Not sleeping in - an exploration of the influence of activism on the researcher.

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Paper

*You can be active with the activists*

*Or sleep in with the sleepers*

*While you're waiting for the Great Leap Forwards.*


from the Album: *Workers’ Playtime*, Go! Discs.

Communities are increasingly atomised in post-modern times, where individuation and anomie have increased, and a deeper understanding is required of why individuals give their time to community involvement. My recent research explored an example of community engagement by investigating the motivation of school governors and how this role is part of lives and learning. By looking at current societal circumstances through contemporary authors as well as factors relating to feminism, and by delving into individual responses to questions about why people volunteer, the research was necessarily interdisciplinary, and drew on different references to history, sociology, psychology and politics.

The research used a qualitative methodology to explore elements which gave rise to the urge to become involved with unpaid endeavours on behalf of others. The resulting auto/biographical narratives were analysed for themes and issues and the author's own reflexive narrative was included in this enquiry in order to locate herself in the work.

The vital role of motivation was explored across the micro, meso and macro levels of engagement. The central argument was that a psychosocial interpretation was needed to start to understand what prompts individuals to put themselves forward for a role as a community activist. Drawing on the work of Winnicott (1971), a unique combination of psychological factors relating to family background, upbringing and inherited values could be seen to be working agentically in conjunction with societal structures and mores to move an individual
to embrace this voluntary work. Reflecting Mills’ (1959/2000) treatise on the role of human agency in determining history, the different narratives showed the interface between these psychological and sociological elements and exhibited a clear need for recognition as outlined by Honneth (1995). The results indicated the necessity to explore motivation with volunteers to encourage a successful involvement through the identification of unique motivational factors and in order to be able to attend to those aspects which enhance self-esteem and self-respect.

This paper describes the way that experience of activism itself led to the decision to become a researcher and explains the process of discovery that the author experienced in reflexively exploring her own early life. This auto/biographical quest uncovered a background rich in political influences and the common threads running through lived lives down the generations and indicated the strength and effect of these early influences.

The research is outlined and the conclusions shared, showing the lessons for the recruitment and retention of school governors which were uncovered and how they are relatable to volunteering and community activism generally.

**Question:** What it means to be an activist and whose values we represent?

**Keywords:** Auto/biography; change; connectivity; recognition; reflexivity.

**References:**

