Connecting Reflections: Narratives of Older Adults’ Participation in Pandemic-Era Photovoice

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GRADUATE RESEARCHER BACKGROUND

Aging services & Therapeutic Recreation Administration

Arts-informed practice, intergenerational collaboration, oral history & narrative aging

Graduate research during COVID-19 pandemic
Qualitative researchers have begun to collect narratives of lived experience during COVID-19 pandemic.

Participatory Action Research approaches aim to center voices of vulnerable groups.

Adults age 65+ experienced high death rates & deficits-based master narratives during pandemic.
SETTING:
1:1 EVALUATION INTERVIEWS
NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF EVALUATION INTERVIEWS

How can evaluation interviews be a site for **collaborative, therapeutic reflection**? (Kvale, 2001)

How can data from evaluation interviews support participant narratives?

Can the interviews themselves support participants?
TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW

At first,

But then,

And so

Look for phrasing that sets the stage...conveys past, present, and future selves

STORY ARC FORMAT
## Data Analysis Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Verbatim transcription</td>
<td>Transcripts with “quotations”, [notes about non-verbal communication]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Close-reading to develop logic for inquiry</td>
<td>What did participants <strong>want to share</strong>? - questions that inspired, long narrative passages, anecdotes, illustrations, animation!</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Narrative analysis to find “engagement strategies”</td>
<td>Metaphor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Seaman et al. forthcoming; Tannen, 2008)</td>
<td>Constructed dialogue</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Storying formats</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>How are strategies being used to convey meaning?</td>
<td>Establishing themes of meaningful feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>What was it like to participate in this project?</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>How do these meanings relate across experiences?</td>
<td>Five emerging themes of meaningful participation</td>
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</tbody>
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NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

-In conversations, people share stories for a reason
   -Stories convey meaning
   -We can find themes within stories to look for similar experiences
What was meaningful about this experience?

- Surprise & embodiment
- Introspection
- Perspective
- Relating to others
- Change, learning, growth
- Instrumental reminiscence

"Meaningful engagement" was an opportunity…

To connect with a new kind of research

To see a different point of view

To learn & do something new

To see more of myself in someone else

To understand how I coped with a critical life event
The whole process of doing that was sort of an exercise in self-awareness. Becoming aware of my own spiritual well-being: "what am I doing about that? My own emotional well-being?" "What does that really mean to me?" ... And so, it was...what looked every week, like, "Uh oh, I got something to do that's going to be difficult and I don't know how to do it" ended up every week being something like "wow, that was really interesting to do," I found that helpful...I found that that was worthwhile effort.

To illustrate their definition of "whole process" as an "exercise in self awareness" they use a familiar story format signified by "And so," and constructed dialogue [signaled with quotes] to give voice to a past self.
**IMPLICATIONS**

**NARRATIVE AGING**
- Therapeutic facilitation of reminiscence can support developmental tasks in older adulthood
- Sharing alternative narratives of aging may counter deficits-based master narratives

**PRACTICE**
- Group and 1:1 reminiscence can be a site of therapeutic growth
- Strengths-based approaches support collaboration with instead of service to older adults

**RESEARCH**
- Engaging with older adult participants in PAR-based methods can support purposeful reflection, collaborative learning, and mutual benefits
- Purposeful, collaborative reflection between researchers and participants during evaluation interviews can support therapeutic outcomes
IMPLICATIONS

Center participant voices
Learn alongside them
Support valuable roles for participants across the lifespan
Thank you to all project participants from the Universities to the community for sharing & connecting with each others’ stories!

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