Understanding the wellbeing potential of participatory arts events for the over 70s: A conceptual framework and research agenda

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the growing body of knowledge which intends to make event studies more critical through a focus on the under researched demographic of the over 70s. Our discussion is centred on the socio-psychological impacts of arts events on older adults with the development of a conceptual framework drawing upon critical gerontology within the context of event studies. The value of this paper is threefold. Firstly, studies drawing upon critical gerontology and the potential benefits of planned events in relation to the over 70s are limited particularly within event studies literature. Secondly, only a limited number of papers have connected the particular issues and opportunities that the over 70s have with most choosing to present areas such as loneliness and isolation as separate rather than interconnected concepts. This paper debates the specific challenges around understanding and researching the potential socio-psychological benefits of participatory arts events for the over 70s. The wellbeing outcomes are particularly important within this demographic where there is a greater risk of isolation and loneliness and of lower self-esteem and self-worth. These key areas of literature set the context of our paper in relation to arts event participation and the theoretical debates within critical gerontology. Thirdly, our paper proposes a conceptual framework to guide further studies in this area. We aim for this to stimulate the development of a more cohesive body of knowledge and much needed critical dialogue around this under researched but highly important demographic within events.

Keywords:

Critical gerontology, critical event studies, elderly, participatory arts events, wellbeing and personal impacts of events

Introduction

Recent reports highlight that many countries have ageing populations and a growing number of relatively healthy people over the age of seventy (Cracknell, 2010; ONS, 2012; Thomas, 2015). Haub's (2011) research forecasts that people over the age of 65 will more than double, representing 26 per cent of the world's population, by 2050. Many conclude that ageing populations present major challenges to our society as a whole (Mordini et al., 2009) such as the rise of social isolation (Davidson & Rossall, 2014). Therefore, the consideration and fulfilment of older adults' needs is more important now than ever before. There is a growing realisation that the creation of arts, cultural and community events enables many older people to connect with their local community and to create social networks, which can increase their confidence and feelings of wellbeing (Matarasso, 1996; O'Shea & Leime, 2012). Even the terms 'older', and 'elderly' are not yet clearly defined within research. In tourism studies Patterson (2006) concludes that research within the field of gerontology includes a range of different ages, from 50 to 55 and 60 to 65 years, yet literature in gerontology has been quite consistent in defining the term 'elderly' according to a person's retirement age of 65 or older. Social and psychological issues are likely to increase as we get beyond these ages. Loneliness, for example, has been shown to decline with age generally but begin to rise again from age 70 onwards (Tornstram, 2011). This gives further evidence that people over the age of 70 may represent a key group when looking to understanding ageing and loneliness and yet there remains a dearth of research exploring this demographic within tourism and events.

Although there are studies investigating participatory arts for older adults, there is a need for a more rigorous and collaborative approach to provide "valuable evidence-based additions to the senior health toolkit" (Noice et al., 2013, p. 752). Similarly, Castora-Binkley et al. (2010) conclude from their

systematic review that there are physical and mental benefits for older adults from arts participation although they recognize that this is a relatively new and emerging area of research.

Although many definitions of the creative arts exist most remain, according to Leckey (2011), elusive and vague. In this paper, we advocate Leckey's (2011) research approach, and suggest the adoption of the Arts Council England (2007, p. 5) definition of creative arts as encompassing "literature and writing, theatre and drama, dance, music and visual arts, which include crafts, new media, moving image and combined arts." Research by Hackling et al. (2006), Holt (2008) and White (2009) found that the highest participation rates in creative arts were within the visual arts which took various forms including; drawing and painting (77%), crafts (60%), writing (59%), visiting exhibitions (55%), and photography (53%). Their studies also concluded that most included more than one creative activity. Although these can be undertaken individually the creative arts clearly provide great scope for events where likeminded people with shared interests can come together, create and learn in a social situation.

Our paper contributes to a praxis of event studies which is more critical by applying theories drawn from critical gerontology to better understand the personal benefits of participatory events for the over 70s. To date this demographic is highly underrepresented within the events literature. Thus, our work adds to the growing body of knowledge in critical event studies with a focus upon the personal impacts of planned events. The paper is conceptual and centres the debate firmly upon the psychosocial impacts of participatory arts events and in particular the impacts they can have upon people over the age of 70. The aim is to highlight the need for research with older people to better understand what they can gain from participating in events and to develop a conceptual framework to encourage and inform further research in this area.

The paper is structured into four key sections. Firstly, we introduce the conceptual framework. The components within the framework are then discussed in more depth beginning with an overview of literature in gerontological studies in tourism, leisure and events. We then move on to provide a better understanding of the wellbeing variables pertinent to this older age group. We finish with suggestions for future research with the over 70s employing critical gerontology within an event studies context.

The framework

We propose that the closely related but distinct concepts discussed later within our review of literature form the basis for understanding the personal benefits of arts events generally but have specific importance for the over 70s. The framework focuses on participatory arts events where the making/doing of something achievable in an inclusive, creative, and accessible setting is not only a vital part of the experience but is also a catalyst for important social interactions which potentially improve wellbeing. The proposed framework guides research into the processes that occur as we experience a socially creative activity. In more fully understanding these processes arts events can be better designed to maximise the benefits to those participating (Ballantyne et al., 2014). This will enable a contribution analysis approach (Mayne, 2008) to understand and attribute the personal benefits (such as belonging, inclusion, self-worth, self-esteem, reduced loneliness, and reduced isolation) which undoubtedly arise. These benefits have been evidenced in several recent studies (All Party Parliamentary Group UK, 2017; Gutheil et al., 2016; Mental Health Foundation, 2012; Zhang et al., 2016) but how and why they occur is not yet fully understood. We suggest that the intersection between social interaction and creativity/artistic endeavours is likely to create a synergy which increases both the in-the-moment enjoyment and the longer lasting benefits for those taking part. Those benefits which it is felt are pertinent to older age form the outcomes to be assessed within

the framework. These are discussed in more detail later in the paper addressing some of the debates around these related but quite distinct concepts.

It is not possible to understand these complex processes without consideration of age identity and life experience in the over 70s. It is for this reason that we introduce critical gerontology to the events field, particularly drawing upon the theories of gerotransendence (Tornstram, 2005), socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1992) and activity theory (Havighurst, 1961). These provide a lens through which the importance of motivations, background and the individual nature of response to experience can be viewed and most importantly, how these differ in older age. The framework therefore illustrates the importance of the intersection between creativity and social contact that can be created through events. We argue that this is where the most change in terms of personal benefit will occur (hence the thicker arrow) whilst acknowledging that either of these alone also has the potential to improve wellbeing in this age group (narrower arrows). The main theories within gerontology are illustrated as the lens through which we explore the process of change brought about by participating in arts events. To the right of the model we list the outcomes of these experiences identifying them as the main personal benefits accruing from creating with others.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Our methodology in constructing this conceptual paper uses secondary research via a systematic review drawing together areas which have largely been omitted from event management studies. These focus around the key areas, older adults and leisure/tourism/events; wellbeing of older adults and events; personal impacts and participatory events. In exploring and critiquing these areas we had to move beyond the events literature to better understand the particular issues and life experiences of the over 70s and therefore also explore critical gerontology as a theoretical framework and the issues of loneliness, social isolation, belonging and self-worth. A variety of

academic databases including Emerald; Ebsco; Ingenta-Connect; Discover and Google Scholar were interrogated using a combination of search terms drawn from the areas mentioned above.

Gerontology in tourism, leisure and events

Critical gerontology provides a useful foundation on which to build understanding of the older event demographic. Bernard and Scharf (2007, p. 7) define critical gerontology as "the study of older people in society, with epistemological foundations in political economy, feminism, and humanism. It brings to the forefront the relationships between ageing, the cultural and economic characteristics of later life, as well as the impact(s) of social policy." Critical gerontology, as a field of study, has the potential to promote social justice and challenge the negative social constructions and stereotypes associated with later life. However, one critique of research in this field is that rather than engaging in humanist participatory/ co-creative research, studies tend to have adopted positivist approaches with a desire to predict and control human behaviours, generalising groups rather than listening to individual narratives (Sedgley et al., 2011).

Tornstram (2011) suggests two clear recurrent themes within critical gerontology. The first being the misery perspective whereby a significant number of studies have analysed the difficulties associated with ageing and old age such as mobility, loneliness, isolation, and depression. The second theme focuses on the positives, such as Westerlund et al.'s (2009) findings that retirement is not perceived as trauma but as rejuvenation. Tornstam's (2005) theory of ageing adopts an optimistic approach and is encapsulated by his term 'gerotranscendence'. He concludes that happy ageing is not merely a continuation of the activities and values which were representative of a person's mid-life but something different. Gerotranscendence is a transformation characterized by new ways of understanding and enjoying life, its activities, oneself and others. In other words, it represents a shift in one's meta-perspective from one influenced by consumption or a material and rational vision to a

cosmic and transcendent vision informed by a growing awareness of the finitude of old age. The transcendent changes proposed by Tornstram (1989, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2005) take place across three levels; the self, social, and cosmic levels which accompany us as we grow older. Self-levels were defined by a reduced sense of self-centredness whereby one is less concerned with materialism and physical appearance but more concerned with a need for introspection. Social levels suggest that an older person becomes less interested in superficial social contacts, and experiences a need for fewer closer ties, solitude, peace, and meditation. Finally, the cosmic level emerged as the most consistent level of gerotranscendence emanating from Tornstram's (1989, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2005) research. This level reflects a longing for a higher sense of connection with the unity of nature and the universe. The older person experiences new definitions of time, space and life along with an enhanced sense of belonging to past and future generations. We suggest that future research within events brings together these approaches to ageing. Events, and in particular participatory arts or creative events, can offer 'transcendental' opportunities through self-expression, freedom, new experiences as well as developing meaningful relationships based on shared interests and world views. At the same time, participatory arts events have the potential to be effective interventions to alleviate the negative experiences of older age.

Within these broad views of ageing there are a number of theories which need further brief consideration. One of the main schools of thought is centred on 'activity theory' which advocates stay active to stay healthy and achieve life satisfaction (i.e. age well = stay young). This was first developed by Havighurst in 1961 and since then has become the dominant discourse of successful ageing within academia and government policy. Activity theory makes intuitive sense in that engaging in activities as though 'young' is likely to give the appearance and therefore benefits of being a younger, healthier person. However, the theory tends to ignore the differing socioeconomic situations amongst older adults many of whom will not have the same choices, opportunities or indeed same level of control over their social situations and activity choices. An alternative theory

developed around the same time is 'disengagement theory' (Cumming & Henry, 1961) where a gradual disengaging from social activity is viewed as normal as we move into older age. The original theory has been widely criticized (Adams & Sanders, 2010) and other theories of ageing that focus on reductions in social activity have since been developed including socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1992; 1995) and Tornstram's work on gerotranscendence. Both of these incorporate the increasing need to find time to reflect through a reduction in 'busyness', and in particular, social activities. Critical gerontologists, although incorporating a number of theoretical stances, generally critique activity theory for idealising youth. They argue that society needs to accept and respect ageing itself instead of asserting the need to appear younger through greater activity. A further growing area within gerontology is third generation theory from a feminist perspective (Gillis and Munford, 2004). Demographics in most societies show that very old age is largely a female experience and that ageing generally is very different for women and men (Krekula, 2007; Russell, 2007). This clearly has implications for creative arts event design and audience targeting.

Although there is relatively little research related to older demographics within events we can draw upon some of the work undertaken within tourism. This has tended to focus on activity and behavioural theory as a way of understanding the older tourist (e.g. Bai et al., 2001; Jang et al., 2009; Javalgi et al., 2001; Nimrod, 2007 & 2008), segmenting the market through their socio-demographic profiles or unique characteristics (e.g. Shoemaker, 1989), or seeking to understand their motivations to travel (e.g. Hsu et al., 2007). Surprisingly, within tourism literature there remains little research on the personal benefits gained from social leisure pursuits from an older person's perspective. Although there has been some application of activity theory (which is naturally attractive to tourism and leisure scholars) there remains a limited number of studies on how the older adult's travel experiences or activities have affected their overall quality of life or wellbeing (Lee & Tideswell,

2005; Milman, 1998; Wei & Milman, 2002). One of the exceptions to this is Wei and Milman's (2002) study of elderly travellers' tourist leisure activities and psychological wellbeing. They concluded that activity levels and types were of great significance to older people in terms of their relationships and quality of life.

Sedgley et al. (2011) provide a critical overview of tourism and ageing. This paper makes an important contribution to research through a refocus of critical tourism studies to advocate both the contribution of 'hopeful tourism scholarship' [that which is value led, co-created knowledge, has its foundations in partnership, ethical enquiry and has the potential to be transformative for researchers and the researched (Pritchard et al., 2011)] and cross-disciplinary enquiries informed by critical gerontology theory. They suggest that studies seeking to understand ageing and tourism have been constrained by a market driven focus to exploit the potential of the 'silver economy'. Although there is clearly scope for this within event management research, critical event studies have the opportunity to take a more humanist approach to research in this area. Similarly, there has been a proliferation of quantitative studies within tourism conducted 'on' older people rather than with them (Sedgley et al., 2011). This is driven by a desire to understand and control market forces upon a stereotyped group of older people rather than to view them as individuals. This approach is clearly at odds with that of critical gerontologists, and hopefully critical event scholars, who seek to make a difference to the individual lives of older people. Adopting such a consumerist research approach is unlikely to provoke any significant change in power relations or challenge existing stereotypes or ageist discourse (Ray, 2007). From a systematic review of event studies literature there has been little research with older populations and those that exist tend to be related to sport rather than art or cultural events (e.g., Dionigi, 2002; Grant, 2001; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007).

Understanding the personal benefits of participatory events

It has been widely documented within event studies literature that planned events hold the potential to unlock a wide variety of social and cultural benefits for attendees, and local communities such as socialization, family togetherness and community wellbeing (Azara et al., 2018; Chang & Yuan, 2011; Chou et al., 2018; Uysal & Li, 2008). Much of the research suggests that the social aspects of an event experience remain the most important motivation for many attendees (Dodd et al., 2006; Nicholson & Pearce, 2001). Even within business events the friendships formed have been found to be one of the most important legacies of attendance (Foley et al., 2014). Crompton and McKay's (1997) early research found that meeting new people and socializing with friends and family were key motivators to event attendance. More recent studies have cited the opportunity to experience the positive atmosphere created when people come together to have fun (Gelder & Robinson, 2009; Yolal et al., 2016). Motivational literature in event studies has led to a renewed emphasis on understanding the event experience and its meaning to participants and audiences (Berridge, 2006; Filo & Coghlan, 2016). Clearly the design of the event experience is central to meaningful social interactions at events (Ballantyne et al., 2014; Nordvall et al., 2014). Greater understanding of how event social interactions take place and become meaningful is vital considering that the social networks of people over 70 often deplete over time. An opportunity to form new relationships through event activities has the potential to make a considerable difference to older people at risk of loneliness and isolation.

Few studies within events have addressed loneliness and isolation with older groups. Rydzik et al.'s (2013) study is an exception as they assessed the potential of arts-based transformative activities upon migrant women highlights the benefits of such events and the need to utilise more creative research methods to understand this area. Their research applied a five-stage visual methodology whereby participants created and exhibited their individual artwork upon completion using reflexivity and visual elicitation to document and analyse the participant's journey. Their study

highlighted the need for broader methodological thinking within event studies if the complexities of personal impact are to be truly understood - a point we return to in the latter sections of our paper.

Creative arts events provide a useful and explorative context in which to discuss these conceptual issues in relation to the over 70s. Participation in a socially creative activity, which is both accessible and achievable in later life, is likely to maintain and extend existing friendship networks. Art might also provide a continuation of a pre-retirement 'making/creating' lifestyle alongside the opportunity to learn new skills and gain confidence. Furthermore, creative activities have been linked to feelings of achievement and self-worth (Greaves & Farbus, 2006) and a sense of purpose and personal growth in older adults (Fischer & Specht, 1999) and in particular those approaching gerotranscendence (Tornstram, 2005). Indeed, one of the conclusions of a comprehensive report into the arts and loneliness is that "the arts exemplify the 'five ways to wellbeing': connect, be active, keep learning, take notice and give" (Cutler, 2012, p. 5).

Creativity through art event participation is therefore likely to have positive outcomes and these can be understood through the contrasting theories found within critical gerontology. For example, Price and Tinker (2014) highlight that creativity is an activity often undertaken in social situations and that creativity may well increase in later life as disinhibition and a lessening of distraction occurs. They argue, that creative activity promotes social interaction, cognitive stimulation, and a sense of self-worth which may help to counteract the ageism encouraged by a youth obsessed society. Participating in the arts can enable gerotransendence (Tornstam, 2000), allowing those that participate the time to reflect alongside others seeking similar experiences. The activity therefore stimulates introspection and thoughtfulness. The act of making or creating may also be a way to continue what was done in younger life and provide a way to feel valued within society. This

continuity theory of ageing suggests that older adults attempt to maintain existing internal and external structures and accomplish this through strategies linked to past experiences and their social world (Atchley, 1989).

Leckey's (2011) systematic review of the effects of creativity on wellbeing found that creative activities could have both a healing and protective effect upon mental wellbeing. Additionally, the therapeutic effects of arts participation could promote relaxation, provide a means of self-expression, reduce blood pressure, boost the immune system and reduce stress (Leckey, 2011; Ulrich, 1992). The creative arts have the potential to promote social networks alongside these improvements in psychological and physiological wellbeing (Leckey, 2011). Although there remains a lack of clear evidence to support these claims, it is widely acknowledged in social psychology literature that social networks (development, maintenance of ties) remain key to understanding personal wellbeing and loneliness.

A significant area of participatory arts events can also be understood through the theories surrounding social sharing. Rimé et al. (1992) found that most emotional experiences are shared with others shortly after they occur. They proposed that social sharing represents an integral part of emotional experiences. Producing art individually or collectively within a group will undoubtedly mean that social sharing will take place. Indeed, it will most likely form a valuable part of the experience as individuals validate themselves within the social group and provide support to others. Social sharing helps individuals to develop their egos, esteem, integrity, and to generate new meaning from experiences. Emotion is seen by many researchers as being able to intensively activate an individual's ties to a social network (Leckey, 2011). The result of this is the real potential of emotion to elicit social integration (Rimé et al., 1992). Creativity is an emotion rich experience and

experiencing this within a social setting (the event) enables the social sharing which brings about positive psychosocial outcomes.

Our review of literature into arts events and older people reveals that studies vary in their approach to data collection and analysis with some relying on either psychosocial data,or socio-physiological data or in some cases both. The majority of papers agree that investment within communities and arts can be personally and socially transformative (Leckey, 2011) and on an individual level, arts activity can give pleasure through socialisation, improving confidence, learning new skills, personal growth and wellbeing. At the same time at community level, art activities have the potential to develop new ways of communicating, new networks and to strengthen existing community relationships.

Our paper engages primarily with personal impact discourse (Reid, 2006; McClinchey, 2008) in the context of how creative arts events can positively impact personal wellbeing. In order to do this, we next define and clarify much of the misunderstood terminology related to the challenges faced in older life. Terms such as social isolation, social inclusion, loneliness, self-worth, quality of life, and wellbeing are often used interchangeably with little consideration of their appropriateness within the context of the research being undertaken. A lack of consistency and clarity in defining these terms has led to insufficient analysis to support the psychosocial benefits of arts events (Leckey, 2011) and, therefore, the evidence base remains weak (Hackling et al., 2006).

The fuzzy concepts of wellbeing and quality of life

Before considering the potential personal benefits most pertinent to older age it is useful to briefly overview the overarching concepts of quality of life and wellbeing. Understanding quality of life

(QOL) from an over 70s perspective is problematic. Firstly, due to the scarce amount of information on what older people consider constitutes a good quality of life, and secondly because a certain quality of life is needed to enable participation in creative art events. The term, quality of life, first emerged in the 1950s (Bech, 1993) and has evolved into a deeper hermeneutic investigation of an individual which as well as being concerned with health seeks to understand a person's social functioning (intentions, values and morals) and psychological wellbeing (Fitzpatrick, 1992; Wulff, 1986). Xavier et al.'s (2003) paper which examined elderly people and their definition of QOL suggests that senescence (biological aging) could represent either a positive (development and satisfaction), or negative (linked with depression symptoms). For example, if an elderly person has been able to successfully stay integrated in society then they will have done so by building a strong sense of ego, the result of which is a positive perception of their legacy (usually through work or their relationship with their children). The reverse of this is an inability to maintain a secure ego or find solutions which result in a conflict of self, disappointment and 'despair' (Erikson, 1968). So QOL in the later life cycle is very dependent upon both internal (emotional belief, attitude towards life) and external (contingencies, environmental) variables influencing the person's life, their interpretation of the importance and reality of these variables, and also their personal agency (i.e. the degree to which they are able to control resources and social relationships). Quality of life is therefore strongly linked to the related concepts of self-identity and self-worth and clearly has the potential to be positively influenced by art activities and socially interactive events. The Sing for Your Life charity in the UK, for example, is based on the mantra "a song a day keeps the doctor away" and aims to support the health and wellbeing of older people by running participatory singing activities. Results from these programmes have shown to significantly improve participants' quality of life for as long as six months after participating in the activity (Coulton et al., 2015).

Several studies found that social relationships (and frequency of contact), home and neighbourhood environment, social capital, psychological wellbeing, activities and hobbies, health and functional

ability, and social roles are key to elderly QOL (Arnold, 1991; Gabriel and Bowling, 2004; Xavier et al., 2002). Wiggins et al. (2004) highlight the importance of social structures in QOL in early old age (65-70) and in particular social support and participation, the quality and quantity of social contact, and feelings of trust and reciprocity. Despite the numerous studies and its use in government discourse there remains no universally accepted definition of QOL as a construct (Gill & Feinstein, 1994) or how it is justified from a methodological point of view (Hunt, 1997).

The concept of wellbeing seems to be gaining more traction than QOL and in particular *subjective wellbeing* which is well defined and has been used within psychology for a number of years (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999). There have also been a recent number of studies within the events field that consider changes in wellbeing related to attendance or participation (Filo & Coghlan, 2016; Packer & Ballantyne, 2011 & 2014; Yolal et al., 2016). The Arts Council England (2007, p. 2) believe that "experiencing the arts and culture creates a sense of wellbeing for individuals and communities", but this sense of wellbeing can hold multiple meanings especially between different age groups and cultural backgrounds. Noice et al.'s (2013) study highlights the term participatory arts (art making rather than passive observation) as the most likely to create wellbeing. They also distinguish between two types of participatory arts - wellness studies, and treatment studies. Although events have the potential to be used as interventions for ill-health we focus here on their use within wellness studies. We see participatory events as a tool for creating positive memories and social relationships promoting cognition, emotion, and psychosocial wellbeing in participants in good health. The positive effects of events are also determined by the art form they contain, for example, music has been found to be particularly beneficial to wellbeing (Noice et al., 2013; Packer & Ballantyne, 2011). There is undoubtedly a growing and convincing body of evidence linking art activity to wellbeing. In particular studies have found improved general health, fewer visits to the doctor's, fewer trips and falls, improved posture, increased morale, reduced loneliness (Cohen et al., 2006, 2007; Kattenstroth et al., 2013; Koga & Tims, 2001), improved psychological wellbeing (Noice

et al., 2004; Yuen et al., 2011), reduced anxiety levels (Koga & Tims, 2001; Clift et al., 2012), and increased social wellbeing such as greater confidence and enjoyment of social interaction (Noice & Noice, 2009; Pyman & Rugg, 2006; Yuen et al., 2011).

Creativity is often embedded within participatory art events and is likely to be a catalyst for personal beneficial change. There is a growing body of research that evidences that creative activities such as arts events bring many psychosocial benefits including quality of life, life satisfaction, self-esteem and problem-solving skills (Clift et al., 2009; Flood & Phillips, 2007; Leckey, 2011; Noice et al., 2013; O'Shea & Leime, 2012). In their review of research in this area Flood and Phillips (2007, p. 406) conclude that "all of the older research and most of the more recent work has demonstrated positive relationships between creativity and mental wellbeing of older adults" and go on to state that "creativity is advantageous to the mental wellbeing of older adults." Berkman et al. (2000) set out the importance of social networks to health/wellbeing through the development of a comprehensive framework. This includes upstream wider social-cultural conditions which effect the nature of social networks. These networks, in turn, provide opportunities for psychosocial mechanisms which then impact upon health through behavioural, psychologic and physiologic pathways. Their conceptual model provides a useful framework in which to study how a social activity, such as arts participation events, are culturally and socially embedded and can play a valuable role in social network creation.

In order to explore this further, it is important to understand some of the terminology used in considering the potential benefits of events. Below, we firstly outline the often-interchangeable terms of social isolation and loneliness and then extend the discussion further to consider the related, but positively framed, concepts of social inclusion and belonging. These social benefits to the individual form the first grouping of potential psychosocial outcomes of arts participation and

are key to the more personal outcomes often associated with creativity and making (see framework in Figure 1). The personal benefits, which include sense of purpose, self-worth/esteem, confidence and self-efficacy, are discussed later in the paper.

Social isolation

Research suggests that a great number of older people feel trapped in their own home (Davidson & Rossall, 2014). Victor (2005) documented that almost two hundred thousand people aged 65+ did not receive the help necessary to leave their house or flat to socialise which marries up with the research conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions in the UK (DWP, 2008) who found that 24% of pensioners went out socially less often than once a month. One could argue that this has resulted in 41% of people aged 65 and over in the UK feeling out of touch with the pace of modern life and a further 12% suggesting that they felt completely cut off from society (TNS, 2014).

Social isolation has been defined as "the distancing of an individual, psychologically, physically or both from his or her network of desired or needed relationships with other people" (Biordi & Nicholson, 2011, p. 98). Isolation could, therefore, be a positive choice (i.e. in a seeking of apartness, aloneness or solitude) but when imposed by others or society becomes more akin to social exclusion and clearly has negative implications. Indeed, social isolation has been found to be one of the two most important aspects of chronic illness care (along with physical disability) (Biordi & Nicholson, 2011). The extent of isolation can be described through consideration of the number, frequency and quality of social contacts an individual has as well as the longevity and durability of these contacts and the subjective feelings attributed to them by the individual. Others exclude subjective feelings from the definition and see social isolation as "the actual absence of informal supportive relationships" with a focus on self-reliance as part of the solution (Machielse, 2015, p. 340). There is

also evidence to suggest that a larger number of social interactions is more important in younger generations than the strength of tie, i.e. quantity over quality (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014), and that quality is determined on a scale which includes the negative effects of some social interactions (Rook, 1984).

Lin (1986) suggested that social isolation could occur at four levels: community (integration with social structure), organization (work, school, church etc.), confidantes (partner, friends, family) and person (personality and intellectual ability). In older adults, feelings of isolation can develop as a result of a reduction in community involvement (perhaps due to physical limitations, transport), loss of organizational inclusion (e.g. retirement) and fewer confidantes (e.g. bereavement). Interventions to address social isolation therefore need to operate at these varying levels. Participatory arts events provide an opportunity for community involvement (community of shared interest), organizational inclusion (continuation of doing in some form and a replacement of work-based networks with hobby based networks), and opportunity to develop new close personal relationships.

Machielse (2015) reminds us of the heterogeneity of older adults in her development of a typology of social isolation. The two criteria include, firstly the length of time they have been socially isolated (and whether this is situational or structural alongside a distinction between active and passive coping strategies), and secondly, whether the individual's action orientation is aimed at social participation or not. These dimensions create eight socially isolated types. Her work highlights that any intervention, such as a participatory art event, aimed at reducing social isolation will need to be tailored to the individual (or at least the type) as one size will not fit all. This can already be seen in reviews of past studies where response to interventions varies considerably both within and between groups (Gleibs et al., 2011; Masi et al., 2011). The wide range of activity types and levels available within participatory arts events allows for this individualisation whilst maintaining the all-

important social setting. This can, for example, be seen in initiatives such as the Staying Well project run by Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council in 2014, which has shown some success in reducing isolation among older people living in rural areas. The project provided opportunities to participate in a wide range of arts and crafts activities (such as painting, drawing, music or singing) within four community hubs, of which three were successful in reducing loneliness and isolation along with an improvement in participants' overall health and wellbeing (All-Party Parliamentary Group UK, 2017). Interestingly, Hoeffer (1987) found that it is the perception of social isolation that acts as a better predictor of feelings of loneliness than 'actual' social isolation as measured using quantity and quality of relationships. Subjective feelings are therefore more influential in loneliness than social isolation assessed objectively.

This suggests that 'loneliness' may be a more useful concept when considering the psychosocial benefits of arts event participation: psychosocial refers to the psychological state of the individual rather than an externally judged sociological status (Biordi & Nicholson, 2011). In the context of our study, it therefore depicts the relationship between the human mind, feelings, and the time spent meeting with other people. We put forward the potential lasting benefits that participatory arts events can have upon individuals such as reducing loneliness and social isolation, increasing individuals' sense of belonging, self-esteem, and self-worth through engaging in creative arts activities in a social setting.

Loneliness

According to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra, 2011), nearly half (49%) of all people aged 75 and over in the UK live alone. Additionally, a million older people (over 65+) in the UK have said that they are always or often feel lonely, and within this sample nearly half said that television or pets are their main form of company (TNS, 2014). It has also been

documented that people with a high degree of loneliness are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's compared with people with a low degree of loneliness (Wilson et al., 2007). Holt-Lunstad et al.'s (2010) research into social relationships and causes of mortality found that loneliness could be as harmful to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes per day.

Loneliness is the result of the perception of having too few social contacts and/or poor-quality contacts (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). These are similar markers to those used within social isolation but with the focus on 'perception'. Therefore, loneliness should be viewed as being distinct from social isolation in that it is the individual's subjective emotional state rather than an objective state of deprivation of social contact (Bennet, 1980). Social isolation may of course be a factor in feelings of loneliness, but the two concepts are distinct and can exist independently of each other (Victor et al., 2009). Similarly, Weiss (1987) distinguishes between social and emotional loneliness describing these as concepts distinct from each other. As an area of investigation, loneliness is more often disclosed in research derived from qualitative methods than it is quantitative methods (Franklin, 2009; Routasalo et al., 2009).

Group interventions of differing types have been found to be beneficial in reducing loneliness in older adults but only if these last for a considerable length of time (5 months or more according to Findlay, 2003). Findlay's systematic review also concluded that there is a dearth of research into what works in reducing loneliness in older people. The evidence is scant and somewhat contradictory. For example, Hagan et al.'s (2014) systematic review of interventions to reduce loneliness in older people found that only Creswell et al.'s (2012) study reported statistically significant success of a group intervention. Other studies highlighted that female participants experience less beneficial effects than male participants (Gleibs et al., 2011; Masi et al., 2011). However, Cattan et al. (2005) do conclude that group work with an educational focus has a greater likelihood of reducing loneliness than one to one interventions.

It appears, therefore, that providing events aimed at reducing social isolation will not necessarily reduce feelings of loneliness as the two concepts are quite distinct. Events which continue over time and are structured to allow for the development of meaningful personal relationships whilst boosting feelings of self-worth and confidence seem likely to have the best chance of combatting loneliness in older people.

Social inclusion/exclusion

The concept of social inclusion is based at the community/society level and is therefore not merely the antonym of social isolation. The term appears to have emerged mainly within policy discourse (Long & Bramham, 2006) and has more in common with social capital theory. For example, McKenzie et al. (2002) describe social inclusion as resulting from the bonding, bridging and integrating of groups in a society. The related term, social exclusion was first used in a policy context (Common Criteria Concerning Sufficient Resources and Social Assistance in Social Protection Systems (92/441/EEC) in Europe by the European commission in 1992. And although this focused upon poverty rather than social exclusion, it made reference to the right to sufficient income to be accompanied by policies for economic and social integration. The UK Social Exclusion Unit then further developed this into policy which revealed disparities in key services (health, education, justice). The UK Social Exclusion Unit was formed in 1997 by the British Prime Minister, and aims to improve government action to reduce social exclusion through specific projects in consultation with other government departments and special interest groups (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 1997). Social Inclusion therefore is about reducing those disparities (Long & Bramham, 2006).

The link between social inclusion and social isolation can be seen in Secker et al.'s social inclusion scale which consists of three subscales, social isolation, social relations and social acceptance.

However, this should be treated with caution as they also state that "conceptualization and measurement of the construct is at an early stage. (2009, p. 71)."

There is some evidence that art engagement helps the socially excluded to participate in community activities and therefore to move towards being socially included (as well as encouraging formation of more positive identities) (Thomas et al., 2011). Social exclusion could be viewed as the far end of a scale which includes social isolation but is caused by wider policy decisions. In considering the effects of participatory arts events upon older adults, the potential to affect broader social inclusion is less likely than the potential to reduce loneliness and social isolation. Assessing the value of creative arts activities on felt loneliness appears to be a more useful focus of event research within this area and is therefore a key element within our proposed framework.

Belonging

Belonging is seen as a multi-dimensional social construct of relatedness which includes relationships with people, places and things (Hill, 2006). Hill's work also concludes that belongingness is central to personality, wellbeing, and is "the subjective experience of having relationships that bring about a secure sense of fitting in" (Lambert et al., 2013, p. 1420). Lambert et al. (2013) found that relationships which promote a sense of belonging are especially likely to enhance a belief that one's life is meaningful and research on older adults found that higher levels of social support predict greater meaning in life (Krause, 2007). Art and craft activities for elderly women were found to connect them with others and allowed them to continue contributing to family and community. Taking part in this type of creative event enables them to help others and feel valued as well as a multitude of personal benefits not least of which was the experience of pleasure (Liddle et al., 2013). Feelings of belonging in social groups can imbue life with meaning in various ways such as providing stability, helping individuals create a shared social identity, and allowing them to pursue higher

order collective goals (Baumeister et al., 2001; Haslam et al., 2008; Tajfel, 1972 cited in Lambert et al., 2013).

The record of materials reviewed indicate that, in order for us to feel we belong weak ties are as important as strong ties. For example, Sandstrom & Dunn (2014) suggest that although we interact with a wide network of people on a daily basis, the social psychology literature has primarily focused on interactions with close friends and family. Their research tested whether subjective wellbeing is related not only to interactions with these strong ties but also to interactions with weak social ties (i.e., acquaintances) and suggests that we should not underestimate the value of our acquaintances.—Accordingly, interactions with weak ties are related to our subjective wellbeing and feelings of belonging. Although further research is needed to examine causality, the results are consistent with the idea that the more peripheral members of our social network shape our day-to-day happiness. A chat with the coffee barista, postman, yoga classmate, and dog owner may contribute meaningfully to our happiness, above and beyond the contribution of interactions with our close friends and family. The making and creating together inherent within a participatory art event can play a crucial role in developing these all important 'ties' and foster a sense of belonging. Relationships and social identity (along with self-discovery and self-expression) were also found to be the beneficial results of art-based practices in mental health recovery (Van Lith et al., 2013). Although creativity is an important aspect within participatory arts events there is evidence to show that socializing in a group setting is as important to older attendees as the activity itself (Bedding and Sadlo, 2008). The being together and the 'doing' create a sense of belonging closely related to social identity and self-worth.

Self-esteem and self-worth

Self-esteem and self-worth are the final two potential personal benefits of participatory arts events for the over 70s in our framework. Seen as important psychosocial wellbeing concepts, self-worth and self-esteem are often used interchangeably and are the key building blocks of self-concept (along with self-image and ideal self). Studies have shown that self-esteem follows a particular pattern as we age, increasing in young and middle adulthood, peaking at about 60 and then declining in older age. This decline in old age is largely due to changes in socioeconomic status and physical health (Orth et al., 2010). Meira et al. (2017) found that both educational level and the quality of interpersonal relationships are significant protective factors for high self-esteem in older people. These studies suggest that although self-esteem is affected by background and health it is also strongly related to social connections. Participatory arts events therefore would appear to provide the opportunity for self-esteem maintenance and/or strengthening in older age.

Self-worth relates specifically to how we value ourselves and our role in society (albeit this is also based on how we perceive the extent to which others value us). The theory of 'contingencies of self-worth' (Crocker and Wolfe, 2001) provides a useful framework in which to study this concept. These 'contingencies' are defined by Crocker and Wolfe (2001) as categories of outcomes on which we stake our self-esteem. Success or failure (judged by our own standards) in each domain influences our self-esteem. How we value ourselves in differing contexts therefore directly affects our self-esteem. Participatory arts events can provide a setting for this success or failure to take place and can therefore strengthen or weaken self-esteem.

Although there are a growing number of studies considering physical activity, body image and self-worth there is, as yet, little that looks at creativity and art in relation to this (Price & Tinker, 2014). The act of doing or making in a supportive social environment is likely to positively affect self-worth and the sharing of this experience to enhance self-esteem. There is growing evidence to suggest that

creativity and social activities can reduce loneliness, enhance feelings of belonging and build self-worth and esteem. What is still lacking is an understanding of the process through which these benefits are accrued by the older individual. Participatory arts events provide an ideal context in which to study these phenomena.

Conclusions and future research agenda

A participatory arts/craft event experience is made up primarily of the creative activity and the social situation. It is the bringing together of these two aspects that creates the potential for positive benefits to wellbeing. Although there is increasing evidence of the benefits of creative activity and of social activities as yet there is little that considers the processes involved when the two come together. Our framework (Figure 1) highlights the potential power of this combination in changing the lives of older people at risk of loneliness, social isolation and feelings of low self-worth. The process of change, we argue, can be best understood within the theoretical frameworks offered within critical gerontology and in particular those relating to activity, social engagement/disengagement and changing worldviews.

Within critical event studies, there is clearly scope for a research agenda involving older people, especially those over the age of 70. Research has centred on the areas outlined above with very few studies specifically investigating the personal wellbeing impacts of arts events. Several studies have analysed the effect of tourism or events experience upon quality of life (short term cross sectional and/or mono-methodological studies) (Lee & Tideswell, 2005; Milman, 1998; Wei & Milman, 2002), but none have engaged with the particular challenges of later life or implemented a more longitudinal approach to these research phenomena. These are needed in order to further conceptualise the processes which bring about wellbeing changes and lasting personal benefits. It is

only through the development of longitudinal mixed methodological studies that we will be able to capture the rich and varied cultural and emotional footprint of participatory arts events. For example, the use of visual photographic data captured by autography, reminiscence interviews, audio recording arts sessions, focus groups, observational notes, or wearable technologies such as those to measure electro dermal activity (EDA) could be used alongside traditional quantitative methods such as surveys (see for example the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale 'WEMWBS'). For the identified age group, participatory arts events that allow for the development and maintenance of meaningful personal relationships seem particularly beneficial in creating lasting personal benefits. Through longitudinal studies the positive effects of these events which continue over time (rather than one-off experiences), can be explored further with regards to enhancing participants' self-worth, self-esteem, and reducing their loneliness and isolation. Crocker and Wolfe's (2001) 'contingencies of self-worth' provide a useful model here to investigate whether experiences of success or failure during a participatory arts event have a strengthening or weakening effect on participants' self-esteem.

More research is also needed into the potential of events as interventions in reducing loneliness and isolation. When studying participatory arts events as interventions, however, it is suggested that the approach needs to maintain an element of individualisation as the experience can vary greatly between participants (Machielse, 2013). Past studies have shown very different individual responses to arts interventions (e.g., Gleibs et al., 2011; Masi et al., 2011), and while the social setting is important to be maintained, the arts activity itself needs to allow for individualisation in order to produce valuable results.

We therefore suggest that future research should seek to explore the many different contexts of 'arts events', be these singing, craft, painting, sculpture, creative writing, to ascertain the individual elements that bring about positive change. Noice et al. (2013) highlighted the positive effects of

music in particular, but more research is needed into other forms of creative art as defined by the Arts Council of England (2007, p. 5) to include, literature and writing, theatre and drama, dance, visual arts, including crafts, new media, moving image and combined arts. Attention also needs to be given to the cultural setting and the influence this might have on outcomes. Cross cultural research and research done in multiple locations will help to bridge this gap. Berkman et al.'s (2000) conceptual model could be used here to study how participatory arts events are culturally and socially embedded and can play an important role in the creation of social networks. Within these networks, the importance of both strong and weak ties for subjective wellbeing also need to be explored further (Sandstorm & Dunn, 2014). A comparative study between creative activities with close friends and family versus participatory arts events with acquaintances or more peripheral members of the participant's network could provide insights into the importance of interactions with strong/weak ties.

We acknowledge that older age can be considered a feminist issue (Marshall, 2006), and research agendas need to reflect this. In particular research into the 'very old' is needed, as well as those women or men who do not engage in participatory or creative arts and the reasons for non-participation. Alongside this there is a research need to understand participatory arts events that attract different socio-economic groups and in particular males within lower socio-economic groups. This group tend to engage less in social activities as they age and are therefore at greater risk of social isolation (All-Party Parliamentary Group, UK Government, 2017; Cracknell, 2010).

Our review of the literature has revealed a great opportunity to undertake research with people over 70 and furthermore to advance the fields of critical gerontology and critical event studies. There is clearly a research need to investigate the processes concerned with participatory arts events with a view to understanding the psychosocial or emotional wellbeing of the cultural self and the benefits arts and cultural events can provide to older people.

The over 70s are an overlooked and, to some extent, undervalued generation who provide a significant and growing audience for events. It is this generation, often with the time and resources to attend who may gain the greatest benefits and, as a consequence, create benefit to communities and wider society. An understanding of the process through which personal value is created remains an important precursor to exploring the wider social benefits of arts participation. Arts events provide a unique context in which researchers can explore older adults, their social interactions and creativity in order to better understand the 'ageing well agenda' and the challenges older people face within our communities.

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