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**Title**

**Understanding Personal Change through Storytelling in a Therapeutic Community**

**Abstract**

*Purpose:* This article explores the potential for personal and community transformation through storytelling within a therapeutic community through the analysis of one narrative case study.

*Design/Methodology:* The article uses a narrative research design to describe and theorise the individual narrative of a TC client member, “Emily”, who self-identified areas of therapeutic change. Emily’s story is a single case of personal and community transformation. Analysis focussed on story of her weight loss to understand her changing role to her self and the community.

*Findings:* Emily’s story reveals the social complexities underpinning individual transformations within a community context. This complexity is particularly evident as Emily experienced visible weight loss but identified that the meaningful change is her changed relationship with herself and others. Using theories on symbolic interactionism, analysis of Emily’s narrative indicates the TC played a role in facilitating personal change and that through sharing her story with the wider TC, the community shifted its perspective on food and weight loss.

*Value:* The article expands the discussion on how storytelling practices within a TC contribute to therapeutic change. It is argued that community relationships play a key role in facilitating a changed relationship with self and others, and that stories themselves play an active role in shaping community meanings.

*Keywords:* therapeutic communities, narrative, personal change, symbolic interactionism, identity, self-validation

*Article Classification:* Research / Case Study
Introduction

Informal uses of storytelling are an everyday component of many therapeutic communities (TCs) as members continuously offer feedback and support, often through a storied framework of their own experiences (see e.g. Stevens, 2012). Researchers in the social sciences have recognised that stories can richly encapsulate self-identity (McAdams, 1993) and individuals’ relationships with their social environments (Hinchman and Hinchman, 2001; Etherington, 2008). Stories highlight how individuals understand their role in their social and cultural environment as within a story will be a represented self that shows tellers’ expectations for how they see themselves, or believe they should see themselves, by those in their community. In turn, these expectations reflect wider community narratives and social norms (Bruner, 1990). Narrative research has enjoyed a rich contribution to experiences and recovery of mental distress (see e.g. Etherington, 2008; Speedy, 2008; Lapsley et al., 2002). However for TCs, it appears less well known how social processes during storytelling facilitate personal change and whether individual stories transform meaning and values within a TC. This article is based upon a narrative research methodology to examine a narrative based TC approach. It explores the potential for personal and community transformation through storytelling within a TC through the narrative case study of “Emily”, who experienced a six and a half stone weight loss, moving her weight closer to overweight rather than obese. The study arose from personal experience within a volunteer faith therapeutic community, “Haven”, and from conducting peer reviews with Community of Communities (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2016) whereby members naturally engaged in storytelling processes. As Haven has a self-described “narrative culture”, individuals are continuously encouraged to share their own story of change with other members in the community (Holmes, 2005). Not only is the “outcome” of a story of value, but so too is the change process.

The contribution of this article is to expand the discussion on how storytelling practices within a TC contribute to personal change. It is argued that relationships within a TC play a role in facilitating a changed relationship with self and others, and that stories themselves play an active role in shaping community meanings. In the discussion that follows, this paper will define narrative theory, discuss its application in relation to Haven, present the case study and analyse the importance of storytelling practices in a community context.
Theoretical Framework: Narrative Analysis

With roots steeped in the literary tradition of storytelling, narrative analysis draws inspiration from several disciplines including oral history, autobiography, sociology, criminology, psychology and anthropology (Plummer, 1995). Elliot (2005) recognises narrative analysis as talk organised into sequential order around events that provide meaning and insights into people’s experiences and construction of the world. Narrative theory builds upon interpretivist sociology and phenomenology (Denzin, 1989) as it values individual lived experience and how people define and understand their lives. Stories are continuously being defined and redefined and as such, Etherington (2008:29) contends stories have value as “knowledge constructions in their own right”. Those who listen to stories are able to engage and identify with the teller, and in this way, Halbwachs (1992:53) argues sharing memories through stories connects people with the thoughts and attitudes of their “social milieu”, even if those around them are unfamiliar with the events in their narrative. Stories reveal how individuals understand their role in their social and cultural environment (Elliot, 2005). For those in TCs, the way people construct their story can reveal how they see themselves, and their interactions and relationships with the community and their wider social networks. This is especially important within TCs as Best et al. (2014) argue that social connectedness, or how integrated members are within a community, is linked to recovery.

Narrative analysis draws on the symbolic interactionist tradition whereby an individual’s sense of meaning, about themselves, others and their social environment, arises through social interactions (Blumer, 1969). Through social encounters, individuals reflect on what something means to them and then interpret it, deciding either to keep the original meaning or revise it. Meaning is thus not static as it is continuously forming and reforming. In relation to personal identity, a sense of self and relationship to one’s social environment is capable of undergoing continuous transformation and revision (Burkitt, 2008). This continual process of social (re)interpretation and personal change links in with Jones’ (1976) concept of social learning as individuals learn more helpful ways of relating through everyday interactions with one another. Meanings can be challenged through reality confrontation in a TC and reinterpreted so that a new of way of relating to oneself and others emerges.

The process of meaning construction and reconstruction does not occur within a neutral social environment. TCs in particular have been critiqued in the past for issues related to social control and manipulation (Sharp, 1975; Baron, 1987). Whilst it is acknowledged that institutions, communities and groups do exert influence upon individual agency (Blumer, 1969), traditional critiques of power and social control within TCs ignore the
ways in which individuals can also influence the community. This paper questions whether the process of meaning making is therefore one-directional. In order to contextualise issues of power and to understand the dynamics of an individual transformative process within a community, it is necessary to examine whether meanings within the TC also change.

Exploring the process, rather than just the outcome, of personal change is particularly important as Emily’s narrative centres her weight loss and a move away from obesity, a visible change outcome. Focussing solely on her changed appearance is problematic as it risks minimising other, less visible, forms of change. Moreover, it potentially aligns the TC as encouraging or reinforcing the Western societal ideal of bodies that are young, healthy and thin (Shilling, 2005). As those who are obese are vulnerable to stigma and depression (Epiphaniou and Ogden, 2010; Luppino et al., 2010), it is necessary to understand how Emily perceived the TC’s response to her weight and weight loss. Lastly, it can be questioned whether Emily felt she was a passive receiver of support from the TC or whether she moved to a more active role to influence the TC’s perspective on weight and body image.

Method

This study used a narrative research methodology to examine a narrative based TC approach. It was part of a broader research project exploring storytelling within a community. The primary method of data collection was narrative interviewing in order to understand the participant’s perspective of the social processes involved in personal change. Whilst this method is subjective, Bailey and Tilley (2002) argue the aim of narrative research, like many qualitative methods, is understanding meaning making. Examining personal narratives enables the researcher to look for holistically shared communal meaning, which is constructed within a cultural and community context (Stivers, 1993).

Ethical permission to conduct this study was granted from the university who sponsored the research. As this study is a single case study of one TC, confidentiality was carefully considered (Gabbard, 2000). Whilst some case studies may change the gender of the participant in order to ensure a “thick disguise” (Winship, 2007:179), Emily’s gender and details of her weight loss story were central to her narrative. To ensure confidentiality, a pseudonym is used for the participant, “Emily” and the TC, “Haven”. Emily was made aware she could withdraw from the research at any time. Emily also provided written consent for her story to be captured and published in the hope that this might help others. As a member of Haven since 2005, the author was familiar with the daily life of the community and
individual narratives within the TC. Though the author was not living in the community at the time of the research, she was aware of her “insider” and “outsider” status within Haven. Her experience and familiarity with Haven enabled her to position Emily’s narrative within the wider community to find intersubjective meanings, whilst her outsider status provided a distance to reflect upon her narrative for themes and tensions. Throughout all stages of the research, the author reflected upon her own shared status within Haven through note taking and discussions with her research supervisor in order to limit the imposition of her values on Emily’s story (Etherington, 2004; Davies, 2008). This process included ensuring that Emily had space, time and freedom to answer the questions as she wanted, asking her clarifying questions to ensure understanding of her perspective, and analysing tensions and contradictions within her story.

Participant selection was purposeful (Miller and Crabtree, 2004) as Emily had self-identified areas of change, including her weight loss, and had experience of telling her story to others within the community. Her interview took place on 23rd June 2011, followed an in-depth interview structure (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006), and was just over 2-hours. Questions focussed on what brought Emily to Haven, what she wanted to be different as a result of her time in the TC and how she experienced life within the community. Emily was interviewed at her home, which she had recently purchased after having lived in a community house with other women. All direct citations to Emily’s interview in the text are noted by double quotation marks. The interview was recorded on a digital audio-reorder, transcribed verbatim and transcription formed the first stage of data analysis.

Data analysis in this study was thematic. Whilst Riessman (2008:73) describes thematic analysis as both “intuitive” and “straightforward”, she also notes it is very systematic with a meticulous attention to detail. Following Coffey and Atkinson (1996), the thematic analysis focussed on themes across the whole of the text, rather than fragmenting the data into codes. Once transcribing was complete, the text was read several times whilst listening to the tape in full to look for themes, patterns and emotion within the narrative. Emily’s story is analysed using the story of her weight loss to understand her changing role within the community, her relationship to herself and how community values shifted as a result of her sharing her narrative with the TC.

Context: storytelling in community
At the time of the interview, Emily was a 37-year old single woman and had been part of the community since 2007. During her time in the TC, Emily experienced significant personal change, including moving from obese to overweight through her six and a half stone weight loss. Her story occurred and was re-told within a therapeutic faith community, Haven. Unlike other TCs, Haven is an open democratic adult TC that is entirely self-funded, does not receive any external funding and the leadership structure is shared (for examples of this type of TC, see Holmes and Williams, 2010; 2012). Members, who are all equally both “staff” and “patient”, live in their own private residences; many own their homes and the others rent or live in shared houses. Regular community meetings include the Sunday services, gender specific “homework” groups, discipleship groups, worship group, women’s nights, men’s breakfasts and coffee mornings. Additionally, members arrange their own informal social activities throughout the week. Though Haven is a faith community, members do not have to be a Christian as all are welcome to participate in whatever way is helpful for them. It is accredited by the Community of Communities (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2016) and its core values and qualities are shared by a range of other communities in the TC network.

Membership is entirely voluntary and there is no time limit on how long someone can be an active member. During data collection, there were approximately 75 adult members and most members were employed and/or in education. Haven’s narrative culture encourages individuals to continuously share their own story of change (Holmes, 2005). Emily therefore had several opportunities to share her story of change within the community: one-to-one, within small groups and to the wider community during church services. Her act of storytelling was consistent with Haven’s culture that views narratives as continuously changing. Though the author had already heard part of Emily’s story prior to the interview, she did not know it in detail. The interview began by asking Emily what brought her to the TC and her story unfolded from there.

Findings: Emily’s Story

Emily shared she first came to the TC because she “just had a couple of things” she wanted “to clear up” and her life “would be perfect”. She explained:

So um, I came for my two main reasons, one was that I wanted to lose weight and the other is that I had an unhelpful fear of men […] But a little while after being here, I thought whoa, maybe everything wasn’t as good as I thought it was. […] I was very lonely in London. But because I kept so busy, I didn’t really realise that my life was nothing. I didn’t have a life. I didn’t go out. I didn’t do anything.
When asked what she would do after addressing her two issues, Emily responded, “well I was hoping it would be better, that I would be thin”. For Emily, the focus of her personal change and one of her main reasons of coming to Haven, was her physical appearance. Despite coming to the TC to lose weight and overcome a fear of men, Emily did not begin to address either issue upon arriving in Haven. She said one of the first things to change as a result of living in the community was her daily routine. She described a “normal” pattern of everyday living was to eat, sleep and work: “I just slept all the time. Didn’t go out. And I ate. Slept and ate. That was the cycle. Which um...yeah went on for years”. Emily stated her routine was “so normal” to her that it was “nothing worth addressing”. However upon moving to the community, TC members challenged this routine. Living with two other women in a community house that continuously had other members of TC visiting, Emily related she was surrounded by other community members when she was not at work. She described this tension between her definition and the community’s definition of a “normal” daily structure:

I was quite cross to begin with because I thought, well they clearly don’t understand...that I’m going to bed. So I would sleep until 2pm on a Saturday and I would get up, when I was here, and I would get up because well I don’t know why I got up. I think probably to go get some food...and go back to bed...and they said, people in the house would say, "you alright?" or would knock on my door and say “are you still alive?” and I’d be like yeah, I’m just doing what I do. It’s Saturday... So... (clears throat) I think it was quite, quite annoying. But I thought, I didn’t see that my behaviour was abnormal.

Emily explained she struggled to see her routines as problematic and said it was “stressful” getting used to having so many people in the house.

During the interview, Emily seemed to quickly shift her focus from talking about the challenges of living in shared accommodation to discussing her weight loss story. Returning to her two reasons for coming to Deal, she stated the “men thing” is not “completely gone yet” and losing weight “soon became like a minor issue actually in the end”. She highlighted her weight loss story did not begin with her physical appearance but with her relationship with herself. Emily shared her view of herself was initially linked to her attempts to lose weight:

I couldn’t do it [lose weight] because I was s**t. Well I’m rubbish at everything else so I am going to be s**t at this. So I never believed in myself enough that I could do it. And even if I could do it what was the point because I am so s**t anyway so there’s not really any point in trying.

Rather than starting with another attempt to lose weight, Emily shared a member of the community suggested “the issue was I had to love myself”. Initially, Emily said she was “cross” at the suggestion and described it as a “really impossible thing”. However, she
explained that “for want of another solution” she would try it. She elaborated on the process of loving herself:

But when I tried to do that, I found that the reason I hated myself was so many and long and numerous. [...] You can’t suddenly go I weigh this much but I’m still going to love myself. I couldn’t do that. So I had to try and find other things that I wasn’t horrendous at. And then I lost a bit of weight. And then I felt better about myself. So it kind of went in parallel.

As she began to love herself, Emily said she approached losing weight from a different perspective: “And I did it more on the fact that I wanted to feel better than I wanted to look better”.

Additionally, she described undergoing a significant transformation about being likeable or dislikeable as a person. Prior to beginning the process of loving herself, Emily thought that because she hated herself for being “fat”, other people must also hate her for the same reason. However she came to realise through her relationships with those in Haven that in actuality:

People don’t hate you because you’re fat. They hate you because you’re annoying or because you bitch all the time or because you’re a horrible person. And that’s quite a big...mind shift...to go through. They don’t hate me because of my weight. I hate me because of my weight. So I have to let them like me because of the things I am good at rather than the way I look.

Emily explained she came at the process of losing weight from a “different angle” as she did not focus on her appearance:

I thought I don’t need to lose weight, I just need more energy. I just need to feel better about myself, be more awake and not be exhausted all the time. So that was the way I started doing it. I don’t know how I started loving myself. I think I just probably started to stop hating myself as much. So if I did something that was good, rather than go oh it’s because so and so were there and they always make things good, I thought, do you know what, I did an all right job then. [...] So it kind of builds up very, very slowly and probably I guess without even realising it.

Emily found a new definition of loving herself based upon believing she was “fabulous” and “incredulous”, even though no one else agreed: “I think it’s not caring what people think, when they think negatively. I mean I don’t do it all the time. Don’t think I’m healed but it’s much easier than it was before”. For her, it was enough she believed she was fabulous, even if no one else validated that belief. In time, Emily said she realised if people like her for her “skills”, then she could change the way she valued and related to herself. She also explained that as a result of her changed relationship with herself, she gained the confidence to purchase a house and live independently for the first time in her life, whilst still continuing in relationship with those in Haven.
Prior to making her transformative change, Emily reported she used to believe she “doesn’t really have a story” to tell. However, she changed her perspective and stated, “I do have a story...and it’s believing in it”. Emily had the opportunity to share her story of her weight loss and her changed relationship with herself with those in the community. One of her narrations was recorded on a CD, providing her the opportunity to listen to herself telling her own story. She reflected:

When I heard my voice, I was like, is that me? I was so shocked it didn't sound anything like I thought I would sound in my head, because I couldn't breathe, I didn’t know what I was saying, the story didn't make sense, it was like all over the place and I thought, that's not how it comes across. That's not how I've seen myself... it was quite enlightening.

Though Emily highlighted she had been told by her work supervisors she lacked “confidence” in her role, hearing herself share her story of weight loss increased her confidence at work:

I did a job where it was all voice over to a big team of people [...] And I projected my voice because I thought, my voice isn't irritating. It wasn’t irritating on that CD so there’s no reason why it's suddenly become irritating now. And I thought I do sound coherent.

Moreover, Emily noted that after she shared her story to the wider community, others approached her looking for help with weight issues:

There’s quite a lot of people who have issues with food that you don’t find out about until you start doing something like this and then other people start talking about them and stuff with me. [...] Everyone was like oh we’d really like to walk with you or some people were like, will you help me? I want to try and lose some weight or different things. Yeah lots of people asked me about it afterward.

She said many of these issues could be “tricky” and “embarrassing” for people. However, her story encouraged others to change their relationship with themselves and their weight as shifting their identity away from appearance. Furthermore, Emily started a cycling group within the community and supported several individuals in their efforts with weight loss. She did not espouse everyone must approach weight loss in the same way as her, but by not associating self-affirmation directly with weight or body image, she did support others to find ways to validate themselves without relying on a change to their physical appearance.

**Analysis**

Because Emily’s weight loss, and move away from obesity, is so visible, it is easy to prioritise her resulting weight loss and overlook the complex social processes at play within her narrative. At the start of her story, she said she came to the TC because she wanted her
life to be better and defined better as “thin”. Additionally, dislike of a person, namely herself, was associated with weight and appearance. It was almost as if Emily's weight was a fixed part of her understanding of herself. However, and in direct contrast to her previous view that self-validation would come from weight loss, her process of losing weight began first with self-validation. Importantly, throughout her narrative Emily does not ever describe an ideal weight or use a comparative model that she was aiming for. Rather, it seems the goal during her process was not losing weight, but loving herself, which came to be equated with validating herself. Being “thin” ceased to become the basis for herself and others’ acceptance and the process of weight loss began to represent a new definition of self-love, rather than as a means of gaining validation. Her sense of herself was no longer fixed, as her value was no longer associated with her appearance, even though her appearance continued to change with weight loss. Hearing her own story told in her own voice gave Emily even more self-assurance and appears to have facilitated further change. She shifted her self-narrative away from believing she had no story to share and that her voice was “irritating”, to recognising she did have a story and she could project her voice with confidence. This process highlights that “reclaiming one’s story” involves not only a discussion with oneself but also with others (Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea, 2001:220).

However, there are also unresolved tensions within Emily’s story. Firstly, she mentioned her fear of men was the second reason for coming to Haven, but other than to say the issue was not resolved, she made no other comment about men or her fear of them. It is unclear where her fear of men stemmed from, what her fear was about, and whether and how she intended to address it. Moreover, despite Haven having men in the community, she also made no reference to her relationship with them. Secondly, there is a clash between her version of normality in relation to her daily routine, and the normality she encountered within Haven. Specifically, her housemates challenged her pattern of work, eat and sleep, which for her was “stressful” and “annoying”. Whilst Emily’s daily patterns did change, there is a gap in her story that does not fully explain how she felt about this process.

Discussion

By exploring the process of meaning making in Emily’s story, her narrative can be seen as a process of transformative personal identity that is worked out in relationship with others. From this perspective, it can be argued that the process of weight loss, rather than the
weight loss itself, is of primary importance to her story. In addition, Emily’s narrative highlights the dialogical process of shared meanings within a community. Significantly, Emily’s transformation occurred in relationship with others. She explained telling her story within relationships enabled her to understand her changes and provided the basis from which more personal changes were possible. This is in keeping with a TC ethos that traditionally encourages social support through relationships within community environments (Jones, 1968; Davidson et al., 1999; Best et al., 2014). The positive outcomes for mutual support include new self identities, a renewed sense of life’s worth and new perspectives on the natural and social world (Davidson et al., 1999), all of which Emily displayed in her narrative. Moreover, Stevens (2012:537) argues that by adapting to life within a TC, clients can learn to be “responsible” and “autonomous”. In this sense, then, Emily’s personal relationships in the community were both the context for where her change occurs and the catalyst for making further changes.

Nonetheless, as previously noted, her narrative does raise tensions around questions of social conformity, particularly in her description of adopting Haven’s meaning of a “normal” daily routine. Rose (1999) argues that the psychotherapeutic disciplines have primarily validated their position within society in service of businesses and other economic and government agencies as a means of constructing a sense of normality and what it means to be a healthy, adjusted individual in society. From this perspective, violations of normality have little to do with maintaining biological health; society is more concerned with preserving a set of social expectations that are linked to government and financial interests. Moreover, Shilling (2005) notes that since the 1950s, there has been a significant shift that has placed the body at the core of personal identity. Key to this trend is a direct link between the outward appearance of the body and personal identity, and the ways in which society values bodies that are fit, slim, youthful, toned and healthy (Shilling, 2005). There is constant pressure for individuals to attain and then maintain an ideal body type, often by whatever (natural or unnatural) methods possible. For those who are obese, they can experience depression and stigma for being outside this ideal (Luppino et al., 2010).

One interpretation of Emily’s narrative would be that she succumbed to societal pressure to be thin and that Haven became an agency that defined daily normality (Sharp, 1975; Baron, 1987). It would also seem to suggest that rather than becoming empowered, Emily had become trapped within Haven’s, and perhaps the wider Western society’s definition of health, normality and happiness. However, such an interpretation ignores the complexities and deeper meanings within Emily’s story; it also does not acknowledge the way Emily influenced and transformed meaning within Haven. Davies (2008) highlights
Mead’s (1934) approach to understanding the self involves recognition of the ways social structure, in this case a TC, influences the development of the self and the ways in which individuals influence the structure. In this sense, meaning moves from the structure to the individual and in the “opposite direction”, from the individual to the structure (Davies, 2008:25). As Mead (1934) theorises, the process of constructing the self is continuous and people therefore have the potential to use their individuality and creativity to influence and transform structural meanings. Whilst the flow and pattern of groups are dependent upon continued affirmation of meaning by its members, because individual meanings are not fixed, members are continuously defining and redefining theirs and others’ actions. Redefinitions spark new meanings, which in turn give rise to new “conceptions”, “relations” and “types of behaviour” (Blumer, 1969:67). From this perspective, the TC engaged in a “developing process instead of a mere issue or product of psychological or social structure” (Blumer, 1969:67). Meaning can be conceptualised as a dialogical process, involving continuous conversations between members and the community that are mutually influential. Within Haven, this process of meaning making occurs through storytelling. In this way, the flow of meaning moves from the community to a member and back again.

For Emily’s story, the movement between individuals and the community in shaping community values is significant because it further highlights that her change process was not simply about conformity to community standards. Emily’s story is also about transforming meanings within Haven. She related that after she shared her weight loss story to the entire community, individual members began to ask her specific questions about her process of change. Issues such as weight loss, body image, exercise and food began to be explored by more members, and others experienced further change. What is more, Emily started a cycling group within the community, which at the time was a first in Haven, and shared meanings regarding weight and self image began to be reconstructed within the community, as they were no longer defined by physical appearances.

Haven places a significant emphasis on the tradition of oral storytelling within the community. Many community values, practices and even its history are primarily shared in a narrative form, and through storytelling, the TC’s values change over time. Riessman (1993) argues that individuals do not tell the same story the same way twice and thus even the same person telling the community’s narrative will alter the story with subsequent retellings. Thus community meanings are flexible, fluid and in a continuous state of change as they are transformed and influenced by individual members. The community influences individuals and individuals in turn shape and re-shape the community. This points to the ways in which an interpretation of TCs using social control (Sharp, 1975; Baron, 1987) to affect change
does not allow for the role that members play in shaping and influencing the values and practices of the community. Though communities do influence their members (Blumer, 1969), this process is not one way. Community narratives are formed from individual stories (Hinchman and Hinchman, 2001). As individuals stories are constantly in motion, so too is the community narrative. Individual and community narratives do not just mutually reinforce each other but they challenge and change one another. Whilst Emily does not reveal how she resolved the tension surrounding her daily routine, she was clear that weight loss was not about losing weight but about self-love and self-validation. Others began to seek Emily out for help on their own issues surrounding food and weight, and she has introduced activities, such as the cycling group, to the TC. Thus the interaction between community and individual narratives is a mutual and a multi-conversational process. Issues of power are certainly important and these issues need exploring from other perspectives, taking into account the active roles that members themselves play.

Emily’s account is a contribution that reflects part of the communal Haven story. Nonetheless, it is important to note that her story of self-validation through relationships does not necessarily represent the experiences of everyone within Haven. There are many missing stories, in particular those who have left Haven, those who are struggling to integrate, stories from men and newcomers to the community. Additionally, the research is not able to address the question of how individuals’ narratives and the wider Haven narrative are continuously (re)forming on a daily basis through everyday social interactions in the TC. It is hoped that this study has opened the dialog for narrative discussion within TCs and that future studies will be conducted that prioritise the perspective of members in understanding their social environment.

**Conclusion**

This paper has been concerned with exploring the role of storytelling during a process of personal change within a TC context. Narrative analysis highlights how individuals derive meaning from their lives and how this meaning is made and re-made throughout various life events. Emily illustrated how change occurred in and with the help of a community environment. Moreover her story indicates that change is a dialogical process involving both individuals and the community. For TCs, this highlights that stories have a transformative role in the community and highlight that relationships are both the context and the catalyst for personal change. Further research examining everyday acts of storytelling within a TC
would provide greater insight as to how narrative occurs through daily social interactions and facilitates the process of personal change.

References


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