Exploring the meaning of participation in a community art project: A case study on the Seeming project

Christopher Sonn

Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology

Exploring the Meaning of Participation in a Community Art Project: A Case Study on the Seeming Project[†]

MONICA E. MADYANINGRUM[1] and CHRISTOPHER SONN[2]*
[1]*Faculty of Psychology Surabaya, Widya Mandala Catholic University, Indonesia*
[2]*School of Social Sciences and Psychology, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia*

ABSTRACT

In Australia, community art has drawn significant research attention in regard to its potential as a community development strategy. Despite the fact that researchers have presented evidence for the positive developmental outcomes of participation in community art projects, a gap remains in understanding how and why people's participation in a community art project can lead to those positive outcomes. This research explored the meaning of participation in a community art project from the vantage point of the people who experience it. Ten participants were interviewed about their participation in a community art project (The Seeming) held in Bendigo, Australia. Following thematic analyses we identified three themes of how participants viewed their participation in a community arts project. These themes included giving voice to the silenced, creation of social connections and challenging and reproducing stereotypes. Participation means coming together and the findings highlight the potential of community arts projects for promoting the creation of new relationships and new stories about community. However, there are also problematic stories about self and others that were not deconstructed. It is argued that the settings in which different groups join can be meaningfully extended if there is an explicit concern with consciousness raising and deconstruction of normative stories. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: community art; participation; history; voice

INTRODUCTION

In Australia, community art has been positively valued as a community development strategy (Binns, 1991; Hawkins, 1993; McQueen-Thompson & Ziguras, 2002, 2004; Mills & Brown, 2004). Community art is a form of cultural practice in which art is produced and used by local people within their communities as an instrument for social change

---

(Adams & Goldbard, 2002; Fotheringham, 1987; Kelly, 1984). As a community development strategy, arts practice has been used in various areas such as health, ecologically sustainable development, public housing and place, rural revitalization, community strengthening, active citizenship, social inclusion and cultural diversity (Mills & Brown, 2004). This article aims to contribute to the study of community art by using social psychological research to explore people's experiences of participation in a community art project.

Historically, the community art movement in Australia found its momentum in the 1960s and 1970s (Kirby, 1991). But, the development of a community art movement in Australia had been underway long before this time. The idea of using community art as a social movement to organize and consciously engage ordinary people in cultural life has its origin in the radical movements of the socialist factions in Australia. Since the late 19th century, this political faction started to think that making cultural resources more accessible for all classes, especially for the marginalized, is an essential part of creating a more egalitarian, just and humane society (Kirby, 1991). However, later in its development, the profile of community art in Australia was shaped by the government's cultural policy. Since the 1970s, under the Liberal government, community art practice was constructed around the idea of recognizing the plural cultures that characterized contemporary Australia and the idea of using cultural practice as a way to foster a sense of community. This became a period when the practice of community art was oriented toward the framework of community development (Hawkins, 1993; Mills, 1991).

In Australia, there is growing research exploring community art as a community development strategy (see Centre for Popular Education, 2002). The report prepared by the Centre for Popular Education shows that there have been many studies investigating the effectiveness of community art as a community development strategy. Yet, while researchers have presented evidence for the positive developmental impacts of involvement in community art projects (e.g. Flower & McEwen, 2004; McQueen-Thompson & Ziguras, 2002, 2004; Mills & Brown, 2004; Sonn, Drew & Kasat, 2002; Williams, 1996), a gap remains in the understanding of the social and psychological processes by which participation in community art projects leads to positive psychological and social outcomes (Putland, 2008). Therefore, by exploring the meaning of participation in a community art project from the vantage point of the participants, we seek to investigate how involvement in a community arts project may promote positive psychological and social outcomes.

STUDYING THE MEANING OF PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY ARTS

Along with its increasing popularity as a community development strategy, the practice of community art has evoked ongoing research attention. Generally, studies in this area are oriented toward providing evidence of the developmental impacts of community arts projects (e.g. Adams & Goldbard, 2000; Flower & McEwen, 2004; Matarasso, 1997; McQueen-Thompson & Ziguras, 2002, 2004; Mills & Brown, 2004; Williams, 1996). The increasing interest of local governments and funding agencies toward the use of community art as a community development strategy has raised questions about its effectiveness. Generally, the studies are intended to inform policy makers about the long-term investment value of community arts.

Studies about the developmental impacts of community arts have raised discussions on how evidence of impact is collected and assessed. However, there are questions about the

reliance on anecdotal accounts, selective case studies and small sample sizes (McQueen-Thompson & Ziguras, 2002; Putland, 2008). Some researchers also critique the more quantitative 'evidence-based' approach. For example, Putland (2008) notes that the emphasis on 'evidence-based' studies 'risks reducing the value and meaning of arts and cultural activities to narrowly defined functions, whereby art is seen as merely instrumental to prescribed social outcomes and public policy agenda' (p. 266). Similarly, McQueen-Thompson and Ziguras (2002) suggest that future research on community arts needs to focus more on the community arts' participants' 'ways of evaluating their experience' rather than the needs of policy makers (p. 12).

This brief review suggests that studying the meaning of participation in community arts from the participants' point of view is a relevant area of inquiry. Informed by the literature above, we were interested in exploring the meanings of participation in a community arts project from the perspective of the participants. We were particularly interested in the meaning of participation and the implications of participation for how people viewed themselves and others. By understanding the participants' meaning of participation, we aim to outline the socio-psychological processes through which the experience of participating in community arts is translated into positive developmental outcomes.

Exploring the socio-psychological processes of participation is considered important as it may describe the relationship between individual and society (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000). Based on this premise, Campbell and Jovchelovitch (2000) propose their theory of the social psychology of participation. Drawing on Paulo Freire's (1972) notion of conscientization, they view community participation as a social achievement rather as a given social state, which involves the process of developing a community's critical awareness about its members and their living conditions. Further, they argue that the development of community awareness involves the interaction of three social psychological elements, which are social identity, social representation and power. Linking the three concepts, they explain that the act of participating may facilitate the emergence of community awareness as it provides an opportunity for 'a community to state and negotiate identities and social representation which are, in turn, shaped and constrained by the material and symbolic power relations in which they are located' (p. 267–268). The link between participation, community awareness and social identity is discussed further in several other studies (e.g. Campbell & McLean, 2002; Campbell, Cornish, & McLean, 2004; Cornish, 2006; Siddiquee & Kagan, 2006; Ramella & De La Cruz, 2000). These studies underline the idea that the meaningfulness of community participation for those who are involved in it is related to its ability to foster individual and social awareness about social identities and social realities. Informed by these studies, we will use the findings of our study to reflect on the theory of the social psychology of participation.

THE SEEMING PROJECT – BENDIGO: HISTORY, IDENTITY, CULTURE AND BELONGING

The Seeming project is a community art project organized and facilitated by a Melbourne based theatre company called The Torch Project. The Seeming project took place in Bendigo, a big country town, in the north west of Melbourne, Victoria, from 2004 to 2005. Bendigo is one of the oldest towns in Victoria. As a town, it was built during the gold rush, following 'white settlement' in the area. The traditional owners and inhabitants of the land on which Bendigo now exists are the Aboriginal people known as the Jaara Jaara

people (Bendigo Tourism & City of Greater Bendigo, 2006). Today Bendigo is a country town made up of mainly people with Anglo Celtic backgrounds. In the 2006 Census, there were 81 939 persons resident in Bendigo with Indigenous persons comprising 1.1% of Bendigo's total population. Meanwhile, overseas-born persons made up 5.7% of the total population. Most of the overseas-born population were born in England (1.7%) New Zealand (0.6%), Scotland and the Netherlands (0.3%) (ABS, 2006).

Within The Torch Project itself, The Seeming is one among several other community art projects that come under a program called 'Re-Igniting Community' (RIC). Based on an evolving community cultural development process that began in 1999, RIC is a community building initiative that uses arts to engage diverse communities in a process of making art with professionals to grapple with issues of *history*, *culture*, *identity* and *belonging* (Flower & McEwen, 2004; Kelaher et al., 2008; The Torch Project, 2005). Between the years 1999 and 2006, The Torch has worked with 25 local communities around regional and metropolitan Victoria blending art and community building strategies. In general, the aim of each RIC project is to increase local capacity to lead and manage culturally diverse communities (The Torch Project, 2005).

The Seeming project was the major RIC project for 2005. The company worked with the communities in and around Bendigo for almost 2 years, resulting in increased engagement in the arts and a play called The Seeming. This project was developed in partnership with, the City of Greater Bendigo, the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-Op (BDAC) and St Lukes (a local NGO which took a role as the local coordinator of the project).

The play was performed not only in Bendigo, but also in several regional communities around Bendigo. It involved 125 performers. Most of them were local community members. Seven local artists were involved and together with two professional artists from The Torch they made the core cast. The performance also involved Indigenous ceremonies and dances. The Bendigo Pacific Islands Association dancers and the Central Victorian Women's choir joined for the final shows. The project as a whole involved 26 children. Over the 3 weeks tour, The Seeming drew almost two and a half thousand people into its audience (The Torch Project, 2005).

The Seeming tells about a mythical town called Dinkum.[1] Dinkum is portrayed as an old gold mining town. The drama in The Seeming is developed around the plan of re-opening the mine and how the town becomes divided between those who support and those who are against the plan. Not only that, apparently, the plan to re-open the gold mine opened up an untold (hi)story about the town. The story goes as follows: Sir Richard Dink long ago discovered the fabled Dinkum Gold Seam. One hundred and fifty years ago, Richard was the Chief Magistrate and a generally important person of Dinkum. He was a highly articulate, charming, learned man who liked to get his own way. It was Richard who allegedly discovered the fabled gold reef. The alternative story is that, 150 years ago, the reef was discovered by his Indigenous 'native policeman', Billy Birandee. Billy knew his rights and could claim the gold found. In a rage Richard killed Billy and it is seen by Sun Li, a Chinese miner from another field. Richard solves this by accusing Sun Li of the murder and, as Magistrate, had Sun Li hanged. It is the consequences of this untold (hi)story that becomes the main drama in The Seeming. It is manifested in the tensions, confusion, rumours and humour that developed among the current descendants of the first generation of Dinkum in the way they react to the plan of re-opening the mine.

---

[1]Dinkum in this context is derived from the Chinese expression 'ding – gum', which was used in the goldfields to refer to good gold.

To some extent, the story mirrored Bendigo's history as a town in which goldmining was a defining historical episode. An old puppet head (mining headframe above the shaft) located in the centre of the town now is one of Bendigo's historical landmarks. However, the meaning and significance of this historical episode was experienced differently by the Indigenous people and the 'European settlement'. How Bendigo as a community defines its identity is influenced by how this version of history is constructed and negotiated. Given this background, presenting The Seeming was an invitation to the community to re-look at how the history of the region had been officially written and the implications for different people from different groups in the community.

METHOD

Research process

This research process started when we contacted The Torch project in 2005 and stated our interest to do a study on one of The Torch's community art projects. From this initial contact, The Torch project recommended that we study The Seeming project as it was the latest project that they had just finished in 2005. There had been studies on The Torch's previous projects (e.g. Flower & McEwen, 2004) but there was not any for The Seeming. Following several initial discussions with The Torch project we were connected with St Luke's, a non-government organization that became the local partner of The Torch project. Later, St Luke's facilitated access to the local community members who were involved in the project.

Participants

After approval was received from the Victoria University Ethics Committee and St Luke's Bendigo, interviewing of participants commenced in July 2006. With the assistance of St Luke's, we sent the invitation by mail to 25 community dwellers who volunteered in The Seeming, to participate in the study. They were involved in the project either as steering committee members, performers or audiences. Eight women and two men replied to the invitation. Based on the contact list for those involved in the project it was evident that the entire project involved more women than men. The participants' ages ranged between 30 and 60 years. Participants were employed in different professions including, for example Teaching, Arts, some worked in a government Department and, others stay at home parents. Table 1 contains information about participants including pseudonyms, ethnic heritage.

Interview process

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The formulation of the questions was guided by the conceptual background of The Seeming project as developed by The Torch project. The Seeming project was conceptualized to cover four themes, that is history, identity, culture and belonging. These four themes were elaborated in the interview questions. In term of the story performed in the play, for example participants were asked about the meaning of the story for them and what story meant in terms of the way they experienced their community. Participants were also asked how they experienced the project as a whole, what they learnt from their involvement in the project

Table 1. Participant roles in the project and ethnic heritage

Pseudonym	Ethnic heritage
Aaron	Anglo-Australian
Bob	Indigenous Australian
Catherine	Anglo Australian
Erika	Anglo Australian
Joan	Anglo Australian
Joss	Indigenous Australian
Julia	Anglo Australian
Miranda	Anglo Australian
Sylvia	Indigenous Australian
Terry	Asian

and how it affected the way they feel about their community and their connections within the community. Each interview was conducted face-to-face at a time and place convenient to the participant and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. All the interviews were recorded using a tape recorder with permission from the participants. Line by line transcription was made following each interview.

Data analysis

We used thematic qualitative analysis as outlined by Charmaz (2000, 2003) and Willig (2001). This involved line by line reading of the verbatim text, coding and categorization. The coding process was done without applying a preconceived category or code to the data. Instead the codes used to organize the data were created by defining what we understood from the data, that is the codes developed emerged as we scrutinized the data and defined meanings within them (Charmaz, 2000, 2003; Willig, 2001).

After finishing the coding process, the next phase of data analysis was to create conceptual categories or themes. This is a process of creating a major concept or label that groups together instances of events, processes or occurrences which share central features or characteristics with one another (Browne, 2004; Willig, 2001). This process was followed by developing analysis for each theme.

Findings and interpretation: The meaning of participation

We set out to develop an understanding of the meanings people construct about participation in a community arts project. We started the study with an assumption that the power of this kind of community art project is in the story performed in the play. We saw the story as an invitation for people to re-look at the history of the region and to reflect on the different ways of looking at the town's history – silenced and invisible versions of history. The findings, however, show that it is not the story that is central for the participants in the study. In the participants' accounts, the value and meaning of participating in the project is mostly associated with the process of actually being together with other people in their community, especially in the context where interactions across social groups are very limited. For the participants the value of this project lay in its ability to bring together diverse people in the community. For them, this togetherness is in itself sending a strong

social message, which perhaps is stronger than the messages embodied by the story performed in the play. The quotation below illustrates this point:

> I don't know what they [audiences] actually get out of the story. But I think everyone would realize, how big and rich it was to have so many people, different ages and cultures, how difficult that is to bring a project like that together...the acting in it was good, the story was good. But, the best thing about it was to me, was that it's able to be done and to bring all that together, those cultures and intergenerational – Catherine (Anglo-Australian).

As indicated in the quotation coming together was seen as a key aspect of the arts project that participants valued. Participants comments were organized around three themes related to this coming together including: providing a space and voice for the marginalized, create social connection and challenging and reproducing stereotypes.

Giving voice to the silenced

> ...that to me it is what The Seeming was, you think you know the dynamic of the town... and all the rest of it...but under the ground there are all these unresolved issues from loss of culture, loss of land, loss of everything in justice you know...that's to me what it was about – Joss (Indigenous Australian).

As illustrated by this quotation, giving voice to the silenced means that, for some of the participants, The Seeming made the invisible visible – it surfaced issues of dispossession and loss of culture. The participants valued The Seeming for its ability to highlight, groups of people, local histories and cultures that had not been represented. Participation in The Seeming facilitated awareness for some participants about hardship that the Indigenous people have endured. For example, a non-Indigenous participant reported that she learnt about the impact of child removal practices in Australia, when an Indigenous elder who participated in the project shared with the group that she never had connection with her Indigenous roots, not until she was 42 years old because she was separated from her family at a very young age.

Another participant's comment illustrated how he experienced The Seeming as a way to reignite what has been 'missing' from his culture and to reclaim its place in the community:

> ...we used to have ceremonies when everyone comes together and meet and communicate and everyone know each other business...that's what has been missing for a while. And now when we had something like that [The Seeming] come along, you got the elders coming from different areas and the kids come and sitting down with their grand parents and watching it for, you know things like that for the first time...it was a great thing to bring us together...it brought back a lot of the communication in the community... – Bob (Indigenous-Australian).

The value and meaning of community art for a local community is often linked to its ability to reignite people's ties with their local or traditional cultural heritage that have been dismissed because of the increasing domination of global culture (Haedicke & Nellhaus, 2001). It seems that such reflections are telling about the effect of the increasing domination of global culture, which is eroding traditional communities' connection, as well as young peoples' connection to their cultural roots. For Indigenous people, the processes of cultural globalization may complicate or perpetuate their sense of loss for their tradition and culture, a sense of loss associated with the history of colonization (Smith, 1999).

Creating social connections

Another enriching experience valued by the participants as a result of 'coming together' as a group was the opportunity to make connections with people from various groups in the community with whom they never have contact before. The quotation from Ericka below illustrates this point:

> People embraced this [The Seeming] as, "no matter where we come from we are all the same"...that's the first time around Bendigo. People from overseas are stuck in their own little group, like we have a Dutch Australian Club here in Bendigo, we got German Club in Bendigo, we got Italian Club in Bendigo, we got the Chinese Association, we got the Philipino Association and they are just stuck in their own little group. This [The Seeming] brought them out as a community – Ericka (Anglo-Australian).

This finding supports previous studies in this area that note that facilitating 'social connection' is the most commonly reported impact of community art (Flower & McEwen, 2004; Matarasso, 1997; Mills & Brown, 2004; Williams, 1996). Participating in the project facilitated social connections among individuals and social groups in the community who were previously isolated from each other. For example, Catherine recalled The Seeming as a way to establish an intergenerational connection between her as an elder and the young people in her community:

> People say to introduce children to different cultures, but it's just as difficult for people my age. We are not going out where these things are happening. Children have that opportunity at school because they are mixing with others. But older people like me don't have that opportunity...I don't really interact with younger people in my own community...So, it's good being part of that [The Seeming] as well...it [The Seeming] gives you some way of connecting with those young people – Catherine (Anglo-Australian).

Besides intergenerational contact, facilitating intercultural contact is a feature within this theme that is highlighted by most of The Seeming participants' interviewed. For example, Terry (Asian) stated:

> ...I have never worked with any Aborigine. I have been in this country for more than 30 years, but I have never worked with the so called the Indigenous people. This is my very first time having such close contact with the Indigenous people and so, I've been in the cultural desert for all these years you know...I knew nothing of them, only what I read in the papers and what other people tell me. So, I find that it's such a privilege...it's actually very enriching for me.

These findings support the idea of community art creating a space for people to reclaim a history and make a connection with the past. As stated by Rappaport and Thomas (1996), '[r]estorations of community histories are important for forming and informing the human subject and developing community solidarity' (p. 330). In the case of The Seeming, participation in a community art project has facilitated the participants to explore and listen to different stories about the community as told by the different participants.

Challenging and reproducing stereotypes

It is commonly believed that one way to dismiss prejudice and stereotypes is by making direct contact with those one has prejudices or stereotypes. This commonsense view seems to be evident in this study. Having social connections with people from diverse groups has enabled the participants not only to acquire 'new' understandings about other people

or groups but also encouraged them to re-look in a critical way at their 'old' understandings about other people or groups. It is here that the participants were facilitated to question the taken for granted way of thinking about themselves, other and their community. For example, Miranda experienced The Seeming as an opportunity to break down barriers which discouraged young people from community involvement:

> . . .with teenagers involved, I think break down barriers because normally teenagers uninvolved and adult don't normally hang out with teenagers. So, age didn't really matter. That was probably the most important thing in the whole play was that age didn't matter – Miranda (Anglo-Australian).

While based on observations about school students' learning, Aron (Anglo-Australian) offered the following:

> . . .from my conversation with the students who were involved for them, one of the really good things was getting to spend a lot of time with Aboriginal people and also with one of the actors who is Chinese and that seems to breakdown a lot of stereotypes about, you know, about Asian people, about Indigenous people, because they actually had, you know, worked with them all the time and get to speak to them a lot.

Breaking down stereotypes about people from a particular group is not the only feature that is represented in this theme. The theme also tells about breaking down the pessimism that some of the participants have about the possibility of having a multi-culture and intergenerational project. Having a community project, which involved people from various cultures and generations, is a rare event in the town. Therefore, the meaningfulness of The Seeming is framed in its ability to breakdown the common belief that it was impossible to have such a project. Joss's (Indigenous Australian) comment illustrates this point:

> . . .the things [previous events before The Seeming] that were happening, were happening more in isolation, not involving the wider community. . .people might think, "O, well, this isn't for black *fellas* or the other way around, well this isn't for white *fellas*" you know, . . . I think it [The Seeming] really just brought out how diverse the community is.

In this account, there is an emphasis on the 'coming together' aspects of the project that enabled people who otherwise may not have socialized together, to rethink the prejudices and stereotypes they have about others and their community.

Some participants reported that the 'coming together' aspect of the project enabled them to challenge not only the way they look at others but also how they see themselves. This was represented by the participants' who valued The Seeming as a community project that gave them opportunities to build their skills and capacity. This opportunity, in turn, can stimulate positive personal changes that bring confidence and pride.

The types of personal change that were experienced by The Seeming participants were varied. It can be small such as learning more about another culture's rituals through to experiencing The Seeming as a defining experience. This is evident in Bob's reflection:

> It was such a wonderful, wonderful experience, and I don't know how you could talk about it really. For me personally, *yeah*, just give me more self confidence in what I done, you know. At that stage when these fellows grabbed the whole of me, I was in the bad depression stage, I was on medication and all these type of stuff, you know. . . and *yeah*, The Seeming helped me get through all of that. . . It meant a world to me to meet these people.

The experience above shows that participation in The Seeming provided opportunities for connecting with others who grabbed 'the whole of me'. This may be an unconditional

acceptance, which is pivotal for working 'through all of that' and regaining more self confidence. Thus, part of the meaningfulness of The Seeming was in its ability to connect people with each other, and these connections stimulated personal changes.

For others however the opportunity for connection did not necessarily lead to challenges to stereotypes, instead it led to the reproduction of stories about Indigenous people as lacking in self-esteem and confidence in their culture. For example, one participant commented:

> . . .it brought up, it brought huge self esteem back in to many human beings that I know that didn't really have self esteem and confidence and that they can actually play a role in the community and succeed. So that's what I love about the whole Seeming play. . . I think that was the role of the whole play was to give people self esteem, confidence and be happy about their own culture – Miranda (Anglo-Australian).

Although Miranda is speaking ostensibly of the benefits of coming together, she is at the same talking about others as lacking and the participation in the project as addressing this lack. This view is informed by discourses in the Australian context that construct Indigenous people as lacking in self esteem, while also ignoring the histories of racialized oppression and ongoing marginalization.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we aimed to explore the meaning of participation in a community art project from the vantage point of the local people who experience it and also contribute to the social psychology of participation more broadly. Our analysis for interview data with people who participated in a community arts project suggests that people emphasized the value of participating together with others more than the actual story told through the play. The opportunity to come together meant learning about the histories that have and continue to be silenced, in particular, the histories of Indigenous Australians. Coming together also meant being able to connect with people from different age groups as well as people from different ethnic groups. For some the opportunity to come together meant forming interpersonal connections and feeling valued. However, there were also problematic understandings of Indigenous people that shaped how people reported their own experiences as well as those of others they engaged with throughout the project.

The creation of settings within the community is part of the broader strategy of community cultural development that includes efforts to work with communities to identify critical social issues. These settings become the sites in which people, who are differently positioned in terms of social arrangements and histories, are afforded opportunities to engage with neglected and invisible experiences and stories from within the broader community. This is evident in the participants' reflection in which they shared that by participating in The Seeming they were able to have contact with people from different cultural or age groups for the first time. As has been noted in previous research, engaging in the processes of community cultural development can have positive effects in creating social connection and addressing social barriers (e.g. Matarasso, 1997; McQueen-Thompson & Ziguras, 2002, 2004; Mills & Brown, 2004; Williams, 1996). In this case, it is the creation of specific settings related to the broader project that has been meaningful to these participants.

At a relational level, the opportunity to connect with people from different groups and within groups across generational boundaries, and being exposed to the different stories of living in the community was important for participants, but for different reasons. For example, for Indigenous participants it meant making visible issues related the history of dispossession and ongoing oppression, and it also meant an opportunity to reconnect with valued traditions and practices. For some of the Anglo Australian participants it meant engaging with Indigenous people face-to-face for the first time, and seeing positive representations of Indigenous people as well as other ethnic communities. Arguably, the experiences of coming together afforded opportunities to engage with those who are constructed as cultural others.

However, even though the settings provide an opportunity for people to connect a cross-generational and racialized boundaries and it is where stories of those who are marginalized are made visible, there is not necessarily a critical engagement with the discourses that work to pathologize Indigenous people in the community. Those coming together are differently positioned within the broader history of racialized power relations in Australia. This differential positioning has implications for interpersonal relations and the dynamics of participation. That is, although people are engaging within a shared space and those who are invisible afforded voice, there is little to suggest that there is a deconstruction of symbolic power and privilege afforded because of the history of race relations and social structures in Australia. A key feature of the social psychology of participation is the focus on symbolic power (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000). It is here that a more explicit engagement with dominance through an examination of whiteness within these microsettings will be valuable because the deconstruction of normativity is aimed at challenging racialized power that is tied to macrostructures, while also working to empower those who are marginalized (Green & Sonn, 2005; Sonn & Green, 2006).

Furthermore, although we did not explicitly consider the concept of social identity and social representation in our analysis, we found that the meaningfulness of community participation for those who are involved in it is related to its ability to foster individual and social awareness about 'different' groups within the broader community. This awareness of others and the opportunity for those who are marginalized to participate in everyday settings is important. However, this is not and should not be the only important outcome or goal of community participation. There is a need to deconstruct normativity which often works to silence margninalized voices. Thus, we concur with the writing of Campbell, Cornish, Gibbs, and Scott (2010) who have recently pointed out, the importance of building voices to be coupled with 'promoting a receptive social environment in which this is heard' (p. 970).

The growing interest in community arts and community cultural development is exciting. In this project it is clear that participation held individual and relational benefits for the participants and the play itself provided and opportunity for a re-look at official versions of history. However, these settings, unless there are explicit efforts to actually deconstruct dominant representations of self and others, will actually be limited in terms of their potential to use techniques of consciousness-raising to challenge normativity and promote social change.

Finally, a limitation of the current study is the fact that it was undertaken months after the project took place. This decreases the possibility to observe in more detail the processes of personal and collective identity transformation. Therefore we suggest that future projects may benefit from researchers engaging alongside communities and external agents and documenting the processes of how participants build dialogues among them as part

of the process of community arts practice from the inception through to the end of projects. Nevertheless, this retrospective study has afforded the opportunity for participants to reflect on the meanings they derived from participation in a community arts project. We have brought community arts practice into conversation with the social psychology of participation and highlighted the potential of community arts projects for disrupting taken for granted ways of living and creating spaces for constructing new relationships and new stories about community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Adams, D., & Goldbard, A. (2000). *Creative community: The art of cultural development*. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation.

Adams, D., & Goldbard, A. (2002). *Community, culture and globalization*. Retrieved December 14, 2005, from http://www.comunityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/01/community_cul-tu_1.php.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006). National Regional Profile: Greater Bendigo (C) (Statistical District). Retrieved September 9, 2009, from http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au.

Bendigo Tourism & City of Greater Bendigo. (2006). *Official visitors' guide – Bendigo*. Bendigo: City of Greater Bendigo & Bendigo Tourism.

Binns, V. (Ed.). (1991). *Community and the arts: History, theory and practice*. Leichhardt, NSW: Pluto Press.

Browne, J. (2004). Grounded theory analysis: Coming to data with questioning minds. In V. Minichiello, G. Sullivan, K. Greenwood, & R. Axford (Eds.), *Handbook of research methods for nursing and health science* (second edition, pp. 625–671). Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education Australia.

Campbell, C., Cornish, F., Gibbs, A., & Scott, K. (2010). Heeding the push from below: How do social movements persuade the rich to listen to the poor. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *15*, 962–971.

Campbell, C., Cornish, F., & Mclean, C. (2004). Social capital, participation and the perpetuation of health inequalities: Obstacles to African-Caribbean participation in 'partnerships' to improve mental health. *Ethnicity & Health*, *9*, 313–335.

Campbell, C., & Jovchelovitch, S. (2000). Health, community and development: Towards a social psychology of participation. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *10*, 255–270.

Campbell, C., & McLean, C. (2002). Representations of ethnicity in people's accounts of local community participation in a multi-ethnic community in England. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *12*, 13–29.

Center for Popular Education. (2002). *Community cultural development in Australia: A research map*. Retrieved June 15, 2005, from http://www.cpe.uts.edu.au/pdfs/CCDMap0307.pdf.

Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (second edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Charmaz, K. (2003). Grounded theory. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 81–110). London, UK: Sage Publications.

Cornish, F. (2006). Empowerment to participate: A case study of participation by Indian sex workers in HIV prevention. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *16*, 301–315.

Flower, R., & McEwen, C. (2004). *Holding the torch: Facilitating change and learning through storymaking and arts in regional communities*. Sydney, NSW: The Centre for Popular Education, UTS.

Fotheringham, R. (Ed.). (1987). *Community theatre in Australia*. North Ryde, NSW: Methuen Australia.

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Green, M. J., & Sonn, C. C. (2005). Examining discourses of whiteness and the potential for reconciliation. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *15*, 478–492.

Haedicke, S. C., & Nellhaus, T. (2001). *Performing democracy: International perspectives on urban community-based performance*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.

Hawkins, G. (1993). *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras: Constructing community arts*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Kelaher, M., Curry, S., Berman, N., Jones, R., Dunt, D., Joubert, L., et al. (2008). Structured story-telling in community arts and health program evaluations. In A. Lewis, D. Doyle (Eds.), *Proving the practice: Evidencing the effects of community arts programs on mental health* (pp. 148–164). Fremantle, WA: Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts, Australia.

Kelly, O. (1984). *Community, art and the state: Storming the citadels*. London, UK: Comedia Publishing Group.

Kirby, S. (1991). An historical perspective on the community arts movement. In V. Binns (Ed.), *Community and the arts: Story, theory, practice* (pp. 19–30). Leichhardt, NSW: Pluto Press.

Matarasso, F. (1997). *Use or ornament: The social impact of participation in the arts*. Glos, UK: Comedia.

McQueen-Thompson, D., & Ziguras, C. (2002). *Promoting mental health & wellbeing through community & cultural development: A review of literature focusing on community arts practice*. Retrieved May 15, 2005, from https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/Promoting%20Mental%20Health%20-%20Arts%20Participation%20.pdf.

McQueen-Thompson, D., & Ziguras, C. (2004). *Promoting mental health & wellbeing through community & cultural development: A review of literature focusing on community festivals & celebrations*. Retrieved June 15, 2005 from http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/PromotingMentalHealthCommunityCelebrationsFestivals.

Mills, D. (1991). Foreword. In V. Binns (Ed.), *Community and the arts: Story, theory, history*. Leichhardt, NSW: Pluto Press.

Mills, D., & Brown, P. (2004). *Art and wellbeing*. Sydney, NSW: The Australia Council for the Arts.

Putland, C. (2008). Lost in translation: The question of evidence linking community-based arts and health promotion. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *13*, 265 –276.

Ramella, M., & De La Cruz, R. B. (2000). Taking part in adolescent sexual health promotion in Peru: Community participation from a social psychological perspective. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *10*, 271–284.

Siddiquee, A., & Kagan, C. (2006). The internet, empowerment, and identity: An exploration of participation by refugee Women in a community internet project (CIP) in the United Kingdom (UK). *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *16*, 189–206.

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous people*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press.

Sonn, C. C., Drew, N. M., & Kasat, P. (2002). *Conceptualizing community cultural development: The role of cultural planning in community change*. Perth, WA: Community Arts Network (WA).

Sonn, C. C., & Green, M. J. (2006). Disrupting the dynamics of oppression in intercultural research and practice. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *16*, 337–346.

The Torch Project. (2005). *Annual report 2005*. Retrieved September 15, 2006, from http://www.thetorch.asn.au/web/files/Annual_Report_2005.pdf.

Thomas, R. E., & Rappaport, J. (1996). Art as community narrative: A resource for social change. In M. B. Lykes, A. Banuazizi, R. Liem, & M. Morris (Eds.), *Myths about the powerless: Contesting social inequalities* (pp. 317–336). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Williams, D. (1996). *Creating social capital: A study of the long-term benefits from community-based arts funding*. Adelaide, SA: Community Art Networks of South Australia.

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.