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College of Social
Sciences

**A sociological exploration of belonging at a
Thriving Places tea dance in Glasgow**

Linda Butterfield
Student number:0000000

A dissertation submitted in part requirement for
the degree of
MRes in Equality and Human Rights

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Abstract

The concept of belonging is neither tangible nor measurable yet it continues to excite the sociological imagination as central to the self and the social world. This dissertation takes the concept of belonging and applies it to the context of a tea dance in Glasgow. In doing so, it takes an ageing lens to consider how belonging is experienced by older people both at the dance and beyond it. It also considers how belonging is established at the dance and the impact of this. Qualitative data was gathered using seven semi-structured interviews with attendees and one focus group with organisers. Belonging emerges as a complex experience comprising of emotional, sensory and relational dimensions inevitably shaped by biographical circumstances. The dance is found to be a place where attendees feel a strong sense of belonging, largely through relationships with others. Staff are also uncovered as great facilitators of belonging and the dance has a positive impact on sense of self that seeps beyond the event itself. This dissertation discusses the research process and provides a detailed analysis of the results. In doing so, this study simultaneously confirms and complicates current sociological conceptualisations of belonging.

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1 Introduction

“Everyone *belongs*: it is impossible not to belong to social groups, social relations, or cultures” (Wood and Waite, 2011:201). Yet how belonging¹ is established and experienced is not easily determined. As a subject that never shies away from such challenges, sociology has persistently sought to uncover the connection between belonging, the self and wider social structures (Delanty, 2003). As individuals and communities continually adapt to a changing world, community-based studies “remain a task to excite the sociological imagination in the twenty-first century” (Allan and Phillipson, 2008:171). This study intends to take the complex concept of belonging and examine it in context at a community-based tea dance in Glasgow. In doing so, it takes an ageing lens, revealing how belonging is experienced by older people and its impact upon sense of self.

This research is a collaborative project with Thriving Places (TP). TP, implemented in 2013, is a ten-year initiative delivered by Glasgow Community Planning Partnership. It is based in nine areas of Glasgow, all of which are areas of persistent multiple deprivation. The initiative is intended to improve outcomes for people living in these areas through intensive interventions to engage with the community (Brunner et al, 2017). Whilst TP continually evaluates its initiatives against its principles and intended outcomes (see appendix A), Masters students at the University of Glasgow were approached to conduct research to complement ongoing evaluative work. Given my strong desire to conduct research with meaningful outcomes, I was keen to collaborate with TP and visited several different projects provided by the Parkhead, Dalmarnock and Camlachie branch of Thriving Places (PDC TP) located in the east end of Glasgow.

A weekly tea dance, introduced in 2014, was selected for investigation. The dance takes place every Wednesday afternoon in Barrowfield community centre, Camlachie. The event comprises of bingo followed by instructor-led dancing with refreshments provided at the beginning and during an interval. Participation is

¹ Belonging is used throughout this dissertation to mean an active, sense of belonging that a person might feel

voluntary and designated seating is avoided, thus allowing people to mix freely. There is no form of membership required to attend, nor is there any fee.

The dance has steadily gained popularity and is now attended by over 70 people every week. Attendees travel from across the city to attend, not only from within the PDC TP remit. The demographic is predominantly older people over the age of 60 although approximately 20 younger people also attend accompanied by support workers. My reasons for selecting the dance as a case study were three-fold: it suited my strong interest in community; it offered an opportunity to work with older people as I have done previously; I believed it was a good case through which to investigate the sociological concept of belonging, because, from my observations, I believed it to be a place where people experienced a sense of belonging.

This study begins with a critical literature review on themes of belonging and community. This includes a review of empirical studies focussing on participation and, where possible, examined through an aging lens that reflects my sample. In conducting this review, the following research objectives were developed:

- To explore how older people who attend the tea dance understand and experience belonging
- To examine the ways in which belonging is established and maintained at the dance
- To understand the role staff have to play in establishing and maintaining belonging
- To examine the impact of belonging at the dance for participants and PDC TP
- To build on sociological understandings of belonging

A qualitative research paradigm was selected to fulfil these objectives and justification for this is presented in the following chapter. This chapter provides an analytical explanation of the methodology, methods and sample choices as well as commenting on the research process and its inevitable limitations and ethical considerations.

The subsequent chapter provides an in-depth analysis and discussion of the findings. In doing so, it illustrates how belonging is understood and experienced by participants both in relation to the dance and outside of it. This chapter then identifies how belonging is established and maintained before considering the

impact of this. The concluding chapter then summarises the study and highlights limitations and possibilities for future research both for sociology and TP.

This collaborative research intends to offer some learning for PDC TP and the wider TP community. Therefore, the information contained in this study has been summarised in a short lay report² that can be widely disseminated to participants, PDC TP staff and other community development workers (see appendix B).

² The tea dance has recently been renamed The Barrowfield Ball which is the name used in the Lay Report

2 Literature review

Exploring the concept of belonging is difficult since it is a fundamental part of everyday life that is neither tangible nor consciously considered (Fenster, 2005; Amit, 2010). A narrative review of the literature on belonging finds the concept applied to a multitude of disciplines from health to social policy to psychology. Even within sociology, there is a vast body of literature concerned with the notion of belonging and the seemingly limitless aspects of everyday life to which it can be applied. Taking those most relevant to this case study, this review begins by examining sociological conceptualisations of the relationship between the self and the social before reviewing literature in which sociologists attempt to define and apply the concept of belonging, particularly with reference to older people who form the sample of this project. Given the context of this case study, sociological studies of community including strong and weak ties are reviewed as inextricably linked to belonging. Finally, a short analysis of TP situates the tea dance in its wider context.

2.1 Conceptualising belonging

Whilst definitions and approaches are contested, the fundamental importance of belonging rarely comes into question where it remains a central theme in connecting the individual to the social (Crow and Allan, 1994; Delanty, 2003; May, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2011). The connection between the individual and the social has long been of concern in the social sciences (May, 2011). Early contributions from the symbolic interactionist school of thought found norms, values and social rules constructed through a relational sense of self in which “the human individual transcends the local social group to which he immediately belongs, and that this social group accordingly, transcends itself...” (Mead, 1934:255). Bourdieu’s theory of habitus also asserts that sense of self is constructed and maintained through unwritten rules that govern social life and are “re-legitimised through an interplay of agency and structure” (Bourdieu cited in Wacquant, 2005:316). These theorists convincingly demonstrate how sense of self is governed by socially constructed norms that entail “recognising, or misrecognising the self in other” (Leach, 2002 cited in May, 2011:287). However, they lack exploration of how these norms are developed and maintained in any given context (May, 2011). Furthermore, there is little room

for emotion to enter the framework of this mutually constitutive relationship between self and society, a limitation that warrants investigation (May, 2011; Reay, 2015). Conceptualising belonging therefore should seek to understand how and in what ways sense of self is constructed in a relational, emotional and cultural way (May, 2011; Wood and Waite, 2011).

Belonging is repeatedly defined in the literature as “a sense of ease with oneself and ones’ surroundings,” (Miller, 2003; May, 2011:368; Yuval-Davis, 2011) essential to living a meaningful life (Crow and Allan, 1994; Delanty, 2003; Beatley, 2004) thus enabling “a mode of being in which we are as we ought to be: fully ourselves” (Miller, 2003:218). Yet how to measure, quantify and define such a concept is complex (Jørgensen, 2010) for what exactly is it that we belong to? The concept is especially complex since, when present, it arguably goes unnoticed in everyday life, not dissimilar to Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ (Fenster, 2005). Miller (2003) suggests approaching belonging through looking at material, cultural and relational surroundings. May (2011) takes this further, proposing a framework that explores belonging from the perspective of the participant, acknowledging that our connections are multiple, emotional and sensory. Empirical research should, therefore, seek to explore “interaction, intersubjectivity and the emotional content of these” (May, 2011:369). Given that this project seeks to explore how belonging is achieved, experienced and maintained in a social context, these suggestions are crucial. Firstly, a focus on the sensory and emotional experiences at the dance will contribute to understanding how belonging is achieved. Secondly, it is important to proceed with caution in proclaiming belonging at the dance since it can only be understood within the wider context of biography of the individual, the influences of which are not easily measured.

2.1.1 Approaching the study of belonging

Since belonging often goes unnoticed (Fenster, 2005; Amit, 2010), empirical studies commonly address *non*-belonging, particularly in relation to structural categories such as class, gender and ethnicity (Probyn, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 2011; May, 2016). Probyn (1996:5) describes an emotionality of belonging as involving “a yearning: a sort of longing to belong,” only obvious when isolated from the group. Safety and familiarity are described as significant in order to establish

belonging alongside a perceived similarity to members of the group through which a positive sense of self may be formed (May, 2016). Conversely, those who are not perceived similar can become subject to a process of ‘othering’ by which they are considered inferior (Kavanaugh, Carroll and Rosson, 2005). May’s (2016) recent empirical work on non-belonging found belonging to be:

An accomplishment only possible through recognition and acceptance by others in which personhood is affirmed through others showing concern for wellbeing (ibid:749).

Further research is required to see whether these facets of belonging are important in temporary spaces such as the dance where the focus is not primarily concerned with addressing *non* belonging.

Whilst much research looks to structural categories to explore belonging, May and Muir (2015) argue that ageing is often overlooked. Placing the spotlight on ageing allows exploration of the combined effects of the individual experience of ageing and a collective one marked by the passage of time. For example, they found belonging reduced through a perceived lack of safety at older age but that this was counterbalanced by a sense of ease from having lived in the area for a long time. Temporal and embodied experiences were deemed highly significant where changes in physical health limited belonging by shrinking the social world to which their participants had access. May and Muir (ibid) argue, therefore, that research pay attention to the relational, cultural, temporal and sensory dimensions that contribute to an overall sense of belonging.

Whilst there are numerous dimensions of belonging, one dimension permeates throughout the literature: that of relationships. Given that “there is no sense of ‘I’ [...] without its correlative sense of you, or he, or they” (Cooley, 1902:151 cited in May and Muir, 2015) it is hardly surprising that relationships to people, “trumps all other forms of belonging” as fundamental to forming a positive sense of self (May, 2016:749). Given the importance of relationships, there is much evidence linking participation in leisure activity to satisfaction with life since it facilitates social interaction (Simone and Haas, 2013). Beatley (2004:4) cites participation in groups as crucial in fostering a sensory mode of belonging arguing that social interaction, “yields tremendous enjoyment and personal satisfaction.” Beatley (ibid) particularly emphasises the need for older people to

belong and feel part of something, finding association between extensive social networks and reducing the risk of age related illnesses such as dementia (ibid). Yet how the groups themselves and the staff who organise them create the opportunity for belonging whilst simultaneously avoiding processes of 'othering' is not widely discussed in the literature, a gap in research this study intends to fill.

Closely aligned to my case study is Andonian and MacRae's (2011) research that looked to support older people in an urban area of San Francisco. Though coming from an occupational therapy background, Andonian and MacRae employed sociological research techniques in the form of photo diaries to capture the experiences of social activity for older people and the causal mechanisms of belonging. They found belonging achieved through: connecting with/accepting diversity; development of close personal bonds mirroring that of family; recognition as members of the community. They particularly found regular and consistent activities fostered belonging since a membership kind of participation could be adopted. Conversely, belonging was limited by threats to social funding and risks of being stereotyped akin to that of the generalised 'other' (ibid). Whilst small in scale, these findings allow an insight into how belonging can be developed and maintained in activities similar to that of the tea dance. Furthermore, it entails a sample of older people which reflects the majority of attendees. What is missing is the role that staff members play in developing belonging, yet this is surely of significance in creating belonging in temporary spaces.

In terms of methodological approach, Johnston's (2016) case study of a language cafe in a library in Sweden is comparable to this one. Johnston sought both facilitator and participant perspectives in understanding how informal language exchange can foster belonging for newcomers to the country. In doing so, Johnston successfully illustrated how the language programme fostered belonging through offering participants opportunities to interact with others and build trust (ibid). Whilst the findings do not present much detail in identifying exactly what facilitators do to enable belonging, their perspectives were deemed worthy of inclusion. Jones (2014) further substantiates the importance of incorporating staff perspectives. In interviews with community practitioners, Jones (ibid:83) found that,

...with very little prompting, interviewees described embodied, emotional and biographical contexts that they felt were intimately connected with how they worked to make communities more cohesive.

Capturing the perspective of staff members at an event such as the tea dance is, therefore, worthy of exploration. It provides staff with an opportunity to explain purposeful methods they use to foster belonging and might also allow for unintentional dimensions to be revealed, shaped by personal biographies that influence paid work.

There is much to learn from the empirical studies identified thus far. Emotion, biography, participation and relationships are all described as significant facets to consider when exploring belonging. Furthermore, there is a call to take a person-centred approach, considering individual perspectives. Turning now to another domain of sociology adds further weight to the importance of investigating belonging in order to understand the complex connection between the individual and the social.

2.2 Community and belonging

Whilst there are a multitude of ways to which belonging has been applied, none take such prominence as that of belonging to community. The notion of community has long since been a preoccupation of sociologists (Cohen, 1985; Crow and Allan, 1994; Delanty, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2011). The grand theorists of old were quick to critique modern society, where industrialisation and rising capitalism were considered responsible for destroying traditional notions of community. From Tonnies' (1887) distinction of individual (Gemeinschaft) and society (Gesellschaft), Marx's (1927) theory of alienation and Durkheim's (1893) organic and mechanical solidarity all were concerned with the way in which social solidarity was losing force in the face of modernity (Giuffre, 2013). In doing so, community was attributed with more significance than that of locality, rather a "feeling of belonging to the group," the group being more than simply the sum of its members but rather an entity in which moral order can be sought (ibid:29).

It is perhaps unsurprising that these concerns have resurfaced in recent years in the face of globalisation and modern technology. A recent surge in community studies has challenged notions of fixed local communities. Rather, community should be understood as plural, non-fixed and non-spatial (Delanty, 2003). Urry (2007) has questioned the very existence of community with regards to place and Delanty (2003:192) claims that it is this very “crisis of belonging in its relation to place” that has revived the field of community studies. There is much ambiguity around the meaning and purpose of community today but what remains pivotal to discussions is, a “sense of belonging to a collectivity” the implications of which are, “affectively charged” (Amit, 2010:360).

Savage et al (2005) describe a new freedom for the middle class since they can choose to live with others the same as themselves. However, this “elective belonging” (ibid:23) is, arguably, not attributable to those living in areas of deprivation such as that of PDC TP (Phillipson, 2007). Given that Jorgensen (2010) found a reduced sense of belonging in deprived areas, this lack of choice is important. Perhaps especially so for older people where Phillipson (2007:329) found 79% to have lived in the same deprived area for over half their lives with little choice about what or who they might belong to.

Fostering a sense of belonging to community remains a preoccupation of policy makers and academics alike hoping to respond to a perceived, “crisis of community” (Beatley, 2004:4). In doing so, sociological concepts such as social capital and weak ties have crossed into the public domain as tools for understanding local communities and facilitating belonging. The tea dance is a site with potential for increasing social networks in the form of strong and weak ties to which we will now turn.

2.2.1 Strong and weak ties

Granovetter’s (1973) seminal work, *The Strength of Weak Ties*, has been particularly influential as a tool for understanding social interaction in the community (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Kavanaugh, Carroll and Rosson, 2005). In his study on employment opportunities, Granovetter (1973) found that casual acquaintances, defined as weak ties, were far more useful than that of strong ties made up of family and friends. Whilst strong ties are often considered

crucial for a meaningful life, Granovetter (ibid:1360) argued that they can limit information and access to resources beyond one's direct surroundings. Seemingly superficial associations in the form of "bridging weak ties", however, were found to facilitate trust and provide a great source for sharing information, sharing that would otherwise not be found.

Definitions and the impact of ties have been the subject of much discussion since Granovetter's work. Wellman (1988) defines strong ties as intimate relationships in which there is a strong interest in being together regularly as well as a sense of mutuality through which support can be reciprocated. Whilst strong ties are important for personal lives, weak ties that "bridge" or connect one person to another offer more opportunities for "linking members of different social groups to integrate them into a larger social setting, such as a geographic community." (Kavanaugh, Carroll and Rosson, 2005:120).

Platt's (2009) large empirical survey evidenced the importance of weak ties in fostering belonging. She found informal connections established through communal activity as key to inclusion and increased trust. Cohen's (1985) seminal ethnography found belonging facilitated without the need for close personal bonds. He argued that symbolic notions of community allow for perceived similarities and emotional attachment between members. For example, two individuals discussing their beliefs in Catholicism might find commonality between one another whilst retaining their own interpretation (ibid:70). Similarly, two attendees of the tea dance might be different but can perceive themselves similar through the shared experience of dancing. Therefore, strong ties are not required to form community so long as symbols exist enabling weak ties. Whilst Cohen's work is criticised for its homogenous nature (Delanty, 2003) and research on ties is often criticised for taking a positivist approach, they offer learning applicable to this study as they illustrate the importance of casual acquaintances in fostering belonging. They may serve well to be complimented by qualitative research that explores the substance of ties with sufficient depth to capture experiences of belonging.

However, there is something of a paradox between what is described here and that referenced earlier in this chapter. Andonian and MacRae (2011) found family style relationships in the form of strong ties crucial to facilitating

belonging. Yet here it is weak ties that are viewed as crucial for enabling belonging. Whilst this might complicate research, it also offers opportunities. Platt (2009) argues that, rather than putting strong and weak ties up against one another, the distribution and content of social networks should be the focus. Through remaining open to the many ways that ties might foster belonging, the multidimensional experience of belonging might be uncovered (May, 2011), and, as Granovetter (1973:1377) asserts, this paradox, is “a welcome antidote to theories which explain everything all too neatly.”

2.2.2 Thriving Places

Whilst disagreement persists amongst sociologists around how to conceptualise belonging and community and their relevance to everyday life, outside of the sociological world, local governments continue to invest in local communities with a view to facilitate change. In 2013, Glasgow’s Community Planning Partnership introduced TP as one of its strategic priorities. This ten-year approach is a collaboration between Community Planning Partners aimed at improving outcomes for people living in areas of high multiple deprivation (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2013).

TP has been introduced in nine areas of the city, each comprising of approximately 10,000 residents and each with a small financial budget towards staff and development costs (Brunner, Craig and Watson, 2017). Whilst specific areas of the city were selected based on levels of deprivation, TP adopts a people-based approach with a view to “‘doing with’ rather than ‘doing to’ and supporting individuals who would not normally get involved to actively participate” (GCPH, 2013:23). In order to nurture this participation, each TP community has implemented a variety of initiatives in an attempt to identify needs of the area and respond appropriately. This is not an easy task given the unique and complex history of each TP area (ibid). The tea dance, attracting large numbers on a weekly basis, is one of many successful initiatives instigated by the Parkhead, Dalrnarnock and Calmachie branch of TP (PDC TP).

Given the complexities in measuring the effects of people-based interventions, in 2015-16, TP staff across the city collaborated to identify common principles and intended outcomes of the programme (see appendix A for full list) (Brunner,

Craig and Watson, 2017). Whilst this small study cannot attend to all of these, there are a number that relate to conceptualisations of belonging. TP's principle to widen social networks through "increasing and embedding participation" (ibid:7) connects well to the literature that found participation of great importance for fostering belonging (Beatley, 2004; Cohen, 1985, Andonian and MacRae, 2011). TP outcomes, such as, "connected, supportive, inclusive communities" (ibid:7) are also synonymous with some of the attributes of belonging discussed in this review.

2.3 Conclusion and research objectives

In summary, belonging is by no means easily defined and yet remains a fundamental component of the self. This is not dissimilar to other elusive concepts used in this review, such as community, supportive and inclusion, all of which are complex to measure and have multiple definitions both within TP and sociology. Yet, it is these very complexities that "excite the sociological imagination" and reinforce the need for further research (Allan and Phillipson, 2008:171).

By reviewing literature across a range of overlapping sociological domains, this chapter has highlighted relevant theoretical and empirical foundations of belonging focusing on ageing where relevant. Dimensions of belonging were found in familiarity, similarities with others, strong and weak ties, all necessarily shaped by personal biography. This review also highlighted ways in which belonging can be experienced in embodied, emotional and sensory ways. TP was also introduced with principles and outcomes that bear relevance to this study. Participation was demonstrated as a potential tool through which belonging might be established and it was with this in mind that five research objectives were identified. The first objective seeks to understand how older people who attend the dance understand and experience belonging. The second looks at ways in which belonging is established and maintained at the dance. The third looks at the role staff play in establishing and maintaining that belonging. The fourth objective explores the impact of belonging at the dance for both attendees and PDC TP. Lastly, this study hopes to inform sociological understandings of belonging through conducting research in context at the PDC TP tea dance, a context not previously subject to academic analysis. After all,

“it is only through local studies that we can really understand localities” (Crow and Allan, 1994:8). The following chapter outlines the methodological approach employed to fulfil these objectives.

3 Research methodology and methods

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the qualitative research paradigm used to explore belonging at a PDC TP tea dance in Glasgow. Methods included seven semi-structured interviews with attendees at the dance and a focus group with staff members. This chapter justifies these methods in light of the research objectives (see introduction) as well as reflecting on limitations.

3.1 Epistemology and ontological considerations

Much disagreement exists amongst social scientists about what knowledge entails, how it is produced and how it can be analysed, all of which effect the research process (Bottoms, 2008:76). I assume a constructivist ontological position that denies the possibility that the social world can be observed in an objective manner. Therefore, the notion that one can ‘belong’ to any one group or society that can be systematically observed is rejected. Rather, “belonging is achieved at several levels of abstraction” in a multitude of ways and cannot be consistently studied (Bell, 1999:4).

Through assuming this ontological position, this project sought to “elicit the participant's definitions of terms, situations, and events” to understand how they construct their experience of the dance recognising that this would be different for each individual (Charmaz, 2006:32). This necessitated an interpretive epistemology to abstract meaning from those experiences and apply them to wider theoretical concepts of belonging (Bottoms, 2008:89). A qualitative paradigm that allowed for surprises to emerge therefore took preference over that of testing a hypothesis.

Finally, my ontological and epistemological position warrants a reflexive approach to research. Reflexivity requires “thoughtful, conscious self-awareness” at all stages of the research process alongside a high degree of honesty (Finlay, 2002:532). The design of this study undoubtedly reflects my strong desire to take an empathetic approach with meaningful outcomes, seeking to contribute to local government interventions such as TP (Fontana and Frey, 2008). Whilst this demonstrates a lack of neutrality that some may find unnerving, (Becker, 1967:245) kindly reminds us that,

...there is no position from which sociological research can be done that is not biased in one or another way.

3.2 Single-sited case study

The tea dance is one of many PDC TP initiatives that could have been selected for research. Purposive sampling selected the dance as an example of an event that has been successful for PDC TP. A single-sited case study was chosen since it enables exploration of...

...a phenomenon in considerable depth in order to capture the richness and complexity of the conditions in a particular context (Johnston, 2016:12).

Furthermore, a multi-pronged approach with regards to methods was possible reflecting many empirical studies around belonging (Young and Willmott, 1957; Jørgensen, 2010; Watson and Saha, 2013; Johnston, 2016). Understanding how belonging is experienced in the context of the tea dance was sought by those who attend through semi-structured interviews. However, discovering *how* this does or does not happen is significant if this study is to offer learning for PDC TP. Therefore, following interviews, a focus group with staff members who organise the event was conducted. Whilst some might argue a single-sited case study limits generalisability, depth over breadth took precedence, allowing relationships and processes to be understood within their natural setting and unique elements to be uncovered (Robson, 2002; Burnett, 2009).

3.3 Semi-structured interviews

As described in the literature, a sense of belonging is a difficult concept to investigate since it is neither tangible nor something people consciously think about (Fenster, 2005). It involves capturing feelings that cannot easily be portrayed in a survey with closed questions (Burnett, 2009). Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, take the form of a guided conversation, allowing participants to talk freely whilst retaining question prompts to encourage information pertaining to the research objectives (Arthur and Nazroo, 2010). Through adopting this conversational approach, interviews were conducted with an "ethnographic imaginary" (Forsey, 2010:567) allowing questions that explored biography and cultural influences beyond the remit of the dance itself.

Despite careful choice of questions and prompts, there was little doubt that my “conscious and unconscious motives, desires, feelings, and biases” were embedded in the interview from which there were, at times, unanticipated outcomes (Fontana and Frey, 2008:116). An example of this was the deliberate choice to start all interviews with a discussion about belonging generally. This was intentional and motivated by thoughts that this would facilitate later conversations about belonging in context at the dance. However, on subsequent analysis, these discussions proved significant to conceptualisations of belonging, warranting a distinct section of the findings.

3.3.1 Sample and practicalities

Approximately 70 people attend the dance weekly although this number is steadily increasing. Attendees are predominately older women with some older men. There are also a number of people with disabilities who attend accompanied by support workers. Older attendees who live in the area of where PDC TP operates were originally selected as interview participants. The reasons for this were three-fold: it represented the general population of the dance; it added the dimension of aging to this exploration of belonging; seeking perspectives from those in the area might be useful for PDC TP.

In the weeks leading up to data collection, I attended the dance regularly to engage with attendees and staff. Having worked with older people for a number of years, this was a familiar environment and allowed for positive engagement prior to conducting research. In order to avoid pressure to participate in the study, Sarah, who organises the event and knows attendees well, approached potential participants (and provided information sheets) prior to my arrival.

Whilst this was the planned approach, the reality did not prove to be quite so straightforward. Participants were recruited through purposive, opportunistic sampling based on availability and interest during the data collection period. However, on one occasion Sarah was absent so participants were sought by myself immediately prior to interview. Whilst this was not difficult since I had established relationships with participants, there was a sense of unease on my part through not wanting to pressurise participants. Another aspect that did not go as intended was selecting participants living in the immediate area. In

seeking consent on the days of data collection, it was not always possible to interview those living in the PDC TP area. Of the seven interviews conducted, five were from the PDC TP area and two were from different parts of the city. However, the results of interviewing people from a wider area brought some learning that might otherwise have been missed, therefore adding to this study rather than limiting it.

Interviews were conducted over four weeks, taking approximately 30 minutes. They were conducted in a small room adjacent to the dance hall, therefore offering privacy whilst retaining a familiar setting within which participants felt comfortable.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of study participants

Name	Sex	Age	Home in PDC TP area?	Time spent in PDC TP/Glasgow	Lives with
Jenny	F	76	Y	Whole life	Alone
Jim	M	60+	N	Whole life in Glasgow	Unknown
Lyn	F	74	Y	Whole life	With husband
Kate	F	75	Y	Whole life	Alone
Daisy	F	72	N	Whole life in Glasgow	Alone
Amy	F	60+	Y	Whole life	With husband
Anna	F	81	Y	Whole life	Alone

Table 1 provides demographic information for those who took part. All participants were aged over 60 and retired. Four participants lived alone, two with partners and one declined to comment. All participants had been born in Glasgow and spent the majority of their lives in their current homes. Only one participant was male. This unique male perspective offered some interesting insights into how belonging at the dance is experienced for this individual but cannot be thought to represent the male population at the dance. Having a sample of participants of a similar age demographic might be thought to facilitate generalisability. However, any generalisations are used with caution since it remains a small sample, hardly representative of all attendees or older people more generally.

3.3.2 Ethical considerations

Full ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Glasgow prior to undertaking recruitment of data collection (see appendix C). Participant information sheets (see appendix D) were provided to explain the purpose of the study, given a week prior to data collection where possible. On the day of interview, this information was discussed verbally and participants were asked to complete consent forms (see appendix E). In order to protect participant identities, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms. However, it is important to highlight the difficulties of maintaining confidentiality in a tightknit community such as this one. Ethically this was challenging since it is likely that there was a degree of awareness by attendees that the study was taking place and who was involved. As a result, there are parts of the findings where neither pseudonyms nor demographic information is used.

3.4 Focus group

To fulfil the research objectives, interviews were supplemented by a focus group with the three main organisers of the dance. The focus group lasted two hours and took place three weeks after interviews were conducted. This was a deliberate choice in order to ascertain participant views and have these in mind when conducting the focus group. This section reflexively describes that process, providing a critical analysis of focus groups as a research method.

Focus groups enable individual experiences and opinions to be sought through group interaction (Finch and Lewis, 2010). They have become widely used in the social sciences as a form of social investigation in which "a multitude of ostensibly heterogeneous issues...can be productively addressed" (Lezaun, 2007:130). A focus group therefore offered a great opportunity to discover the multiple, perhaps unintentional, ways in which staff members establish and maintain belonging. It also offered an opportunity to investigate the extent to which personal lives shape community work as Jones found in her study where "local governing and place making were constituted by emotional, political, ethical subjects" (Jones, 2014:75).

3.4.1 Sample and practicalities

Focus group research is “a deceptively simple methodology” (Boon and Farnsworth, 2010:605) in which the role of moderator is of much debate within the social sciences. Whether or not the moderator should attempt a naturally occurring conversation is highly contested since the way in which it is set-up is unavoidably, “highly artificial” (Lezaun, 2007:133). Practical considerations guided my role as moderator. The focus group consisted of the three main staff members who run the dance on a weekly basis. They were aware of the aims of my project having been involved from the outset, as might be expected in a collaborative study such as this. However, I did not want belonging to be the main focus of discussion since this would inevitably remove any elements of their work that might be unintentional. Therefore, I clearly guided the conversation with questions pertaining to the research objectives.

The focus group consisted of the three community development workers that make up the staff team of the PDC branch of TP: Paul, who initiated the tea dance when it started in 2014; Tim and Sarah, who had both been involved for two years. The focus group took place in the office in which they work in order to minimise inconvenience. Conversation lasted two hours and, whilst much was discussed beyond the remit of this study, participants reported enjoying taking the time to reflect on their work.

3.4.2 Ethical considerations

Paul was responsible for employing Tim and Sarah and this was an important ethical consideration. Lezuan (2007) warns of the potential obligation that might be felt by those subordinate to others. To ensure all three staff members were happy to participate, they were approached separately prior to making arrangements. As with interviews, participant information sheets were provided (see appendix F) and on the day of the focus group, this information was discussed verbally and consent forms were completed (see appendix G). Participants were reminded that they should only answer questions they felt comfortable in doing so and could withdraw at any time. It was also requested that staff respect anonymity of attendees at the tea dance by not discussing individuals by name. What remains unknown is the extent to which answers were

influenced by working relationships. However, there are benefits that counteract concerns since the familiarity participants had with one another, “can validate participants’ experiences and viewpoints” (Warr, 2005:202).

In order to protect participant identities, names have been replaced with pseudonyms. However, even more so than with interview participants, maintaining confidentiality is difficult as participants are known as organisers of the dance. This was discussed with participants who were happy for information to be shared. Nevertheless, as a researcher, I considered carefully what data was presented in the findings.

3.5 Method of analysis

Where researchers are usually explicit when it comes to method choices, the same cannot be said for the analysis component. All too often the approach taken to analysis is largely ignored as though the researcher can somehow be neutral (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). However, all analysis has its bias, affected by the “epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions of the researchers who developed them” (Becker, 1967:245). The analysis used, therefore, is based on *my* interpretation of how knowledge is produced and what constitutes evidence of, in this case, belonging.

Narrative analysis allows a sensitivity to personal experiences and perceptions through which the participant can make the connection between the social context and their lives (Bryman, 2008). It therefore allows focus on how participants make sense of attending the dance and the part it plays in their lives, recognising that this will be individual to each person. This also applies to organisers of the tea dance who may bring their personal assumptions into their work (Jones, 2014). There are a number of models for using narrative analysis and this project follows May and Muir’s (2014) study in using thematic analysis to search for indicators of belonging through analysing the *content* of the words spoken over the way in which they were spoken to find indicators of belonging (Bryman, 2008:553).

An iterative, top-down approach was used following an analytical framework developed by the National Centre for Social Research (Spencer, Ritchie and

O’Conner, 2010). This framework allows broad themes to emerge from each interview with a number of subthemes within them. Analysis began immediately following the first interview with thorough reading and rereading of the data to search for broad themes and also for surprises. An iterative process allowed for themes emerging in later interviews to become central themes and this process was repeated until a valid framework was developed that could be applied to the data using qualitative analysis software NVivo. Through looking for repetition and constantly seeking ensure findings were thoroughly grounded in data, this process was undertaken with as little inference from myself as is possible. In doing so, themes were found to be closely related, at times overlapping, the results of which are illustrated in the following chapter.

3.6 Limitations

There are limits in terms of generalisability for this study. The focus group, whilst consisting of the main organisers, did not include the dance teachers or other volunteer helpers that attend regularly. The interview sample consisted of only seven attendees, all of whom were older people. The experiences of those who attend with support workers was not captured and yet might have added much to the understanding of belonging this study sought to find. Another limitation is that only evidence from those who regularly attend the dance is included. It would be useful to capture the voices of those who only attended once or twice to gain an alternative insight of the dance. Gaining access to people who do not attend did not prove possible within the remit of this project. Despite these limitations, insights found hope to make a useful contribution to the work of PDC TP and the body of academic literature on belonging.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has described the research process of this study. In doing so, it has demonstrated the complexities of carrying out social research where methodological decisions must be made in balance with practical and ethical considerations within which any research study is confined. In the chapter that follows, I present a detailed analysis of the findings in the light of the literature and methods chosen.

4 Analysis and discussion of findings

A number of themes emerged pertinent to sociological conceptualisations of belonging and this chapter begins by presenting these. Two overarching themes are then analysed: belonging established through relationships, of which there are multiple manifestations; the role of staff in facilitating belonging. In doing so, themes intersect and overlap as might be expected in a study of an elusive concept such as this (May, 2011). This chapter concludes with focussing on the impact of belonging beyond the tea dance for participants and TP PDC as well as the limits of this. Sociologists warn that belonging cannot be fully understood in relation to one context (Miller, 2003; May, 2011) and, therefore, reflexive considerations are discussed where relevant since my position as an "embodied", situated and subjective researcher" can never fully be avoided in social research (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003:414).

From initial visits to the tea dance, I observed distinct relationships between staff and attendees. Through interweaving perspectives of both in this chapter, I hope to have reflected this distinct attribute that characterises this popular event. All names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

4.1 Belonging defined

Whilst this study aimed to explore belonging in a specific context, interviews commenced by asking participants how they might define this elusive topic beyond the dance, the results of which proved to build on sociological conceptualisations of belonging. Belonging to place and to people took prominence in how participants constructed meaning and common definitions found in the literature were confirmed:

Jenny: It's nice to know that you have people that you belong to, relatives and friends. And it's nice to know that you belong somewhere isn't it.

Other words such as "familiarity" and "comfort" were used, all of which served to enable a "sense of ease with oneself and their surroundings" as described by May (2011:368). May (ibid) advocates examining belonging through seeking individual perspectives and in doing so her notion of multidimensional belonging

soon becomes apparent. Through encompassing cultural and material surroundings as well as biography, the following subthemes emerged: time facilitates belonging; relationships are crucial; safety is fundamental.

4.1.1.1 Time

Participants expressed belonging to the local community as something that comes quite naturally with time. Without exception, all participants had lived in the same area for over 15 years and described an affinity with the community due to time spent there:

Lyn: I do feel like I belong because I was born, brought up, went to school, everything, got married and still have never moved away, wouldn't want to.

These relationships could be described as weak ties, in which people do not know each other well but are connected enough to enable trust and reciprocity (Granovetter, 1973; Henning and Lieberg, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Platt, 2009). May and Muir (2015:4) found that this was enough to facilitate “a feeling of friendliness” enabling support whilst allowing for a degree of privacy. Daisy confirmed this, “we're not in each other's houses or anything but if you need anybody, they're right there”. This was perceived as particularly important in later life by Lyn who described how long-term relationships enabled an element of support for one another:

Lyn: There's a lot of people who've been in this district where I am since the houses went up 60 years ago. They're very elderly and they look out for each other.

4.1.1.2 Relationships

As expected given its dominance in the literature, relationships were discussed at length by participants when explaining belonging. May (2011) proposes that we should understand belonging in a relational way and consider how these relations have emotional consequences. Participants expressed this without prompting. For example, Daisy, who has lived alone for a number of years since her husband passed away, articulated the relational dimension: “belonging means security, companionship” and its emotional consequences, “not being lonely, having somebody there.” This, once again, alludes to the importance of

biography where definitions of belonging adapt to changing circumstances in later life.

4.1.1.3 Safety

In considering belonging to community, this small sample appears to contradict Jørgensen's (2010) findings that showed correlation between areas of deprivation and a reduced sense of belonging. However, whilst participants confirmed belonging to places of deprivation, safety was a salient issue in how meaning was constructed. Words such as “security” and “feeling safe” were considered fundamental to belonging. Kate positively described how she experienced belonging living in her 13th floor flat:

Kate: Your doors secured and you just turn the key and you've got big barriers across the bottom of your door there's no getting in...You've got concierge watch and a camera...You can go hang your washing out and it's all cameras so nobody steals your good denims n thing...I love it, it's great.

Amy and Daisy also attributed belonging to safety. Amy defined it as “having something that's yours, that no-one can take away” hinting that this had not always been possible. When security was assured, emotion was strongly expressed, as Daisy said, “it feels very, very comforting. *Very* comforting. That's what it [belonging] feels to me.” Conversely, when describing non-belonging, avoiding danger was evident. Amy described her previous home as a place she felt alienated: “they'd overdosed and that's when we were like, I don't belong here, I need to move”. Savage et al (2005) argue that the middle classes have freedom to move and ‘elect’ where they belong and those from less affluent areas do not. This bears relevance here since Amy's need to move was not a result of choice but rather one of necessity.

Interestingly, when asked about belonging generally, only Amy naturally made the link between belonging and the tea dance. Later in the interviews, when participants were asked explicitly about belonging at the dance, different definitions emerged to those described thus far. This might lead one to argue that belonging is not evident at the dance. However, in turning to analyse this context, indicators of belonging were clearly evident, and, whilst not easily

defined by participants, this is understandable since, as Fenster (2005) notes, belonging when in existence, commonly goes unnoticed.

4.1.2 Belonging at the tea dance defined

When participants were asked at the end of interviews whether or not they felt a sense of belonging at the tea dance, all participants confirmed with confidence:

“there’s no doubt about it”; “100% yes”; “Oh aye, 100% on that one.”

However, participants openly admitted difficulty in defining what it means and how it is established. Becker (1967:240) advocates, “distinguishing between the truth of a statement and an assessment of the circumstances under which that statement is made,” relevant here as participants might have felt compelled to answer positively given the explicit way in which the question was asked.

However, an interpretive epistemology allows for a higher level of abstraction, seeking connections to belonging beyond those explicitly described. In doing so, definitions pertaining to the literature were easily. Feelings of familiarity and safety permeated the findings:

Jenny: “it feels quite good you know cos you know it, you’re used to it”; Amy: “you feel secure, you know.”

All participants, without exception, expressed a sense of ease to the extent that they would attend alone:

Lyn: I can feel quite at home here...Let’s put it this way, I would come by myself whereas a couple of years ago I would have never have done that

As described by Miller (2003) in the literature review, these descriptions indicate that belonging enabled participants to be themselves, a clear indicator that attributes of belonging are evident for participants at the tea dance.

Beatley (2004:4) argues that “tremendous enjoyment” can be found in participation and this was conveyed by participants. Daisy emphasised “the *fun*, the laughter, the feel-good feeling” and Jim articulated emotionally, “Oh, it’s the atmosphere and the people and it just touches ma wee heart.” This confirms

Beatley's argument as well as substantiating May's (2011) proposal that research on belonging should focus on the, often overlooked, sensory and emotional facets of belonging since they dominate accounts of belonging at the tea dance.

The tea dance was attributed special status by participants in comparison to other events:

Amy: I wouldnae give up this wee club. In comparison with my Thursday club, I would drop ma wee Thursday club and come here

The level of importance given to the dance was evident through the lengths gone to in order to attend: rearranging appointments; braving the winter weather; waiting a long time for the bus. All participants also reported how positive feelings stayed with them for days afterwards, indicating the positive effects of the dance on sense of self beyond that of the event itself.

In summary, the first research objective sought to understand how older people who attend the dance understand and experience belonging. Participants constructed individual meanings and definitions as made possible from taking a constructivist ontological position (Charmaz, 2006). Outside the tea dance, participants described the importance of security, feeling at ease and having others as fundamental enablers of belonging, all of which are commonly found in the literature (Delanty, 2003; Miller, 2003; May, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2011). There were, however, some findings that complicate theories of belonging. Findings appear to contradict Jørgensen's (2010) research that found of reduced belonging in deprived areas. All participants felt a sense of belonging to place having lived in the area for many years and there was little to demonstrate the disappearance of fixed, local communities so often thought to be lacking in modern society (Delanty, 2003; Beatley, 2004). However, Miller (2003) argues that research must seek to understand belonging with cultural, relational and material aspects in mind and this was conveyed in the way that participants constructed meaning. For some participants, belonging was defined with safety as such a prominent feature that it raises questions as to what belonging to community entails. It might be that an ageing lens accounts for this as it did in May and Muir's (2015) research which found perceived lack of safety common for older people but counterbalanced by length of time in area. Phillipson (2007)

argues that older people in deprived areas have little choice as to what they belong to and the way in which participants described their experiences of belonging alludes to an internalisation of social structures akin to Bourdieu's habitus (Reay, 2015; Silva, 2016). May's (2011) argument that self and society are mutually constitutive bears relevance here since it would not be enough to understand an individual's sense of belonging without exploring the structural confinements within which that belonging is defined, something to consider for sociological research on belonging.

Belonging at the tea dance emerged with different definitions demonstrating the multidimensional ways in which belonging is experienced (May, 2011).

Definitions at the dance corroborate with Beatley's (2004) findings that joy found through participation allows a positive sense of self that seeps beyond the event itself. It also emphasises the importance of May's (2011) proposal to focus on the emotional and sensory facets of belonging. These findings affirm belonging at the tea dance whilst also alluding to the varied dimensions of belonging. However, in order to use this knowledge, it is worth trying to understand how belonging is established and maintained to which we will now turn.

4.2 Establishing and maintaining belonging at the tea dance

Two reoccurring themes in the data correspond with elements of the literature on belonging: relationships are crucial (Miller, 2003; Andonian and MacRae, 2011; May and Muir, 2015); belonging is achieved through accepting difference (Andonian and MacRae, 2011). Since discussions about others featured so prominently, May's (2011) proposition that we should seek to understand interaction and its emotional content is justified. This research is distinct in the way in which staff perspectives were sought, and, where pertinent, their voices are interwoven through this section. Through taking on dual roles of organising the event whilst simultaneously trying to support attendees, they are uncovered as great facilitators of relationships that foster belonging.

4.2.1.1 Strong and weak ties

Andonian and MacRae (2011) found belonging achieved through close bonds mirroring that of family. These strong relationships might be likened to strong ties and were expressed in most interviews:

Amy: Everyone's a friend, a big family...that's the kinda thing it is in here. I've got a wee pal there who's if she's trying it, I'm trying it, that's friends and family. Ok, so they're not family but they're good friends

Granovetter (1973) warns that strong ties can reinforce exclusive identities as people mix in small circles therefore limiting resources. However, Andonian and MacRae (2011) assert that strong, personal bonds are important in fostering a sense of belonging for older and this was confirmed in the findings. For those who had lost partners, supportive relationships gained through social participation were highly valued. Anna said how she appreciated being with others at a similar time of life, "people know what you've been through and they've been through the same. And sometimes it's good to talk you know." For Jenny making close friends at the dance had made a real impact on her life. She talked about the difficulty she had making friends due to a hearing impairment. Strong ties established at the tea dance were therefore of great significance, "it's getting to know people that's made such a difference."

For Daisy, strong ties founded at the dance seeped beyond the event itself. Daisy talked about meeting new friends for coffee and Anna attended other groups with people she had met. Whilst there might be risks that this could lead to exclusive groups at the dance (Granovetter, 1973), these are outweighed as they evidence PDC TP successfully fulfilling TP outcomes to fostering supportive communities (Brunner, Craig and Watson, 2017).

Andonian and MacRae (2011) argued that consistent activities enable a kind of membership that further facilitates close bonds. Participants referred to this in the way that they described "being part of the club," which in turn drew participants back weekly. This was despite staff intentionally avoiding any sort of formal membership. When discussing this with staff during the focus group, they expressed awareness of the importance of consistency, talking at length

about the failure of other initiatives withdrawn through lack of funding. Tim also described using other services in the city where staff changes inhibited strong relationships, since “it takes a lot of time to build relationships and for people to get to know you and to get a bit of trust in you.” Therefore, staff recognised the importance, not only of the event being consistent, but also themselves as staff members.

The way in which staff expressed their experience of relationships was striking. They placed great personal value on relationships they had with attendees, as Sarah described,

There’s definitely a bond between us and that gets stronger....so they come to us. It’s more than a working relationship.

These strong ties between staff and attendees are crucial in understanding how the overall experience of belonging is established. In this quote Sarah is alluding to her supportive role, “so they come to us,” whilst simultaneously expressing that the relationship is beyond that of a working one. Perhaps it is through these very ties that staff foster a level of belonging strong enough to allow them to carry out their supportive roles.

Granovetter (1973) might contest these strong ties, proposing that they might serve to exclude other group members or the wider community. Whilst the findings thus far contradict this, Granovetter (ibid) might be pleased to know that his more favoured, weak ties, were also clearly evident.

Cohen (1985) argues that weak ties are enough to establish belonging so long as there are symbols of community that facilitate interaction. The act of dancing is an example of this. Participants reported that everyone was included in the dancing, as Lyn said, “as soon as you come in here, you’re one of the group, one of the people that comes to the dancing.” Staff described the dancing as a “massive ice-breaker” and the activity served as a symbol facilitating belonging without the need of strong ties, as Anna said:

You don’t always know their name or their history but if somebody’s not dancing we ask if they want to try it. We don’t just dance with our own wee crowd.

This statement clearly shows that Anna having strong ties with some attendees and weak ties with others. Weak ties are considered useful for expanding social networks (Granovetter, 1973). As people meet others who move in different circles to their own, stereotypes can be challenged fostering inclusion and trust (Platt, 2009). Establishing an environment for this is very much the intention of TP (Brunner, Craig and Watson, 2017). Staff encouraged new relationships through insisting on open seating, therefore avoiding designated places that might lead to small, exclusive groups. This was noticed and welcomed by participants who felt a sense of ease through interacting with many people so that they became “familiar faces” even if they did not know them well. It also encouraged attendees to proactively welcome new members, as Daisy did:

A lady come in by herself last week and she was a lost soul and we brought her into the body of the church and then she recognised a man across that she knew so then she said do you mind if I go but as she was leaving, she made sure she came up to Eleanor and myself thanks very much for making me feel welcome

Stories such as this demonstrate the impact of weak ties at an event such as this. Weak ties also served to encourage an inclusive environment at the dance, the extent of which warrants its own section.

4.2.1.2 Acceptance of difference

One of the intended outcomes of TP is to foster “inclusive communities” (Brunner, Craig and Watson, 2017:23) and the tea dance was described by participants as a place where everyone would be welcomed and included, an attribute highly valued by all participants, as Lyn describes:

It’s open and there’s no barriers. No, ‘oh you live in that area and I live in this area’. There’s none of that, everyone who comes here is the same no matter where you live no matter what you’ve got. Everyone gets treated the same and you treat everyone the same. You’ve no distinction between ‘a’ and ‘b’

This statement hints that this is unique in relation to other experiences for Lyn and was further emphasised when she described other groups, “there’s people who think they are somebody, I don’t need that, I don’t need somebody that says ‘oh, I’m better than you’.”

Another participant clearly valued the bridging weak of ties when expressing her experience. Kate actively described herself as different from other attendees being relatively affluent, having had a “charmed life.” She experienced great joy in meeting with people at the tea dance who she perceived as less fortunate than herself. She had completed small tasks for others such as providing information on how to save money with utility bills or printing documents. Daisy expressed great pride in completing these tasks and described a strong sense of belonging with people she perceived different to herself. This is a great example of weak ties strengthening where differences are overcome through social participation.

Another participant talked with a great degree of emotionality in describing belonging at the dance, since this was a place where they were accepted on a level that was unusual. Comments such as, “people say things back” and “they’ll not consider us outcasts” indicate that that this dance was a place where this person was not subject to the process of ‘othering’, whereby they are considered inferior for their differences (Kavanaugh, Carroll and Rosson, 2005). An embodied feeling of belonging was clearly articulated: “she took my hand last week and I find that touching. I don’t know how to explain, a glowing in my heart.” This person had little expectation that relationships could ever be close bonds but this small sensory interaction allowed a sense of ease and belonging to the group that was special and unusual. Andonian and MacRae (2011) describe belonging achieved through accepting of difference and this is in action here. This account was not atypical as other participants described with joy being around people they perceived different to themselves. Lyn expressed a kind of well-intended ‘othering’ in which she expressed enjoyment about being around people she identified as different from herself,

The delight on most peoples’ faces! It brings a smile to your face because it’s so lovely to see someone who’s got a disability enjoying themselves, it really is. So, it’s not only for the older. The centre is great that’s all I can say!

Accounts such as this were not uncommon and it was staff who were considered instrumental in facilitating this. Participants reported being welcomed by staff from the moment they arrived without pressure to join or return. Staff intentionally did this, saying that they were keen to have people return out of

choice, deliberately avoiding having any kind of signing-in forms or membership. Membership was clearly unnecessary as participants chose to attend weekly without pressure required, as Amy said:

If you feel like you don't want to come back that's your choice but we didn't have that choice, we didn't *want* that choice. We wanted to come and that's it, end of the story.

Thus far, this section has evidenced how the dance fosters both strong and weak ties simultaneously and the positive impact for those who might not feel accepted elsewhere. Encouraging these relationships is just one of the many things staff did to foster belonging as we shall now see.

4.2.2 The role of staff

The positive atmosphere at the dance was overwhelmingly attributed to the staff who were highly regarded by participants without exception. Staff were discussed at length in all interviews, articulated well by Daisy:

To do the job they're doing, they've got to be exceptional, their temperament, mannerisms and their congeniality. Everything about them draws you in, you know, from the youngest to the oldest.

May (2016) argues that belonging is accomplished through recognition by others and participants talked about a range of ways that staff did to do this. Through celebrating birthdays, going out of their way to be helpful, remembering likes and dislikes and paying attention to detail, staff mirrored family-like roles that were greatly appreciated, particularly at this time of life for those who lived alone and did not get this support at home. Anna commented that they always kept an eye out for anyone needing help and Amy said she felt valued when Tim had asked her for music requests. Staff also put old photos of the city on a projector during the dance which might be likened to Cohen's (1985) symbolic community through which people perceive themselves as having similar through a shared history. These small gestures all contributed to maintaining belonging as participants could feel at ease, be recognised as individuals and feel safe and secure, all of which are regarded in the literature as important dimensions of belonging (Henning and Lieberg, 1996; Delanty, 2003; May and Muir, 2015).

Other things staff did to enable a sense of belonging to others was to offer attendees roles at the event. For example, Kate and Amy were bingo callers and Daisy provided gifts for the bingo. Andonian and MacRae (2011) found belonging achieved through recognition as members of the community. This might be considered particularly important for older people such as Amy who described losing a sense of purpose following retirement. Having a role at the dance confirms this as Amy described her newfound purpose as a “confidence booster” both at the dance and beyond.

Participants talked with amazement about the event being free. Some said without prompting that they would happily pay but staff were quite clear in their intentions that this absolutely had to be a free event, enabling an inclusive community to which anyone can belong. They also organised other events in the area and offered tickets to attendees, always for free. The importance of this cannot be underestimated since it demonstrates PDC TP fulfilling its principle to widen social networks (Brunner, Craig and Watson, 2017). Not only might existing weak ties strengthen through meeting elsewhere but there is potential for new weak ties as participants mix with new people in the community, thus instigating belonging to the wider community beyond the dance.

Staff had a great deal of self-awareness of their work and many of the strategies they employed to create a positive event were intentional. In describing their roles, they talked of the dual purpose of establishing strong, trusting relationships whilst simultaneously having “an ear to the ground,” listening out for ways in which they might improve the community or support individuals. Staff concurred with Andonian and MacRae (2011) who argued that research with older people is necessary to hear the voices of those so often hidden. Tim described their work as “operating through the cracks” in that it allowed them to support people for whom other local services fail. When staff heard about how they could support others, they quickly used this to guide their work:

Paul: The first kind of breakthrough that meant we could help was when we realised that people were struggling with bereavement and loss. It was a big issue and the fact that it was told to us and that we were trusted enough to learn that was great. Then that allowed us to really think through what an earth we were going to about this.

Staff had since set up drop-in sessions for those affected by bereavement in the area. This story was one of many through which PDC TP staff had successfully responded to community needs through the dance. They had also recently distributed a questionnaire asking how attendees needed support at home therefore using the dance as a platform through which to consider how best to help the community. Responding to “community-defined needs” is one of TP’s key principles and this unobtrusive form of engagement clearly facilitates this (Brunner, Craig and Watson, 2017:7). It is difficult to see how this could be achieved without a sense of belonging through which people feel at ease to the extent that they have trust in the staff members they encounter.

Jones (2014) found that the personal lives of community development workers influence working life and this was evident in the findings. All three staff members in the focus group had a strong affinity with the community and unyielding ambition to impact upon it. Sarah described this job as “a calling in life,” a position for which she had overcome many barriers to attain and Paul was driven by what he described as a “horrible injustice” that those born in certain areas did not have the life chances that he been given. In asking at the end of the focus group whether staff themselves felt that they belonged at the dance, an emotional account re-emphasising the importance of relationships was offered by Sarah:

When someone comes to tell you something and they go out of their way to tell you because you’re that significant person in their lives. When somebody is sharing that with me I feel totally involved and I belong, that’s where I’m meant to be at that time because I’ve made a difference to a person and they’ve made a difference to me

Crucial to this is that Sarah herself, as with Tim and Paul, took great joy in being involved in the lives of attendees. There was no evidence that this was a job Sarah *had* to do, rather this was something she wanted to do. A sincere interest and genuine admiration of attendees resonated throughout staff discussions. There was clear recognition of the difficult lives attendees faced in the community and a sincere drive to make changes based on what was told to them. May (2016) attests that showing concern for others facilitates a positive sense of self and this was evident as staff really enjoyed their roles. The seemingly natural way in which they carried out their work was recognised by

participants who described them as “generous” “supportive” “approachable” and, as Kate sums up nicely, “there’s no forced politeness, no masks.” Perhaps one of the ultimate enablers of belonging at the dance was this subtle way that staff carried out their work. Through fostering relationships that mirrored family their dual roles were almost hidden, only surfacing when support was needed. Since staff went out of their way to ensure they successfully responded, trust was further embedded facilitating an even stronger sense of belonging.

As mentioned previously, staff were aware that a lack of consistency decreases the potential of creating trust. Andonian and MacRae (2011) cite this as a potential threat to belonging and staff concurred, noting the importance of regularity. Staff had persevered in maintaining a weekly presence at the dance despite low numbers when it began initially. In doing so, numbers had steadily risen as word of mouth spread and the dance gained popularity. However, whilst this approach proved successful and the dance is now almost at full capacity, it also has its limitations to which we will now consider.

4.2.3 Limits to belonging at the dance

Whilst accounts of the dance were overwhelmingly positive, there were some limits to belonging. Refreshments are provided during the dance and some participants described with distaste the way in which some attendees took more than what might be considered their fair share. Daisy said of these people, they “are so, so greedy, they come here as if it’s their lunch.” Staff also mentioned that attendees had reported to them that some people were not always suitably attired. This form of ‘othering’ indicates limits to the accepting of difference where some people are viewed positively for their differences, as described earlier, and others are not. However, staff played a key role in overcoming this. They described actively listening to comments about others without adhering to requests to make changes. TP is, after all, intended for people who are deprived and it is therefore not surprising that they did not criticise appearance or stop people taking food. In the focus group, staff emphasised how hot drinks provided might be the only ones for some attendees that day. With regards to appearance, staff skilfully let time alleviate this problem. As attendees became familiar with one another over time, barriers were eventually broken and attendees not only stopped commenting but actually reached out to dance with

those they had previously criticised. This patient way in which staff dealt with such situations indicates their many skills in facilitating belonging, allowing relationships to develop naturally over time.

In concluding this section, sociological research that repeatedly cites relationships as crucial for belonging is confirmed. Weak ties are favoured by Granovetter (1973) who argues that connected communities can be fostered through casual acquaintances and Cohen (1985) argues this is facilitated by symbols through which people can perceive themselves as similar. The act of dancing is one such example. Through sharing the experience of dancing together, participants expressed belonging to the group and felt able to be themselves without fear of being judged. Whilst the extent to which this has been achieved for all attendees is unknown, it confirms sociological work that finds weak ties of benefit to forming connected communities. Staff were fundamental in achieving this, overcoming processes of 'othering' by allowing time to pass, enabling attendees to get used to one another.

Whilst weak ties were clearly important, it is important to also highlight the significance of strong ties at the dance. For participants who had recently lost family members, strong ties were of great importance for re-establishing a positive sense of self in the form of mutual support. Strong ties with staff also allowed participants to request and receive support, once again, something deemed more important in later life as networks reduce and more help might be needed (May and Muir, 2015). The findings suggest that strong and weak ties were being fostered simultaneously, both with distinct uses and there was little evidence of exclusive groups forming. Any hints at 'othering' were counteracted sensitively and skilfully by staff. These findings therefore perhaps leave Granovetter's (1973) paradox, that weak ties come at the expense of strong, unfounded. Rather than favouring one over another, sociologists might, therefore, consider the content of ties and the context in which they are found (Platt, 2009).

Belonging was also maintained through consistency, something highlighted by Andonian and MacRae (2011) as important. Through maintaining regularity, a membership-style participation was possible through which participants felt compelled to return without the need of any sort of official enrolment.

4.3 The impact of belonging beyond the dance

This section considers the impact of belonging beyond the dance for participants and potential impact and learning for PDC TP. One of the intended outcomes of TP is to build connected communities and this was evident in the findings (Brunner, Craig and Watson, 2017). Beatley (2004) argues that participation reduces isolation and this was confirmed by Lyn who described with joy her increasingly lengthy shopping trips since she would constantly encounter many people she knew, stopping to chat to people from the dance. Other participants mentioned spending time with people they had met at the dance either by going to other clubs or catching up with a coffee. Whilst not all participants talked about this, this is a clear indicator of widening social networks that serve to increase belonging to the community.

May (2011) advocates looking to the emotional to understand belonging and given the strong emotions conveyed by participants throughout this chapter, this is well substantiated. Jones et al (2014:3) argue that “in a social context, emotion produces its own effects as it feeds back into the social world.” The importance of the dance for the lives of the participants beyond the event itself demonstrates this. There was evidence of the tea dance enabling better, happier lifestyles for participants who reported feeling excited for days afterwards. Amy comically described the positive impact it had on her relationship with her husband, “if I didn’t go he’d be getting it in the neck. He’s happy if I’m happy.”

Another, surprising element of the findings was the extent to which participants expressed a personal sense of achievement through attending the dance. All participants referred to this in some way with Jim commenting how attending allowed him to give himself “a pat on the back” and Anna’s account summing this up nicely:

No matter if you’ve two left feet as the saying goes, you end up having a left and right when you walk out of here and you feel happy with yourself.

Beatley’s (2004) research emphasises the positive effects of participation at later life to which Kate referred, “it makes you feel more than an old

pensioner.” Hearing participants convey this personal sense of achievement adds weight to the importance of events such as this. Attendance is voluntary but through enabling a strong sense of belonging, participants felt compelled to return week after week, the consequences of which seeped beyond the tea dance. These findings echo the work of Mead (1934) as sense of self is constructed through the dance that in turn transcends the dance itself, as Lyn describes, “you feel a sense of responsibility so you don’t feel isolated, you feel you have a purpose in life.”

For PDC TP, establishing belonging allowed barriers to be broken between people who might otherwise not have mixed, thus bridging weak ties. These relationships seeped beyond the dance, therefore supporting PDC TP in delivering on their principle to widen social networks through participation (Brunner, Craig and Watson, 2017). Strong ties established at the dance enabled participants to support one another and allowed staff to be responsive to need, both intended principles of TP (ibid) that, arguably, could not happen without establishing a sense of belonging through which participants trusted staff enough to share private concerns. There is a risk that these strong ties may mean that staff hear the needs of some over others. Those who have strong ties with staff might feel more able to share their concerns and therefore have access to support. This is not dissimilar to Granovetter’s (1973) warning that strong ties can be exclusionary but, in this instance, it would be those with the strongest ties who stand to benefit most since those ties are with staff who have access to resources. Given the seemingly endless drive by staff to support attendees, it was not surprising to hear that they had recognised this potential problem and were trying to address it. They had recently distributed a survey asking all attendees what, if any, support was needed. However, staff felt that attendees had not documented some of their most urgent needs. This would hardly be surprising since most of the information staff had obtained thus far was through strong relationships accomplished through time spent listening, something not achievable in a survey.

Whilst staff were actively trying to overcome the risk of responding to some people over others at the dance, in looking beyond the event itself there might be further limits of belonging for PDC TP. Belonging may have been achieved for those who attend but there was a notable absence of minority groups, such as

those of ethnic origin. Staff acknowledged that they had not reached out to different groups unlike in some of their other initiatives such as the homework club. Staff were also aware that people in the housing estate directly surrounding the community centre did not attend, thus calling into question the extent to which PDC TP have achieved their outcomes of connected and inclusive communities through this dance (Brunner, Craig and Watson, 2017). This absence was not through lack of awareness of the event. Tim described how someone had visited recently requesting food bank vouchers having been told by a member to go on a Wednesday because the dance was on. This is an important story since it indicates the untapped need in the area and also highlights the potential of the centre as a place that could be utilised further as a place of support.

Once again, staff were trying to alleviate this problem. They had recently changed the name to the 'Barrowfield Ball' in an attempt to attract new people since the term 'tea dance' perhaps attracts a certain demographic. However, they also expressed a degree of acceptance having purposely, and successfully, allowed the dance grow "organically" through word of mouth. There are likely to be many other people in the vicinity who do not benefit from a word of mouth approach and this hints at future possibilities for expanding belonging at PDC TP. Having said that, this dance was now almost at full capacity, a potential problem to which staff had yet to find a solution.

This section sought to highlight the impact of belonging and there is little doubt of the positive impact for participants as described. The impact of belonging for PDC TP is also significant since, despite inevitable limits, this dance has been a great achievement for PDC TP in fostering supportive and inclusive communities. Paul described the TP approach to community development as one of "trial and error." Through relentless perseverance and consistently nurturing belonging, staff have successfully made inroads in supporting and responding to community need. Any limitations, therefore, might be better described as future possibilities.

4.4 Summary

To summarise, this chapter began by analysing definitions of belonging and in doing so, Miller's (2003) suggestion to recognise biography is confirmed. Cultural and material circumstances accounted for varied experiences of belonging as did the ageing lens through which this story is told.

In following dominant themes in the data, the chapter then looked at the ways in which belonging was established and maintained at the dance. Strong and weak ties facilitated by staff were considered crucial in this, demonstrating the relational dimension of belonging through which personhood is affirmed through others (May, 2011). Given the proliferation of sensory and emotional accounts of belonging in the findings, May's (ibid) proposition that this under-explored area requires attention proved to be well founded. The significance one participant placed on being touched by another is just one of many examples of how sensory engagement contributes to belonging.

The final section explored the impact of belonging beyond the tea dance itself. Belonging was shown to contribute to an improved sense of self that feeds back into the social world as participants felt they had a purpose. This also demonstrated the strong contribution of the dance to TP principles and outcomes as belonging facilitated a degree of trust that allowed staff to learn what was needed in the community. In exploring this, limits to belonging were also indicated and the many ways in which staff had tried to overcome these.

Overall, these findings demonstrate the complex and multiple ways in which belonging is defined and experienced, building on conceptualisations of belonging reviewed in the literature. In the chapter that follows, the study as a whole is summarised along with its inevitable limitations. In doing so, possibilities for future research are indicated since this case study presents only one of seemingly limitless ways in which belonging can be applied.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of belonging through a sociological lens and apply this to the context of a PDC TP tea dance in Glasgow. Following a critical review of literature on belonging, five research objectives were developed. These objectives were addressed through conducting seven semi-structured interviews with attendees aged over 60 and a focus group with organisers. Firstly, the concept of belonging was explored. Qualitative interview techniques allow for unexpected themes to emerge (Braun and Clarke, 2014) and thus definitions of belonging outside the dance became a fundamental component of this study, with time, safety and relationships all considered important dimensions of belonging.

The second and third objectives sought to explore how belonging was established and maintained. May (2011) argues that belonging can never be an individual accomplishment and this claim proved to be well founded as relationships with others were discussed in abundance. Staff used techniques such as open seating to foster relationships between attendees and this worked well as participants could feel belonging within the dance but also outside of it as they ran into people from the dance out in the community. Staff reaffirmed belonging by showing concern for participants and worked hard to build strong ties through which they could respond to need. One of the most significant ways in which belonging was established was through being accepted to which all participants referred. Staff, once again, were fundamental in achieving this, overcoming any forms of 'othering' by allowing time to pass.

The fourth research objective identified the impact of belonging beyond the dance. Beatley (2004) argues that participation in later life reduces the risk of isolation and offers a sense of purpose, both of which were confirmed in this study. Participants described feeling a sense of achievement and improved confidence through attending the dance. For PDC TP, belonging at the dance had allowed them to fulfil some of their intended outcomes. Strong ties facilitated "supportive communities," weak ties, "inclusive communities" and the combination of both went a long way in establishing "connected communities" (Brunner, Craig and Watson, 2017, p. 23).

The final objective sought to inform sociological understandings of belonging and this has been evidenced throughout the findings. Common definitions in the literature review were confirmed with relationships proving most significant. The abundance of emotional and sensory accounts substantiated May's (2011) suggestion to consider these dimensions of belonging when conducting research. Unexpected themes found, such as the issue of safety, complicate conceptualisations of belonging and offer potential for future research. Sociologists might do well to consider biographical circumstances such as material confinements within which belonging is constructed. The evidence of strong and weak ties being established simultaneously also serves to build on sociological conceptualisations of belonging since these were found to have distinct purposes and consequences. Overall, through following the advice of May and Muir (2015:9) and avoiding "trying to pre-determine what belonging might consist of" the findings allowed for varied and multidimensional accounts of belonging to be revealed. However, whilst research objectives were fulfilled, there are inevitable limits to this study, three of which will now be considered.

5.1 Limitations and recommendations for further research

Firstly, this small sample represented only a small number of people at the dance and there is much scope for further research that captures experiences of belonging for other attendees. In addition, there is much to be learned from those who attended only once since they might provide information about limits to belonging at this event. There are also those in the area who have never attended. Recruiting those participants proved beyond the remit of this project but it would be useful for PDC TP to know what events might be better placed to support those that they have yet to come across in their work.

Another limit to this research is that it was conducted at one point in time. Given that TP is a ten-year initiative, a longitudinal approach would be of great use. Revisiting participants regularly over the ten-year period would allow for change to be evidenced, thus allowing PDC TP to be measured against their principles and outcomes.

Finally, this research took a single-sited case study as its focus. In doing so, generalisability to other dances and TP projects cannot be achieved (Bryman,

2008). However, TP recognises that each community is different with unique and specific needs (GCPH, 2013) and this study found experiences of belonging varied even within a small group, suggesting that any form of generalising should be used with caution. Nevertheless, a comparative approach might offer some insight into belonging, particularly comparing how meaning is constructed for people with varying levels of affluence or between different age groups.

Whilst generalisability is limited in this study, there is much that could, with caution, be used at similar events or intervention programmes. This study found that establishing belonging was beneficial for individuals, the event, and the wider community. Therefore, any community intervention programmes such as TP would do well to attempt replication of identified mechanisms that facilitate belonging. Through combining staff and participant perspectives at the dance, practical techniques employed by staff, both intentional and otherwise, were uncovered and could be adopted at other events.

An unexpected finding was that staff members in the focus group valued taking time to reflect on their work. Similar work might be done across the TP community to enable staff to realise the significance of their roles in fostering belonging and also consider how they might improve. Through reflecting on work, staff recognised their own limitations and the work to be done if PDC TP are to fulfil their intention to “engage with individuals who would not normally get involved” (GCPH, 2013:23). The instance of the person visiting for food bank vouchers suggests that there is an awareness of the community centre as a place to find support. Increasing usage of the centre for drop-in support might allow for further engagement that might push further at the limits of belonging.

Overall, this study has highlighted four dimensions: the experience of belonging for participants at a PDC TP tea dance; the way that belonging can be established and maintained, particularly by staff; the impact of that belonging for participants; the significance of this for PDC TP in achieving their outcomes.

In returning to sociological conceptualisations of belonging, Mead’s (1934:255) notion that that the individual transcends the group which in turn transcends itself proved to be well founded, as final words from participant Daisy convincingly illustrate,

Belonging here [at the dance] is from the companionship. Oh, the fun, the laughter, the people. It really is the ultimate feel-good factor and I feel good for days after.

As sociologists continue to contemplate what connects the self to the social world, they would do well, therefore, to focus on belonging.

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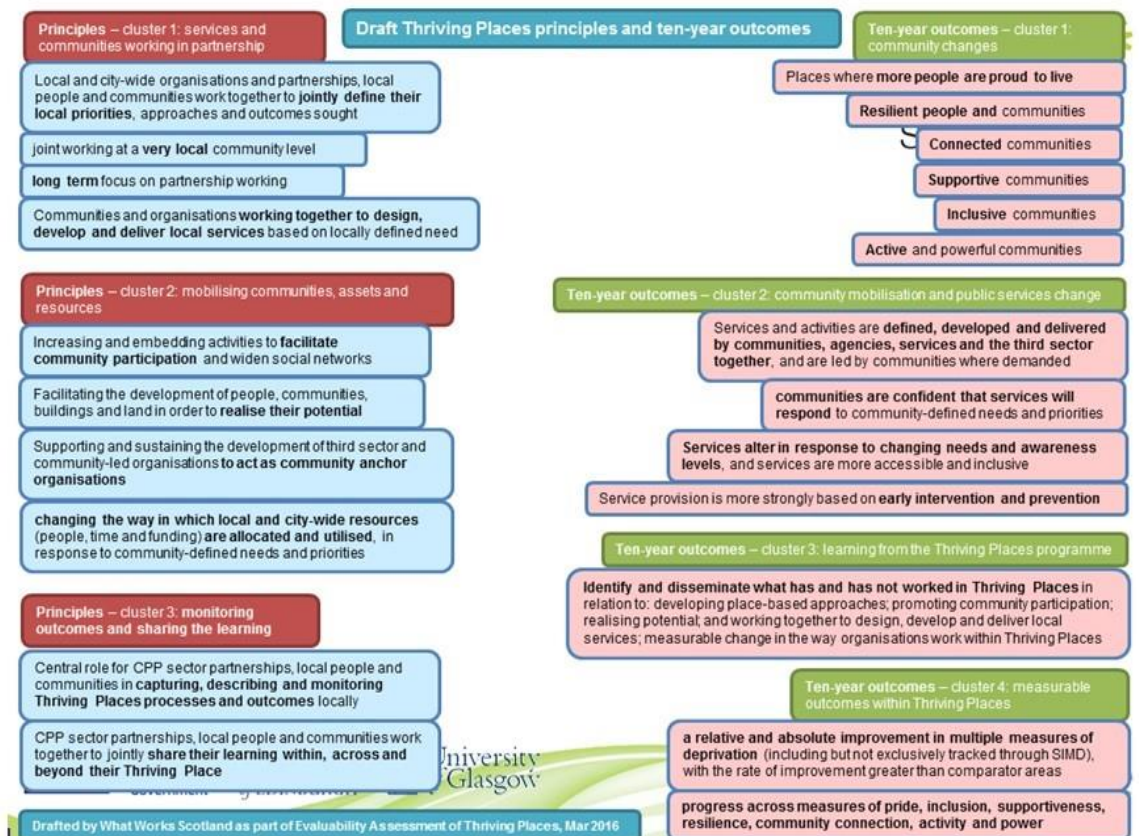
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Appendices

Appendix A: Thriving Places Principles and Outcomes

Final Thriving Places Principles and Outcomes



Extracted from *Evaluability Assessment of Thriving Places: a Report for Glasgow Community Planning Partnership* available on whatworksscotland.ac.uk

Appendix B: Lay Report

Four-page Lay Report created for dissemination to participants, TP staff and the wider community

Lay Report

A sense of belonging at Thriving Places: Participant experiences of belonging at the Barrowfield Ball in Glasgow

Linda Butterfield (University of Glasgow)

in collaboration with Parkhead, Dalmarnock and Camlachie
Thriving Places.



Introduction

This report provides a summary of a 2017 study conducted as part of a Masters degree in Equality and Human Rights at the University of Glasgow. The study was conducted in collaboration with Thriving Places, a ten-year community programme aiming to improve outcomes for those living in areas of persistent multiple deprivation. The programme, delivered by Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, operates in nine areas of the city. The focus for this study was The Barrowfield Ball initiated by the Parkhead, Dalmarnock and Camlachie branch of Thriving Places in 2014.

The Barrowfield Ball takes place weekly. It is free to attend and involves a few rounds of Bingo, followed by dancing and refreshments. Since it started, the ball has attracted more and more people and now over 70 people attend regularly coming from different parts of the city. I wanted to understand why this ball is so popular and whether or not attendees feel a sense of belonging at the event. In doing so, I hoped to discover how that sense of belonging happens as well as the impact it might have on the lives of those who attend. Belonging means different things to different people and I wanted to learn about this using the following five research objectives:

1. How is the concept of belonging understood by older attendees at the tea dance?
2. In what ways is belonging established and maintained at the ball?
3. What is the staff role in establishing and maintaining belonging?
4. What is the impact of this for participants and for Parkhead, Dalmarnock and Camlachie Thriving Places?
5. How does this inform sociological understanding of belonging?

Methodology

I visited the ball before starting research and got to know attendees and staff. It was during these visits that I observed a close connection between staff and attendees that influenced my choice of methods. I interviewed seven older attendees at the dance and then conducted a focus group with three staff members who organise the dance.

The interviews were conducted with a topic guide but questions were not set. This was so that participants could talk about what was important to them and the interviews could be like a conversation. The focus group took place after the interviews so that I could use themes of interest as talking points during staff discussions.

The interviews and focus group were audio-recorded and notes were manually written up and analysed for expected and unexpected themes of interest. The study was approved by the University of Glasgow ethics committee before any data was collected or any participants were recruited.

Key findings

Analysis of the interviews and focus group uncovered a number of themes that might explain why the ball is so popular and why coming to it is important.

1. Participants felt a sense of belonging at the Barrowfield Ball

Belonging is different for each person but is associated with feeling at ease, being safe and being around familiar faces. Participants felt a strong sense of belonging at the ball, expressing that they felt so comfortable there that they would go alone. It was an event participants looked forward to every week.

2. Strong ties

Relationships were really important in creating a sense of belonging. Participants had formed close, personal bonds with others in the form of strong ties. These ties were supportive and purposeful since participants could share common difficulties associated with later life.

3. Weak ties

Wider social networks were formed through the ball as participants came across many people every week and these people became familiar faces. This helped to create a sense of belonging to the community as participants would meet one another outside the dance either at other events or whilst out and about in the local area.

4. Acceptance of difference

All participants felt accepted at the ball and enjoyed being around people different to themselves. For some participants, this was a unique since they did not feel accepted in many other places. The ball was described as a place for anyone at all, no matter the circumstances.

5. Staff roles

Staff were crucial in creating a sense of belonging. They facilitated belonging by encouraging relationships, welcoming anyone who walked through the door and paying attention to details such as birthdays. The relationships they established allowed them to do much more than only organise the ball, they learned about wider community issues and responded to them. Staff had initiated a bereavement support group and persuaded The Mungo Foundation to relocate to the community centre in response to needs learned at the ball.

6. Impact beyond the Ball

Participants described having a sense of purpose from going to the ball. They felt more confident and more connected to the community.

7. Impact for Thriving Places

Establishing belonging at the ball allowed Thriving Places Parkhead, Camlachie, Dalmarnock to deliver on their outcomes of fostering connected, supportive and inclusive communities. Through connecting with participants at the ball, staff had managed to learn about community needs and respond to them.

Conclusion

The data found that participants had a strong sense of belonging to the Barrowfield Ball. The ball was a place that participants felt at ease and this was achieved largely through relationships. Participants had made strong, supportive relationships with others they had met. Participants also described how the ball had given them a wider social network as they now recognised many people in the community through having met them at the ball. Staff were found to be great facilitators of belonging. Through successfully nurturing a feeling of belonging, participants felt able to share their private concerns. In doing so, staff could successfully learn about and respond to needs in the community. Participants expressed that attending the ball improved their lives beyond the event itself, providing a sense of achievement and purpose that should not be overlooked.

“Belonging here [at the ball] is from the companionship. It really is the ultimate feel-good factor and I feel good for days after.”

“the atmosphere and the people and it just touches ma wee heart.”

“I wouldnae give up this wee club. In comparison with my Thursday club, I would drop ma wee Thursday club and come here”

“So, to me belonging has to be people. If you took that centre where the ball is, that’s just a big empty room unless it’s filled with tables and candles and music and people and those people want to be there. That to me is belonging. It’s being with people you want to be with and when that happens, all sorts of other things can happen”

And all sorts of other things have happened and all sorts of things continue to happen.

Future research

- Analysis of **staff roles** in nurturing belonging and the impact of this for the community
- The **longer term impact** of attending the ball for participants and the wider community
- Further research about what it means to **‘belong’**. For example, how it might be different for different age groups, cities or neighbourhoods

“the fun, the laughter, the feel-good feeling”

“It’s open and there’s no barriers. Everyone gets treated the same and you treat everyone the same.”

“To do the job that they’re doing, they’ve got to be exceptional. Everything about them [the staff] draws you in, from the youngest to the oldest.”

Appendix C: Ethics Approval



Ethics Committee for Non Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

NOTIFICATION OF ETHICS APPLICATION OUTCOME - UG and PGT Applications

Application Type: New
Reviewed: 5/4/17

Date Application

Application Number: SPS/2017/760/SOCIAL SCIENCE

Applicant's Name: Linda Butterfield

Project Title: A sociological study of belonging: How belonging is created and maintained at a 'Thriving Places' tea dance in Glasgow

APPLICATION OUTCOME

(A) Fully Approved *Start Date of Approval:* *End Date of Approval:*

(B) Approved subject to amendments

If the applicant has been given approval subject to amendments this means they can proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval, however they should note the following applies to their application:

Approved Subject to Amendments without the need to submit amendments to the Supervisor

Approved Subject to Amendments made to the satisfaction of the applicant's Supervisor

The College Ethics Committee expects the applicant to act responsibly in addressing the recommended amendments.

(C) Application is Not Approved at this Time

Amendments must be made to the satisfaction of the School Ethics Forum (SEF)

Complete resubmission required. Discuss the application with supervisor before resubmitting.

Please note the comments in the section below and provide further information where requested.

If you have been asked to resubmit your application in full, send it to your supervisor who will forward it to your local School Ethics Forum admin support staff.

Where resubmissions only need to be submitted to an applicant's supervisor. This will apply to essential items that an applicant must address prior to ethics approval being granted. As the associated research ethics risks are considered to be low, the applicant's response need only be reviewed and cleared by the applicant's supervisor before the research can properly begin. For any application processed under this outcome, it is the Supervisor's responsibility to email socpol-ug-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk with confirmation of their approval of the re-submitted application.

APPLICATION COMMENTS

Major Recommendations:

Minor Recommendations:

I have a minor problem with this sentence in Consent Form, where it is stated that "Any information you had already provided would be deleted and not included in any results". How is the author going to use the information acquired during the interviews? This sentence should be deleted (or amended).

Appendix D: Interview participant information sheet

Title of project:

A sociological study of belonging: How belonging is created and maintained at a 'Thriving Places' tea dance in Parkhead Community Centre, Glasgow

Name of Researcher: Linda Butterfield

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Richard Brunner

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this'.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this project is to look at the impact of the tea dance on the people who attend. It will explore community, belonging and relationships to see what impact the tea dance has on these things. Results from the research will tell us about the impact of events like this for the people that attend them.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as someone who attends the tea dance regularly who might be interested in talking about the tea dance and what it means to you

Do I have to take part?

No, you are in no way obliged to take part, it is important that you only do so if you want to. In addition, if you do consent to taking part but then later change your mind, that is perfectly fine. Should you change your mind, any information you have provided will not be used or included in any results.

What will happen to me if I take part?

Should you choose to participate, we will take some time to have an interview at the tea dance. I will ask you some questions about your experience at the tea dance and the impact it has had on you. We will arrange the interview at a time to suit you and it will take about 20-30 minutes.

The interview will take place in a private room adjacent to the dance hall in the centre. Firstly, I will check that you are happy to be interviewed for the study and I will ask that you sign a consent form. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded so that I can fully listen to what you say. I will then type it out afterwards.

Please note that you do not have to answer all the questions, you can just answer the ones that you are comfortable in doing so.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. Your identity will be completely confidential. Your information will be kept securely on a password protected smartphone. Following the interview, it will be transcribed on a password protected laptop and kept securely. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the interview transcript to ensure that you cannot be identified. This also includes anyone you might refer to in the interview, such as other participants or family members. The only other person who may listen and read the transcript is the supervisor of the project, Dr. Richard Brunner. Following the project, all data will be destroyed by deleting electronic files and shredding any paper documents

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results, along with those obtained from a focus group with the organisers of the tea dance, will be used to form the basis of a dissertation that will be submitted as part of the coursework for the MRes in Equality and Human Rights at the University of Glasgow. The results may also be used in the wider community such as at conferences in order to share learning about best practise.

A summary of the main findings will be given to you on completion of the project as well as to Thriving Places staff.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by the School of Social Sciences Ethics Forum at the University of Glasgow.

Contact for Further Information:

Should you have any further questions, please feel free to email me or ask me at the tea dance.

Linda Butterfield
2286530b@student.gla.ac.uk

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Officer, Professor Keith Kintrea, Keith.Kintrea@glasgow.ac.uk or my research supervisor, Dr. Richard Brunner (Richard.Brunner@glasgow.ac.uk)

Appendix E: Interview consent form

Title of project:

A sociological study of belonging: How belonging is created and maintained at a 'Thriving Places' tea dance in Glasgow

Name of Researcher: Linda Butterfield

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Richard Brunner

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I agree to take part in this research project

I consent to the interview being audio recorded

I understand that interviews will be transcribed and kept securely

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym

Name of Participant (print)

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher (print)

Signature

Date

Appendix F: Focus group participant information sheet

Title of project:

A sociological study of belonging: How belonging is created and maintained at a 'Thriving Places' tea dance in Parkhead Community Centre, Glasgow

Name of Researcher: Linda Butterfield

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Richard Brunner

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this'.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this project is to look at the impact of the tea dance on the people who attend. It will explore community, belonging and relationships to see what impact the tea dance has on these things. Results from the research will tell us about the impact of events like this do for the people that attend them.

Why have I been chosen?

In order to understand the impact of the tea dance, it is important to understand why it started in the first place, how it has developed and changed. You have been chosen because of your role in helping to organise the tea dance. The other people who have been chosen are your colleagues at the tea dance.

Do I have to take part?

No, you are in no way obliged to take part, it is important that you only do so if you want to. In addition, if you do consent to taking part but then later change your mind, that is perfectly fine. Should you change your mind, any information you have provided will not be included in any results.

What will happen to me if I take part?

Should you choose to participate, we will arrange a convenient time to get together to talk as a group about the tea dance. Firstly, I will check that you are happy to be part of the focus group and I will ask that you sign a consent form. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded so that I can fully listen to the conversation. I will then type it out afterwards.

I will ask you to be careful not to talk about attendees specifically in order to protect anonymity. Questions will be about how the tea dance began, how it has changed and any factors that you feel contribute to its popularity.

The focus group will take place in a private room convenient to you. It will take approximately one hour.

Please note that you do not have to answer all the questions, you can just answer the ones that you are comfortable in doing so.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Your identity will be confidential within the group setting. Whilst it is not possible to guarantee how other focus group participants may use information discussed, I intend to store audio data securely on a password protected smartphone. Following the focus group, I will transcribe it using a password protected laptop on which it will be kept securely. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the focus group transcript to ensure that you cannot be identified. This also includes anyone you might refer to, such as other participants or family members. Following the project, all data will be destroyed by deleting electronic data and shredding any paper documents.

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results, along with those obtained from a focus group with the organisers of the tea dance, will be used to form the basis of a dissertation that will be submitted as part of the coursework for the MRes in Equality and Human Rights at the University of Glasgow. The results may also be used in the wider community such as at conferences in order to share learning about best practise. A summary of the main findings will be given to you on completion of the project as well as to Thriving Places staff.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by the School of Social Sciences Ethics Forum at the University of Glasgow.

Contact for Further Information:

Should you have any further questions, please feel free to email me or ask me at the tea dance.

Linda Butterfield
2286530b@student.gla.ac.uk

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Officer, Professor Keith Kintrea, Keith.Kintrea@glasgow.ac.uk or my research supervisor, Dr. Richard Brunner (Richard.Brunner@glasgow.ac.uk)

Appendix G: Focus group consent form

Title of project:

A sociological study of belonging: How belonging is created and maintained at a 'Thriving Places' tea dance in Glasgow

Name of Researcher: Linda Butterfield

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Richard Brunner

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I agree to take part in this research project

I consent to the focus group being audio recorded

I understand that the focus group will be transcribed and kept securely

I acknowledge that I will be referred to by pseudonym

Name of Participant (print)

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher (print)

Signature

Date