

McAdams and Logan (2004) describe as a 'narcissism and altruism paradox'. By this they

explain that generative behaviour results from both self-interest, or agency, and other-directed goals, or communion. The cultural role most suited to Max's community activities could be described by Kotre's (1984) 'fellow traveller', in that he seeks to help others with illness or life changes, collaborating to help people achieve creative 'breakthroughs' through music and performance. This can be witnessed in his desire to create a performance arena for service users to 'shine'.

Jan established an alternative support mechanism, through a 'soteria' house, for young adults experiencing psychosis for the first time. Jan's narrative also contains a generativity script of 'transforming bad into good' (McAdams, 1988). The motivation for setting up her project was driven by concern for the welfare of her son and the need to make sense of a traumatic family situation. For Jan, the main goal of setting up her project was to raise awareness of mental health issues and the 'flawed' approaches of mainstream services that had left her in a state of 'shock',' terror', 'horror' and 'despair'. The narrative depicts a feeling of powerlessness in the face of the authority of mainstream services and dominant discourses around mental health. She strives to change perceptions by engaging the support of like-minded others, including people working within the mental health system. This part of the narrative fits with the generative themes 'battling against the odds' (McAdams, 1988) and challenging the *status quo* (McAdams, 1993). Her motives seem aligned with Kotre's (1984) cultural identity role of 'intergenerational buffer' – someone who seeks to protect future generations from some of society's more destructive traditions.

A number of thematic categories were found to be common to all participants' narratives: (1) *Awareness,* or recognizing a problem; (2) *Turning points and chance encounters,* referring to extracts in the narratives that then determined subsequent actions; (3) *Putting*

values into practice, illuminating the rationales provided by participants for taking action; (4) *Sense-making reflections and links* between what was, is and should be, as made by participants; (5) *Struggle,* as noted in periods of conflict and change; (6) *Passing on skills and mentoring,* concerning the ethos and function of the project; (7) *Growth and transformation,* relating to the changes resulting from the implementation of the project; and (8) *Moving forward,* regarding the participants' future projections. In what follows, participants' words are indented.

Awareness

All of the narratives contained references to increasing awareness of a social problem through personal encounters. Participants' evaluations of situations included perceptions of lack of care and support or understanding embedded in existing social structures and institutionalised care. Max and Jan both reported emotional distress in response to structures and practices in the social care system. Max reported:

> I'd been with social services for about fourteen years and I was beginning to burn out. I wanted, I needed something for me, so it was, you know, as much for me as it was for anybody else.

Jan gave an account of suffering distress in response to the institutionalised treatment her son received in response to his long term mental health condition. Alan and Victoria both became aware of the impact of poverty in response to unemployment and lack of funding in social care, but from different perspectives. Victoria, a recently retired company director, spoke about her awareness of the wider social situation through her religious involvement:

> Well, actually I attend an inner-city church and I found the need in the inner-city was huge and, being a director of a, a company for thirty years, erm, and retired I just thought "There's something I can do here, you know, we just can't let this go on!"

Alan was living in a community where the effects of poverty were more tangible:

> People on these estates were forgotten about [...] I was just fed up that my estate didn't have anything for the young people and the young people were getting into trouble.

The narratives also each contained a theme of restoration, together with an ethos of social responsibility and care. Participants' awareness of a social problem at specific points in their life stories is consistent with Kotre's (1984) description of generative 'moments'. These moments of awareness were part of a chain of events that, when viewed retrospectively by participants, had illuminated previously unseen social landscapes. This newly heightened consciousness then opened up an identification of opportunities for further consideration and subsequent action; and formed pivotal turning points in the narratives.

Turning points and chance encounters

Participants' narratives contained turning points in the decision-making process to take action in response to awareness. These turning points incorporated personal milestones, such as: a significant birthday, retirement, and chance encounters at public meetings. Alan described how he took on his role after attending a community meeting:

> I lived in the community where the community centre was. I just went to a meeting for the social landlord who owns the building [...] and I ended up walking out with a set of keys for the building.

Jan decided to put the ethos of a mental health support network (of which she was a member) into practice by using the occasion of her sixtieth birthday to host a party to raise funds to open her project:

> I felt that I needed to use that experience in a positive way [...] rather than just go down that awful deep, dark hole that it takes you to when you can't see a way through and all you can do is complain and that gets you nowhere; it makes things worse.

Participants reported that these significant events subsequently became catalysts for change. The narratives indicated that participants drew upon their personal experiences and resources in order to formulate a plan and galvanise others into action to support their goals. In this way, the narratives implied that these specific circumstances had brought about a consolidation of beliefs and values which, in turn, generated the visualisation of an alternative approach to resolving a perceived social injustice.

Putting values into practice

The decision to act appeared to be driven by personal discomfort or distress in response to dominant discourses involving social support and healthcare practices that did not reflect personal values. Social structures were deemed to be either lacking in some way, or flawed in design. Participants' responses could be summarized as either 'taking responsibility in a void' or challenging the *status quo*. Max's narrative indicated a perception that his project was filling a void in social care:

> The voluntary sector and the organisations are expected to provide those things now by default really, you know, there's nobody else doing it.

Jan's narrative places more emphasis on challenging a system that she perceives to be fundamentally flawed and unable to treat people as 'human beings':

> A horror, a terror of what I discovered - shock and despair. It doesn't seem to relate to, to a human being – it can relate to somebody's symptoms and a very narrow way of seeing what you need to do to reduce those symptoms rather than looking at the whole person.

Victoria indicates recognition of the current mismatch between a social problem and the lack of facilities to rectify the situation:

> This is a huge, huge problem [...]and the government need to realise that there's no way they're gonna solve the drug problem, the alcohol problem in this country unless we build facilities to help these people come off drugs.

Participants drew on their own values in response to what they had experienced. Evidence of this was demonstrated in the narratives, both explicitly and by implication. Drawing on personal experiences, Alan described his values of social justice and inclusion to support those who struggle to fit with social norms and thrive in the education system:

> I'm sick of young people coming in downstairs who's being kicked out of school by the schools because they don't fit the 'uniform' school and they're just wrote off in society.

Max's values are implicit in the use of the word 'orb' in the name of his project:

> I mean the orb's an old broken mirror-ball; some of the panels are broken, you know, so it fires, it fires off in lots of different directions; sometimes it doesn't fire off at all [...] but if you give it chance to shine it would knock your socks off.

This narrative described how his project aims to be socially inclusive by 'normalizing' mental health issues that might otherwise prevent social interaction. The emphasis on performance

and participation enables individuals who might otherwise not have had an opportunity to shine in a mainstream cultural environment. Both of these narratives provide evidence of an empathic response to others and a subsequent desire to 'right a wrong' in a current social system (McAdams & Logan, 2004).

Sense-making reflections and links

Illustrating their empathic connections with people in their communities, participants re-visited their own life experiences to make sense of their current role. Their actions appeared to be influenced and guided by their integration of past experiences into a secure and stable sense of self, from which to impart their knowledge and disseminate their ideas.

> I could have imagined me being a service user of one of these places when I was a youth [...] and I think I'm paying back society for what I've done, and I've done some, done some horrific stuff to people – been involved in some naughty stuff, but people can change (Alan).

Victoria attributed her community engagement to a call to serve others less fortunate than her:

> It was the furthest thing from my life. I could imagine myself perhaps doing some charity work, but more glamorous charity work. People have said many times about it and I said "God put me on the path".

Max described his motives in terms of reciprocal value:

> I'm not religious or anything, but there is a sort of feeling that, that there's a little bit of a positive thing that, you know, if you put out positive vibes you get good vibes back.

Jan expressed a need to direct her energies in a more positive way:

> I think it's much, more healthy to be able to promote alternative ways of working rather
>
> than continue to moan and harangue a system that is not just in crisis [...] it's got a flawed
>
> ethos – a flawed approach.

Participants' evaluations appeared to involve a process of creating a sense of meaning from their life events, and in response to the personal difficulties they had experienced. The narratives suggest that these reflection processes then appeared to generate goal-focused activities, including engaging like-minded others to help challenge the *status quo* by developing an improved system of support for others (McAdams & Logan, 2004).

Struggle

Each of the participants narrated periods of struggle and setback in the start-up and development of their projects. Max and Victoria struggled to find premises to operate from, whereas Alan and Jan battled against stigmatization and prejudice:

> I think there are many, right, some of them are I think are society's traditional fears of, erm,
>
> craziness' 'madness' [...] there are all of those issues in terms of getting funding for something
>
> like that (Jan).

Alan encountered prejudice from local authorities and in his own community. He initially struggled to be taken seriously at meetings:

> I never had no formal qualifications at school [...] I got frowned upon because I didn't have
>
> this - I had to get this bit of paper to be accepted, you know – a qualification?

A subsequent involvement with statutory services resulted in threats and violence from within the community where he lived:

> I've had my vehicle smashed up outside my house, I've been threatened; my wife's been
>
> threatened.

These accounts of participants appeared to be the result of challenges to social norms and the subsequent resistance from others. McAdams (1988) identified frequent themes in generative scripts of struggle and personal sacrifice, to create a better future for others. The struggle to pass on valuable skills or challenge an oppressive authority are frequent themes in generative scripts (McAdams & Logan, 2004), associated with building and creating a better environment for future generations (Snyder & Clary, 2004).

Passing on skills and mentoring

Each participant narrated a desire to effect change through mentoring or raising awareness of alternative approaches to those offered by current systems.

> We've got, er, a befriending, um, er, an independent living project where we teach young
>
> people life skills [...] these are all stuff they're not teaching in schools (Alan).

> I talk, I do training with psychiatrists and social workers and psychoanalysts and all sorts and
>
> I've written about it, erm, I called the chapter in the book that I helped to edit (Jan).

Here, the knowledge and skills transmission are directed through different systems, but with a similar aim of wider social influence. Alan aims to provide life skills to those who have failed to thrive within a system, whereas Jan directs her focus towards educating and influencing people working within a system. The skills and values participants wished to pass on were embedded in the ethos and practice of their projects; corresponding to Kotre's (1984, p.12) definition of 'technical' generativity and 'cultural' generativity. The former, also

termed the 'body' of a culture, refers to implicitly passing on the symbol system; the latter, also termed the 'mind', refers to creating, renovating and conserving the symbol system.

Growth

All of the narratives contained experiences of growth and expansion. These were expressed in terms of personal development and the wider impact of the project:

> We've grown, we've grown a helluva lot [....] and we're still growing. (Alan)

> Well, we just started as a voluntary group but it just grew and grew out of all proportion so that we actually had to become a registered charity. (Victoria).

> I've seen that the, kind of, ripples are going much further (Jan).

The evolution of the projects was often associated with growth and fertility, or evolving 'a life of their own'. Participants acknowledged an interactive process in which social activities produced growth and change, both within the project and externally. The narratives all contained an expectation of further growth and development in the future.

Going forward

When asked about future plans for their projects, participants responded by anticipating continuity and further development. Even though participants predicted the lifespan of their projects beyond their own involvement, they also appeared unable to envisage a final disengagement, suggesting a depth of emotional investment and personal identification with their project.

Max expressed a wish to retire:

> In theory I'll retire in, erm, actually, not as soon as I'd like to - but I think it's gonna be about three or four years.

He subsequently followed this statement with the observation:

> I might continue because I do all the community events, so I might be willing to come back [...] and keep my hand in.

Although Jan stated that she had stepped back from the day-to running of her project, she acknowledged intimate connection and identification with it:

> Some days it means everything, but then I have to take a step back and think, "No, it's important that you have a life outside of all this".

She also expressed a desire to extend a 'way of working' to multiple venues, nationally, implying that she would continue her involvement in other ways:

> Ideally, there should be at least one Soteria house in every locality.

Victoria referred to a future withdrawal from her project:

> I hope someone will step into my shoes and take it on to better things and bigger things.

At the same time, she acknowledged the intensity and commitment of her current level of engagement as being:

> A huge part of my life - I mean, I don't do anything else, I haven't got time for anything else - it's just a passion - it's, it's an addiction!

Alan discussed handing over the project to someone else in contradictory terms. Initially he observed:

One day I'm gonna have to find someone to replace me because I won't be here for the rest

of my life[...]and I feel comfortable handing it over[...]it's like giving your baby away.

When subsequently he was asked if he would be happy to walk away he responded:

Erm, not just yet -we've a lot more to achieve.

These extracts from participants' narratives correspond to the generative function of leaving

a legacy for future generations to benefit from (de St. Aubin *et al,* 2004). Each project

founder expressed an expectation that their project would continue to grow in the future.

All of the participants indicated a desire to reduce or terminate their involvement at some

point with the projects that they had founded, however despite this acknowledgement, all

of the participants reported high levels of current involvement, either on a day-to-day basis,

or in raising public awareness of their concerns. These conflicted responses appears to

support McAdams and Logan's (2004) assertion that 'letting go' is one of the most difficult

tasks of generativity.

Discussion

The narratives revealed an evolving leadership trajectory in which participants sought to

take agentic control at various 'tipping points' in their life histories. This crisis point was

located in a clash between personal and social practices or societal statutory institutions.

These tensions then became a catalyst for change and transformation. Leadership emerged

as a way to navigate these conflicts of power as participants reflected on their own life

histories to pass on cultural values of 'what worked for me', creating a community project

that would embody these values in an enduring way. All of the narratives in the present

study contain themes that are described in previous narrative accounts of community

involvement and public service. Whilst the PSM (Perry & Wise, 1990) is concerned with

social factors and influences to serve other people in public sector institutions and

organisations, the participants in this study had either decided to withdraw from working in

such institutions to establish alternative forms of social support, or were actively working to

challenge some of the values inherent in these existing structures. The VFI (Clary *et al.*,

1998) is used to identify the benefits to self and the social factors which promote a desire to

serve others. However, none of the participants' narratives included references to personal

development or career enhancement.

   The theorising related to generativity seems to illuminate aspects that are less evident in

the other models. These seem to be at the intersection of individual developmental

processes and desires to change external social structures for the perceived common good

of future generations. All four narratives contained patterns of personal growth and

development influenced by dominant cultural values and practice. Participants strove to

create better social care alternatives in response to their own life circumstances,

anticipating making a difference and leaving something for others to benefit from. These

responses are consistent with McAdams's (1988) definition of generativity being expressed

through efforts for social change, defying the *status quo,* changing conventions and

transforming social institutions. They also contain generative references to "a desire to

invest one's substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self" (Kotre 1984, p.10).

   Themes of agency and communion, key personal attributes of highly generative adults

(Mansfield & McAdams, 1996), were also present in the narratives. These were evidenced in

patterns of relationship reciprocity and where participants attempted to redress power

imbalances between social groups and in society as a whole. These attempts to re-shape

social relationships are indicative of a generative script to 'right wrongs', 'give something

back' and redeem life stories through social relationships (McAdams & Logan, 2004).

Community leadership thus 'emerged' (Cronk, 1999) from the above interacting

processes and in the struggle to create something different and enduring; in ways that

encapsulated their values and that reflected aspects of their personal identities consistent

with the generative task of mentoring and passing on skills (Kotre, 1984).

Conclusions

In summary, a unique narrative enquiry into four UK community project founders'

accounts in this study revealed themes consistent with theories of generativity (e.g. Kotre,

1984; de St Aubin *et al*., 2004; McAdams, 1988), making this an original contribution to the

UK field, particularly in the current social context of austerity. Whilst participants took

leadership roles in different ways (as noted in Kagan et al., 2011), they commonly

established their community-based projects to deliver social support in ways that reflected

their values, illustrating the intersection of personal agency (Leonard, 1997) and investment

in others. The catalysts that set these activities in motion were individual responses to

stressful life situations, such as working environments, as a response to the distress of

others, or the acknowledgment of personal developmental milestones.

In this study, generativity was an appropriate and useful theoretical template to further

interpret community leadership experiences. It facilitated the identification of a number of

common themes amongst the narratives and provided a coherent structure from which to

interpret participants' roles. As Reissman (2008, p. 6) observes: "Narrative analysis can forge

connections between personal biography and social structure – the personal and the

political". A nuanced interpretation of participants' responses became possible through the narrative analysis, adding cultural dimensions to these aspects of social behaviour; less visible through other research methods. The trustworthiness of the research findings was maximised through use of a reflexive approach to the data analysis. It is beyond the scope of this paper to comment on the emergence of generative social practices, except to comment that such movement originated in the observations and needs of the individuals and their abilities to communicate these ideas to interested others.

   Limitations of the research include the small sample size, in a specific geographical location and an absence of minority group representation. Gender differences were also apparent in the responses, with female participants being reluctant to accept the role title of 'leader'. It was beyond the scope of this study to explore this finding further, however it might prove an interesting avenue for exploration in future research using a feminist perspective; and it may also be a factor in recruitment drives for female-orientated community projects. Future research might also consider why some community projects fail to thrive and how others become sustainable, continuing to survive beyond the generative efforts of their founders.

Acknowledgements

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