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**Values and Well-being in Community Psychologists: A Qualitative Analysis of ‘Letters
from the Future’**

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Abstract

Community psychologists face an increased risk of developing (mental) health problems, which is why this study examines personal values that contribute to their well-being. Values play a major role in a person's life as guidelines and determinants for actions. **Methods:** The narrative approach 'Letters from the future' is chosen, in which community psychologists describe a desirable future scenario. The positive aspects of this scenario indicate what the participants value and what is important to them regarding well-being. In total, 53 letters were coded and analyzed in terms of values, their importance and their relationship to well-being. **Results:** First and foremost, community psychologists described a strong focus on socially oriented values such as supportive communities, tolerance and consideration. Also, being able to act according to one's personal interests and passions, being in a safe environment, and not having to worry too much played a crucial role. **Discussion:** The results show that community psychologists do value what they are working for (i.e. value congruent) which is likely to have a positive effect on their well-being. It might also increase their job satisfaction and motivation. The letters further seem to hint at what community psychologists are currently missing, such as opportunities for self-directed actions and pleasurable experiences, which might be potential causes or amplifiers for current problems. Future research should focus on how these findings can be used in interventions to promote well-being in community psychologists.

Keywords: Values, Well-being, Community Psychologists, Healthcare, Letters from the Future, Narrative Futuring, Narrative Psychology

Community psychologists are at risk to experience a low well-being or even develop (mental) health problems. This study therefore aims to identify personal values that positively contribute to their well-being, using a narrative method called narrative futuring.

The everyday life of community psychologists includes facing pain, suffering and negativity in other people, which in turn can lead to related problems in psychologists (Shapiro et al., 2007). This is in accordance with a great amount of other literature that states that healthcare providers have an increased risk of (mental) health-related problems (see e.g. Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams, Pattani & Michie, 1998; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Aside from factors that are already inherent to the system such as workload (see e.g. Shapiro, 2007; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998), psychological factors seem to play a role as well. These include, among others, the pressure of responsibility for other people's well-being (Oginska-Bulik, 2006) or moral endeavors such as a 'stress of conscience' (Glasberg, Eriksson & Norberg, 2007). Furthermore, not being able to help patients, while believing it is one's duty to do so or facing contradictory demands during treatment can lead to distress (Söderberg et al., 1999; Sørli et al., 2003). All these psychological stressors can result in a lowered psychological well-being, defined by Ryff (1989). Among others, she found the pursuit of meaningful goals and a feeling of continued growth and development to be crucial aspects of psychological well-being. Not being able to support a client the way one wants to, might then be perceived as e.g. a lack of competences or one might feel like failing to achieve a personal goal.

Stress as well as psychological well-being show influence on job performance. The relationship between stress and job performance is often reported as an inverted U-shape, indicating that low and high stress levels lower the employees' effectiveness (Jamal, 1984; AbuAlRub, 2004). Wright and Cropanzano (2000) also found psychological well-being to be a

predictor for job performance. The higher the psychological well-being, the better the job performance and vice versa. In this context, another closely related factor for job performance is job satisfaction. Here, Judge and his colleagues' (2001) meta-analysis of 312 correlations found an average correlation of .30 between those two variables, being a moderate magnitude.

Summing up, community psychologists face many different factors that could potentially contribute to higher stress levels and a lower psychological well-being and job satisfaction. All of these factors seem to negatively affect job performance, which means that not only the community psychologists themselves are affected, but also their clients might experience non-optimal treatment. In contrast, a high psychological well-being and job satisfaction are associated with a better job performance.

Since the healthcare system includes many stressors (Shapiro, 2007), this study aims to identify contributors to psychological well-being and job satisfaction that protect them from potential negative consequences. Research suggests that personal values are one of these contributors. Values are something a person sees as important, and as such they provide direction and guidance to one's life (Sools, Mooren & Tromp, 2015). Schwartz and his colleagues (2012) define values as 'trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or group' (p. 664). Taylor (1989), underlines the importance values can have for a person by stating that they are a fundamental aspect of the self. Important to note here is the difference between the term value and the term goal. Values are fundamental ideas of what the person *values*, guidelines that have no 'end' and are therefore constantly present. In contrast, goals are concrete formulations that do have a defined end-state and as such they are located in the future.

Values can be a crucial aspect of one's well-being. Oishi et al. (1999) for example, argue that subjective well-being is influenced by how value-congruent a person's actions are. Evidence-based interventions such as the Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) pick up on these findings as well. One central focus of ACT is the identification of personal values and ways to orient the patient's life around these in order to increase one's well-being (Schreurs & Westerhof, 2015), which shows clearly how important values can be.

In the context of work, values in general play a key role as well. For example, a study among firefighters revealed that the extent of perceived value congruence leads to more job satisfaction and higher performance. Value congruence hereby is the extent to which the individuals' values are in line with those of the organization (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). This is closely related to the concept of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. According to Ryan & Deci (2011), values determine the extent of intrinsic motivation. So, when a person's actions are in line with one's values, one is intrinsically motivated. Vansteenkiste and his colleagues (2007) additionally found that so called extrinsic 'work value orientations' correlate with negative outcomes such as emotional exhaustion and a lower satisfaction after achieving a goal, whereas intrinsic work value orientations have the opposite effect. In conclusion, the extent of congruence between values and (job-related) actions can either promote or lower one's well-being, job satisfaction, and therefore job-performance as well.

In concrete, Schwartz and colleagues (2012) defined 19 different values that people live by. Based on their own former work and newer insights gained through questionnaire research, they found 10 basic values, some of them having multiple components leading to 19 values in total (see Table 1). These will serve as the foundation for the analysis conducted in this research.

Table 1. *The 19 Values in the Refined Theory, Each Defined in Terms of Its Motivational Goal*

Value	Conceptual definitions in terms of motivational goals
Self-direction-thought	Freedom to cultivate one's own ideas and abilities
Self-direction-action	Freedom to determine one's own actions
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and change
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification
Achievement	Success according to social standards
Power-dominance	Power through exercising control over people
Power-resources	Power through control of material and social resources
Face	Security and power through maintaining one's public image and avoiding humiliation
Security-personal	Safety in one's immediate environment
Security-societal	Safety and stability in the wider society
Tradition	Maintaining and preserving cultural, family, or religious traditions
Conformity-rules	Compliance with rules, laws, and formal obligations
Conformity-interpersonal	Avoidance of upsetting or harming other people
Humility	Recognizing one's insignificance in the larger scheme of things
Benevolence-dependability	Being a reliable and trustworthy member of the ingroup
Benevolence-caring	Devotion to the welfare of ingroup members
Universalism-concern	Commitment to equality, justice, and protection for all people
Universalism-nature	Preservation of the natural environment
Universalism-tolerance	Acceptance and understanding of those who are different from oneself

Taken from Schwartz et al., 2012, page 669

Schwartz and his colleagues (2012) did not specify these values in the context of work, Murray and Ziegler (2015) however, conducted an interesting study where they used narrative methods to identify motives and values among community health workers. Their results include a strong focus on social justice, equality and community empowerment. 'The commitment to help to create a better world' (p. 347) was a fundamental motive for many participants. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) confirms these findings. Here, aspects like empowerment and self-determination for the clients, human rights, social justice, human

relationships and more play a key role for social workers and community health workers alike (Assembly, N.D., 2008). These aspects are reflected in the value categories of Benevolence and Universalism. A recent literature review further found in total two studies that analyzed factors of why psychotherapists stay motivated (Schep, 2017). The first study, conducted by Rupert and colleagues (2012) found the following influential factors: balance between free time and work time, control at work and satisfying experiences (such as successes). The second study (Miller, 2007) additionally found transcendence (the belief that one's work is of importance), passion, and the feeling that the job fits to oneself. These aspects are reflected in the values of Self-direction and Achievement.

One way to investigate values is the method of narrative futuring. Narrative futuring is defined as the imagination of an ideal future through story telling (Sools & Mooren, 2012). Research showed that imagining the future plays a role in providing one's life with meaning and purpose (McAdams & McLean, 2013) and especially imagining a positive future seems to come along with advantages regarding mental health. For example Sools and Mooren (2012) found that it can help building up resilience when it comes to anticipating crisis and change. Similar effects on resilience were also found by Allen et al. (2011) and Randall et al. (2015). Crucial for this study is that narrative futuring can change perceptions and opinions regarding events from the past and present. By imagining the future, certain events or memories may be redefined or reinterpreted in order to connect or relate them to the imagined future, thus making them "fit it". This way, they help people connecting different, seemingly unrelated events and thereby creating a full story with meaning (Sools, Mooren & Tromp, 2015). As such, narrative futuring can be described as a 'prospective reflection instrument' (Sools, Tromp & Mooren, 2015, p. 362).

So far, narrative futuring has been used to research resilience and a sense of coherence (see e.g. Sools & Mooren, 2012 or Borgmann, 2016). Aside from that, narrative futuring has mainly found its use in applied interventions in order to increase exactly these two aspects (see e.g. Bohlmeijer, 2007). However, Sools and Mooren (2012) argue that narrative futuring can also be used to identify ‘goals and values in a specific and highly personalized context’ (p. 218) by looking at the aspects of the future that are labeled as positive.

This last statement is further supported by the theory of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In general, possible selves are ideals of who a person wants to become, could become and is afraid of becoming. Possible selves are thus mental representations associated with certain emotions and *values*. The bottom line of the theory is that these images of potential future selves steer a person’s behavior, since they want to become the desired self and avoid becoming the feared self. In this context, possible selves provide mental pictures of end states, strategies to achieve them and corresponding values and affects. In addition to that, Markus and Nurius (1986) argue that possible selves ‘provide an evaluative and interpretative context for the current view of self’ (p. 954). Here, too, values play a key role. According to the authors, the self-concept is more than just the present time – it includes the future states and the values attached to them as well. In 2006, Hoyle and Sherrill evaluated the theory and concluded that it still provides ‘rich and detailed descriptions of future-oriented self-representations’ (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006, p. 1693).

In line with the suggestion of Sools and Mooren (2012) and Markus and Nurius’s Possible Selves Theory (1986) this study uses narrative futuring to identify important values that contribute to the well-being of community psychologists.

The approach ‘letters from the future’ is chosen as one way to apply narrative futuring. Community psychologists wrote letters from the perspective of an ideal (i.e. desirable) future to a person in the present. This study wants to identify which values exactly play a central role – especially with regard to the person’s well-being. It is further interesting to see how these values are presented. For example, how community psychologists relate the values they mention to the present, or whether there are any specific combinations or connections among the values, i.e. are there certain patterns or clusters of values?

Based on former works, it is expected that Benevolence- and Universalism-related values will be a central theme in the letters. Additionally, when writing about one’s occupation, Self-direction and Achievement are most likely recurrent values as well. Important to note is that aside from these expectations, there were no concrete hypotheses formulated. This is because the task is very open and serves the purpose of gaining insight into an issue that has not been researched much, yet. Summing up, letters from the future will be analyzed in terms of 19 pre-defined values in order to find out what helps community psychologists to keep up their personal well-being, despite facing suffering and negativity on a daily basis.

Method

As part of the Manchester Community Psychology Festival, community psychologists wrote letters from an imaginary future self to their present self. This study will provide a secondary analysis of these letters. Borgmann (2016) collected given letters and analyzed them in terms of resilience and a sense of coherence, whereas this study will focus on personal values.

Participants and Sampling

In 2015 the Manchester University conducted the “Festival of Community Psychology: Creativity, Collaboration and Community”. One part of this festival was a workshop called “The FutureNow Experience”. This workshop was intended for participants who felt like losing hope and inspiration and had the goal of increasing exactly these again. For one hour, participants of the festival could voluntarily join to take part in the workshop. In total, an approximate number of 70 to 80 people entered, most of whom were community psychologists. Other participants include similar occupational groups or simply interested people. To keep the setting of the workshop as natural as possible, there was no specific sampling method applied. People who attended the festival were free to participate. Based on observation, slightly more women than men took part in the workshop. Also a small portion of the participants were Spanish. Aside from that, no information about the group of participants is known.

Procedure and Instruments

All of the festival’s participants received an E-mail prior to the festival, containing information about the FutureNow Experience workshop, providing a time, place and a short description of the exercise and its purpose. On the day itself, interested people received a piece of paper containing all the necessary information.

The FutureNow Experience workshop started with a short mindfulness exercise led by the instructor. Subsequently, participants were asked to imagine an ideal future for themselves. They were free to choose any point in time. The method of writing letters from the future is based on a course designed to promote resilience (Bohlmeijer, 2007). In this case, the instructor adjusted the task. Every participant’s ideal future had to meet four conditions: (a) living a life in abundance, (b) a world in freedom (e.g. no slavery), (c) peace and nonviolence, and (d) no

monetary system. The four conditions were added to make sure that the future was indeed ideal, since they take away a lot of potential negativity. Also, the festival centered around creativity, collaboration and community. Adding the four conditions helped to better address these three aspects. After a short mindfulness exercise, participants were instructed to write their personal letter to either their present self or any other addresser (time limit of 15-20 minutes). For ethical reasons, participants received carbon paper in addition to a pen and paper to be able to take their letter home while still providing a copy for research purposes. Also, red dot stickers were handed out so that participants could mark parts of their letters they wanted to exclude from scientific research. Lastly, the data was processed confidentially and anonymously.

Analysis

From the 70 to 80 participants, 63 letters were handed in. In the end, 53 letters were applicable for scientific analysis. Excluded letters consist of those written in Spanish (4) and those who were indecipherable (6). Some letters seemed to be written by non-native speakers as they were grammatically incorrect. Since they were still understandable, they were included in the analysis nonetheless.

As noted, the analysis is based on the works of Schwartz and his colleagues (2012). Table 1 in the introduction section shows all 19 values, including their respective, original definitions in short form. An expanded explanation and more can be found in their research paper (Schwartz et al., 2012).

The letters were scanned for value-related content. Here, the 19 values provided the coding scheme. Every statement that included positive values was marked and coded. For instance, “*art, music, teaching, [...], we all have different roles here – based on what interests you, you keep developing yourself in different ways [...].*” is a good example of a statement

coded as the value of ‘Self-direction’. In this case, the participant mentions both sub-categories (thought and action) of the Self-direction value, which is why the statement was coded as both, Self-direction–thought and Self-direction–action. In general, the letters were analyzed fragment-wise, meaning that single words or usually fragments of sentences were sufficient for coding:

“My life in the future would be composed of family, works and arts.” relates to the value of Benevolence (family), Self-direction (work and arts) and Hedonism (arts seen as pleasant hobby). As with “arts” in the example, single fragments sometimes referred to more than just one value. In these cases, codes were assigned based on the content and context of the fragments in question. For instance, in the given example, the author later in his letter elaborates what ‘family’, ‘work’ and ‘arts’ are about. In cases of ambiguity, codes were determined based on the content and context of *other* participants. If for example a lot of participants depicted art as a pleasant hobby as opposed to e.g. Self-direction, the decision was made to go for Hedonism in an ambiguous fragment about arts as well. The coding was therefore done in an iterative cycle, revising and adjusting codes when needed based on new insights.

After coding the statements based on their content, context and other participants’ letters, the importance of mentioned values was estimated, based on two indicators. First and foremost, the quantity of mentions. The more often a particular value was mentioned, the higher its importance. Secondly, the way of presentation. When participants for example literally stressed the importance, or portrayed a particular value as a crucial aspect of their future life, there was a higher importance ascribed than when participants did not do that.

After coding and estimating the importance, this information was used to delve further into the matter. Here, questions of interest include whether there are certain relationships among

values (patterns or clusters), the extent to which they are related to the present and, ultimately, their connection to well-being.

The result section will thus deliver information about which of the 19 basic values are mentioned in the letters, their respective prevalence and importance, their relationship among one another, their link to the present and their connection to well-being.

Results

The letters from the future were scanned and fragments were arranged according to the Refined Value Theory of Schwartz and his colleagues. The letters differed in quantity of code-related statements. Table 2 summarizes the most important descriptive statistics.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of Codes*

Most participants gave around five to eight related statements. Some participants gave even more than 10, whereas others gave almost none at all. One single letter did not include any values but instead was a fanciful story. In many cases, value-related statements took up around half of the text. Values were usually found in the body, meaning that value-related statements were often given in quick succession. The other half often included an introduction and an end, with story-telling elements such as elaboration.	Sum	344
	Mean amount per Person	6,49
	Median	6
	Standard Deviation	3,43
	Variance	11,79
	Minimum	0
	Maximum	15

The following paragraphs will describe the insights gained, ranked by importance, starting with the highest. Sometimes, one value was repeatedly mentioned in a single letter. A total prevalence is given as an indication of how important the respective value was in general and a prevalence of letters including the value in question is given, showing for how many participants a certain value played a role. Table 3 summarizes these results, sorted by importance, which is based on prevalence and participants' depictions.

Table 3. *Prevalence of All Mentioned Values.*

Value	Prevalence in total	Letters containing the value (%)
Benevolence	94	42 (79%)
Benevolence-caring	55	41 (77%)
Benevolence-dependability	39	33 (62%)
Universalism	77	37 (70%)
Universalism-concern	32	25 (47%)
Universalism-nature	29	25 (47%)
Universalism-tolerance	16	14 (27%)
Self-direction	61	26 (49%)
Self-direction-thought	31	26 (47%)
Self-direction-action	30	25 (47%)
Security	34	23 (43%)
Security-personal	19	16 (30%)
Security-societal	15	14 (26%)
Hedonism	37	26 (49%)
Worry-free	10	10 (19%)
Achievement	15	12 (22%)
Stimulation	10	10 (19%)
Humility	4	3 (6%)
Tradition	1	1 (2%)

Benevolence and Universalism

In accordance with the expectations, the two most prevalent value categories were Benevolence and Universalism, mentioned in 42 and 37 of the 53 letters, respectively.

All letters taken together, Benevolence was the most prevalent theme. 42 letters (79%) included some form of small communities, living together in harmony and supporting each other. In almost all cases, it was about communities such as neighborhoods – only two participants mentioned a romantic relationship and only seven used the term ‘family’. Especially the Benevolence-caring value was a central theme in many letters. Equal sharing and caring among members of the society was a crucial aspect of living together. *“The other day we had a big lunch together where everyone brought something to share”* and similar statements were frequently given by participants. Statements that fit the Benevolence-caring value were usually also in line with Benevolence-dependability statements, since they usually spoke in the I- or we-form, indicating that they were part of the community that shares and cares for others – thus being a dependable member of society. One explicit example of the Benevolence-dependability value is *“you have always been so caring to others. [...] and it’s great when the world fosters, nurtures these qualities in everyone [...]”*. 41 participants mentioned the caring aspect of Benevolence and 33 mentioned the dependability aspect, leaving eight cases in which the caring aspect was mentioned without the dependability aspect. In these cases, people described the situation more abstract, without them playing an active role. For instance, *“[...] and people seem to care about each other more”* is a fragment that excludes the author’s personal role, but still labels ‘the welfare of in-group members’ as important.

Regarding Universalism, the subcategory of concern was expressed most often (32 times in 25 letters). *“And young people feel safer – they are actively included in decision about their*

world” is one example of stressing equality among people. Living in respect for and unity with nature was mentioned about as often (29 times 25 letters). Statements like “[...] *making plans to keep our nearby environment healthy and green*” or “*Start planting, start hugging trees, observing plants, bees, animals. Because they will lead you to the light.*” exemplify the importance many ascribe to nature. With, in total 16 mentions, Universalism-tolerance was clearly less prevalent than the other two, but almost always seemed to be of greater significance when mentioned. “*Acceptance*”, “*without [...] feeling judged*” or “*of all ages & sexes*” are examples of people stressing that there is no more discrimination or social exclusion.

Self-direction, Security, and Hedonism

Self-direction, Security, and Hedonism were all mentioned by about half of the participants. Even though they were relatively high in frequency and did play a role in the letters, they were rarely depicted as the focus of the letter, so that they are ranked lower than Benevolence and Universalism.

With in total 63 mentions in 27 letters, Self-direction in general was the third most prevalent value. Participants hardly ever distinguished between the thought or action subcategory. One representative statement for this value is “*we feel free to express ourselves and we’re the empowerment to live in a fair world*”. Here, ‘feeling free to express ourselves’ most likely includes both, creativity and interests (Self-direction-thought) as well as goals and purposes (Self-direction-action). There was just one time when Self-direction-thought was expressed without the action component. The participant describes that “*art is expressed freely and with love*”, which only relates to creativity.

Security was a highly valued concept as well. 23 letters included the theme of Security and the total amount of codes is 34. 19 of these Security codes fit the Security-personal category.

“We live with open doors houses, we don’t fear each other” portrays the absence of crime and related dangers that the participants describe. Also physical health, *“my family, all in good health”* and resource management *“food here is plenty”* are common topics in the Security-personal category. Other participants leave it more general: *“It’s good to [...] be warm and safe [...]”*. A smaller amount of participants (15 mentions in 14 letters) wrote about Security on a societal level. If so, people described that the interaction between people on a larger scale has improved (e.g. *“There is no hostility or competition between people”*).

Another prevalent value was Hedonism – the feeling of pleasure and joy. Hedonism was expressed in many different forms. *“The world is ruled by calmness and gratitude for every small detail”*, *“I’m in a happy place”*, *“No one complains about anything, as everyone leads a fulfilling life and feels content”* all describe the presence of positive feelings. 26 participants presented Hedonism-related content.

Worry-free, Achievement, Stimulation, Humility and Tradition

In addition to the 19 codes, there was one more code created, called “Worry-free”. Ten participants emphasized a positive mindset – i.e. no worries. *“Don’t worry but look forward”*, *“till a few years ago, people used to worry too much”* or *“I feel happy because I don’t have to worry about everything”* are statements that clearly show that even though there is no actual danger involved, the mind is still full of cares. Statements regarding worries were usually either mentioned directly at the beginning – indicating that it was one of the first things that came to mind – or at the end as a sort of summarizing advice. So, when mentioned, the worry-free statements were of relatively great importance which is why an apart code was created. Participants often criticized their personal status quo, meaning that they were unhappy about themselves for worrying too much, because they associated negative consequences with it. One

participant for example literally states “*I wish I hadn’t wasted the first years of my life worrying about money, finding a job, and what world my kids are going to grow into*”.

Observable in 12 and 10 letters respectively, Achievement and Stimulation were less prevalent. On the one hand some participants wrote about concrete success: “*I hope to have helped others to be more peaceful, loving and kind with how I behave in my job role with my students.*” and “*the most important thing I did is to open a school to much different of your presents schools, I’m working there with very beautiful people, and this school is based in emotions and arts education!*”. These two statements give a detailed and explicit description of what the individual has achieved in the future. On the other hand, participants described them being here, in the future, as an achievement itself. For example one participant stated: “*you have strived so hard to get here and I want to acknowledge this part of you*”, thereby indicating that past efforts have contributed to the positive future. Achievement was also coded when participants implicitly regarded themselves as a part of humanity’s success. Participants sometimes began to describe what was negative in the past and then went on with the positive change and them being a part of it. “*All those things you said you worry about [and] that kept blocking your path have gone.*” is a good example of a participant describing a passive, implicit form of Achievement.

Stimulation – the experience of something new, something exciting, was usually described as one part of the positive moods people are in rather than a stand-alone value. “*So joyful and motivated to see new experiences*” or “*I am in a happy place, looking forward, excited to see the new you tomorrow*” were typical Stimulation-related fragments. As such, Stimulation never seemed to play a crucial role in one’s letter but was presented more as a by-product or a symptom of the positivity of the future.

Humility was mentioned by not more than 3 participants. However, in 2 of these 3 letters, it seemed to play an essential role. “1) [...] *You may spend a whole life time looking at yourself, while the world and compassion are so much bigger than that.* 2) [...] *The individual is not opposed to society, but a moment in its function. And anything that comes from you, at the same time, transcends you and is part of a whole system, which does not belong to you, but you belong to it*” and “*All is I am. I am a part of all and all is a part of me.*” seem to be very important, if not fundamental beliefs about the world for these two participants.

Lastly, Tradition was mentioned only one single time. “*Going back to our roots. Rediscovering basic principles, digging, planting, [...]. With our hands.*” Here, the participant ‘revives’ old cultural standards and applies them to his ideal future.

Power, Conformity and Face

Taking a look at the 19 values again, three value categories (five values in total) have not been mentioned at all. None of the participants presented him- or herself as powerful relative to others. In fact, for the better part of the letters, the opposite was the case. Establishments that hold power were no longer existent and people lived equally in small communities. The values of Conformity (conforming to rules/laws and avoiding to upset other people) were not mentioned explicitly as well. However, in this case, the Conformity-rules value did play a role in the letters – in the form of Self-direction. People described that they were free to do or think whatever they wanted, rather than conforming to any foreign or external standards, indicating that conformity is seen as something negative. In contrast, Face was simply not mentioned at all. None of the participants described that it was important for him or her to maintain a certain public image – and also no one described the opposite, for instance not feeling the pressure to maintain that image anymore.

Relationships between Values

The groupings of Schwartz and his colleagues prevailed in the letters as well. One Universalism value usually came along with at least one other Universalism value. Self-direction-thought and action were almost indistinguishable, since the statements were usually formulated vaguely. Both Benevolence categories were closely knit as well. An exception however is the rubric of Security. Personal and Societal Security were easy to distinguish and often mentioned independent of each other.

Moreover, Benevolence often transcended the boundary of groupings. Benevolence and Universalism, for instance, were closely related. Describing to devote resources to the well-being of one's direct social environment and expressing one's concern for human rights in general were often mentioned together or in consecutive sentences. In addition, Benevolence often came along with fragments regarding Security-societal as well. Here, participants often mentioned teamwork on a smaller level and peace on a greater scale and presented it as a sort of connection or causal relationship.

The Link between Future and Present

One of the study's interests was the gap between present and future portrayed by the participants. Remarkably, participants almost never explicitly talked about their personal present situation. As described so far, they do stress what is important to them by presenting the optimal future and mentioning its most crucial aspects but rarely do they mention their current efforts or status regarding these values. For instance, many describe living in unity with nature and animals – as opposed to mass consumption and destruction – as one of the most important changes, but none of the participants mentions to e.g. donate to respective organizations or something similar in the present. The same applies to the Benevolence-category. Here, participants almost in unison

picture a friendly and supportive community, but do not relate this to any concrete personal actions in the present. All in all, personal references to the present were rarely made.

One important exception was the level of (psychological) stress. A majority of participants described their own present situation as stressful, described their fellow men as being stressed out and clearly state that this has turned into the opposite. *“Stress doesn’t exist [in the future], yes, that stress that in your days ruled everybody’s lives, people didn’t know how to live without it.”* is a showcase statement that reflects the content of many letters.

In general the impression was gained that participants strongly focused on what is different. They thought about what is negative in the present and turned that into something positive for the future – thus ‘solving’ all the current problems like climate change or the inconsiderate character of mankind. Thereby, participants seemed to display a huge gap between present and future on a global level. This however, is based on an implicit, interpretative impression, not on explicit statements from the participants, because they rarely explicitly mentioned the present status, situation or their personal role in it.

A small amount of participants did stress the difference between present and future, though. *“I’ve never imagined that my ideals and my dreams would become reality”* for example shows a huge gap between future and present in the eyes of that participant. Regarding the occupation, only two participants bring up related content. In both cases, they say to have helped and supported others living a happier life, thereby making a concrete reference to the present. Another participant mentions that he is still in a relationship with his or her lover, indicating how important this person from the present is to him or her.

The Connection to Well-being

One special interest of this study was to gain insight into values that help community psychologists to stay well and motivated while facing adversity on a daily basis. As this question was not explicitly a part of the assignment for the participants, none of them went in on that topic explicitly. Nevertheless, the task stimulated the participants to write down a desirable future in which they are happy and well. In this context, a friendly and supportive living together that respects all members and preserves fundamental rights was a central theme. Helping and supporting other human beings that are struggling was presented as something positive (Benevolence and Universalism). Additionally, having enough free time to do all the things you want and less external pressure was repeatedly mentioned as a characteristic of that future as well (Self-direction and Hedonism). Last but not least, being physically and not having to worry too much about potential problems (Security and Worry-free) formed significant components of a happy future as well.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify key personal values for community psychologists using the method of narrative futuring. In accordance with expectations, Benevolence- and Universalism-related statements clearly dominated the letters by not only being mentioned most of the time, but also by being the center of the letters when mentioned. Noteworthy here is that even though this focus was expected, the extent of how tightly knit the communities in the future were, was surprising. Around 80% of the participants described a highly interdependent community with neighborhoods that both work together and spend their free time together. Describing a peacefully independent community with a lot of privacy for example would have still met the condition of peace and non-violence. But, that was never the case. Other important values

include Self-direction, which is in line with previous expectations, Security, and Hedonism. All three values were repeatedly mentioned and often played an important role in the letters – only second to Benevolence and Universalism. Worry-free was mentioned less often but if so, it played a crucial role. In contrast to previous expectations, Achievement was rarely mentioned and even if, played a minor role. Values, such as Stimulation and Humility were less prevalent, whereas the values Power, Conformity and Face were not mentioned at all.

Generally speaking, the findings are in line with and add on to former findings. Murray and Ziegler (2015) as well as the NASW (Assembly, N.D., 2008) found Benevolence- and Universalism-related values to be of great importance. Most likely, this focus stems from the target group themselves. A concern for social matters such as equality and supportiveness is probably existent in many community psychologists to begin with, since they might have chosen their occupation on this basis. Especially when talking about those who voluntarily visit festivals about issues like that to deepen their understanding and knowledge, one can presumably speak of an inherent interest. Additionally, the festival's motto could have acted as an amplifier, putting these values even more forward in the participants' minds. Rupert and colleagues (2012) and the NASW (Assembly, N.D., 2008) additionally described Self-direction as a significant aspect. Considering that Great Britain belongs to the most individualistic countries (Rothwell, 2010), Self-directed behavior can be seen as a cultural good. In line with this notion, participants portrayed Self-direction more as a general aspect of life, rather than connecting it to any specific context such as one's job for example. Therefore it seems that Self-direction, just like Benevolence and Universalism are indeed fundamental values that developed early in the lives of the participants.

Security was also valued highly. Considering the innate wish to be safe, as well as the incorporation of that into the task (life in abundance, freedom, and no violence) however, this aspect was most likely nothing particularly related to the target group. Achievement, however, was something that both, Miller (2007) and Rupert and colleagues (2012) found to be crucial in psychotherapists in the form of professional successes and the belief, that one's job is important. In this study, Achievement in general was coded rarely and only in three letters was it related to one's job. In fact, in most cases, the occupational group did not even exist anymore because political and societal structures had changed dramatically. The low importance of Achievement might stem from the huge gap created between present and future. Given the time limit of 20 minutes, the letters were short and focused on the most important aspects of the future only, which might be why there were so little concrete references towards the present, let alone elaborations on past achievements.

Completely new was the value 'Worry-free'. To my knowledge, this has not been found or discussed in any studies so far. One potential explanation is that community psychologists, due to their education and work experience, are fully aware of the impact that negative thoughts can have or maybe even have had on their lives, so that it becomes an important topic for certain individuals. That Power, Conformity, and Face were not mentioned at all can most likely be ascribed to the fact that the task was to focus on positive things. So, instead of talking about Power, participants talked about Benevolence and Universalism, thereby portraying an absence of power. Likewise, instead of talking about Conformity, participants talked about Self-direction – i.e. not having to conform to any external standards.

Next to the general identification of values, one additional topic of interest was the relationship between them. Here, the groupings provided by Schwartz and his colleagues (2012)

clearly shone through as well. As mentioned, participants basically did not differentiate between the two Self-direction categories, both Benevolence categories were often mentioned together or hard to distinguish as well and the Universalism categories were also often tied together. This is probably because they are both, content-wise and concept-wise comparable. The same explanation applies to the fact that Benevolence and Universalism often went hand in hand as well. Participants wished for sociality and acceptance on a community level as well as on a global scale. The only exception were the two Security-categories. The clear differentiation between them and the independence of related statements might be due to the fact that personal Security fits more to the self-related concepts, such as Self-direction or Achievement for example, whereas Societal Security often formed an aspect of Universalism-related scenarios. As such, there was often a clear difference, context-wise as well as content-wise.

A second question of interest was the relation between present and future. Here, a huge gap was observable. Most likely, the assignment itself played a key role in that one. By not only telling participants to imagine a desirable future, but also one that differs enormously from the world we currently live in (no money, no wars, abundance for everyone) might have triggered imaginations of a “fantasy world”. This way, the gap was artificially made bigger than it might have been otherwise. By definition, the future was so different from the present that drawing concrete connections was just not fitting. References were only made to stress the difference: participants resolved all the problems from the present, most commonly stress, intolerance or the inconsiderate human character.

Conclusion

In addition to the identification of values in general, their connection to well-being was the central purpose of this study. Generally speaking, the results do reflect the goals and

purposes of the community psychology field. On a smaller level, supportive and friendly communities with respect to each and every member (Benevolence) is what community psychologists (partly) work for. Being helpful towards others is what many regarded as a positive characteristic of the people in the future, which directly relates to their occupation. Almost naturally, they translate these values to a bigger level of acceptance, tolerance and social equality (Universalism) as well. Valuing Benevolence and Universalism so highly could indicate that many participants do indeed experience a high value congruence in their occupation where they have the chance to not only help individuals, but also act on a community level and therefore improve equality and social justice, which might lead to a particularly rewarding experience when a professional success is achieved. As stated, acting in accordance with personal values is a major factor for well-being (see e.g. Sools, Mooren & Tromp, 2015; Oishi, 1999; Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). A high value congruence, however, can be a double-edged sword. Finding it important to help and therefore being highly intrinsically motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2011) can lead to crushing experiences when the desired success is not achieved. Failing to help for example can have negative consequences in many different ways, like e.g. regarding oneself as incapable (Ryff, 1989). Ascribing a lot of value to helping communities or individuals can thus be both, a blessing and a curse. This negative side of the coin might partially be reflected in the extra code “Worry-free”. If helping a client is important, the fear of failing alone might put a lot of pressure on certain individuals, especially if they have made such negative experiences in the past. This also fits to findings such as Oginska-Bulink’s (2006), who found a pressure of responsibility for other peoples’ well-being in social workers as a straining factor. In many cases, people who stressed to e.g. worry less seemed to try to convince themselves of it in order to change that characteristic about themselves. This way participants

seemed to regard being worry-free as a fundamental aspect of well-being. Noteworthy is that the connection between values, well-being and work was never explicitly mentioned by any participant and is thus based on interpretation.

Alongside Benevolence and Universalism, Self-direction, Security and Hedonism might be connected to well-being as well. Related statements often seemed to reflect what is currently *missing* for the participants. The future absence of our current (political) structures, for example, enables people to grow personally, to use their talents and do what they are passionate about. According to many participants, this is not (or less) possible in the present, which is why Self-direction was desirable. Security-related statements were rarely specified. Often, a general impression is given, e.g. being physically healthy, that there is no criminality or no shortage of resources. Although there were no signs that Security-related statements were anything particularly related to the target group, its presence clearly reflects that feeling safe is crucial when it comes to well-being in general. Regarding Hedonism participants describe a generally happier mood in all people with attention and gratitude for the small things in life and having time for their interests and hobbies. Former studies (see e.g. Shapiro et al., 2005; Shapiro, 2007; Oginska-Bulink, 2006); Glasber, Eriksson & Norberg, 2007) have shown that there are a lot of stressors in the current healthcare system, such as high pressure and high workload, which can lead to long hours on a regular basis. Here, participants might experience a shortage of self-directed behavior and hedonistic activities, which might be why these aspects are highly valued in a desirable future. As such, Self-direction, Hedonism, and Security are portrayed as crucial requirements for well-being. The participants often very openly stressed the lack of opportunities for hedonistic and self-directed behavior, which most likely has a negative impact on well-being. The impression that Self-direction is something that is currently missing stands in contrast to

findings from Rupert and his colleagues (2012), who found that Psychotherapists, among other reasons, like their job due to a good balance between work and free time. One potential explanation is that Psychotherapists often do have more freedom regarding personal timing, compared to community psychologists – especially when they possess their own practice.

In conclusion, social values such as equality, tolerance and being supportive to others are of great importance to community psychologists. Since their work follows up on precisely these values one can suggest that community psychologists do experience value congruence at work, at least to a certain extent. Self-direction and Hedonism, on the other side, seem to reflect more of what is currently missing in the eyes of community psychologists, which might be why they often depict a huge gap between future and present. A combination of a mind full of cares and little opportunities to self-direct one's own behavior and doing pleasant things clearly attenuates the participants' well-being.

Limitations and Implications

This study successfully applied the method of narrative futuring in order to identify key values of community psychologists. To my knowledge, this has never been done before. Narrative futuring as technique can offer a great usefulness in that it is cheap, fast and can be applied to a wide range of people. Noteworthy is the very natural – compared to an experimental/laboratory – setting wherein the data was collected. Participants were totally free to enter, were therefore in a motivated and interested state of mind and they could just participate – without having to fill in questionnaires for personal data or similar 'unnatural' things. Most importantly, this study was able to collect a considerably large data set of 53 individual letters. This allows for comprehensive insights into the topic of interest. Also, the information collected is first-hand, i.e. from the affected people themselves. Nevertheless, the results have to be looked

at with caution. First and foremost because the analysis was done by one researcher only. This allows for subjectivity. Related to that is that the participants usually gave vague statements as opposed to specific ones. This leaves more room for interpretation and therefore increases the likelihood of misunderstandings. By applying a pre-defined coding scheme and using iterative cycles, the subjectivity was reduced as good as possible. By always coding based on the context of the letter in question and other letters, the likelihood of misunderstanding was minimized as good as possible as well. A second point is the group of participants. The workshop was intended for people who are currently struggling, to awaken new hope and inspiration in those who lack these. The results might therefore include values and beliefs that have a *negative* effect on community psychologists – perhaps without them even realizing. However, the exact opposite might be the case as well. Those who struggle now might have a clear idea of why they struggle and what keeps them moving still. A last point, also regarding the participants, is the setting. The festival's motto of community and collaboration might have created a situational priming effect that led to a greater focus on social values than there is in the everyday life. The same might apply to the conditions of non-violence, freedom and equality that were added to the task.

Personal values make up for an important part of one's life and well-being, which is why this study's findings are helpful. On the one hand, values can serve as guiding principles in people's lives and the extent of value congruence between personal values and those of one's occupation contribute to one's job satisfaction (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). Therefore, identifying key personal values and teaching people how to structure their life around it can help increase their well-being. Based on this study's findings, interventions could be developed, specifically designed for this target group and therefore taking into account certain potential pitfalls. This study emphasizes the importance of teaching community psychologists to better

handle professional failures or creating opportunities to add positivity into their lives instead of focusing on worries. This study further underlines the importance of building up resilience in future community psychologists in order to counter the potential negative effects because they will *inevitably* face negativity in clients and experience professional failures. One can say that the results support interventions such as the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, which are based on exactly this concept (see e.g. Schreurs & Westerhof, 2015). Therapies like the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, however, usually work on an individual level and after problems have already arisen. As both, the risks and the stakes are high, interventions are needed. Especially interventions that combine the teachings of ACT and this study's findings apply it in a preventive way, at best on a mezzo- or even macro-level are desirable to prevent these problems from developing in the first place.

Moreover, this study promotes the method narrative futuring. With an openly formulated task, the method was effective and also efficient in identifying general, broad values in community psychologists. With a more specific task, the method can most likely be used to research more specific questions of interest as well, e.g. situation specific values. This is also supported by Sools and Mooren (2012).

Summing it all up, the study was successful in applying the relatively new method 'narrative futuring' in order to analyze key personal values that relate to the work and well-being of community psychologists, i.e. Benevolence and Universalism. This study also provides insight into what community psychologists perceive as currently missing, such as Self-direction and Hedonism. Research that takes this study's weaknesses into account and builds up on its results is desired, because there is a high potential gain for both, the target group and their future clients.

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