

Project title:

Alonely (Isolation and loneliness project: ILOP): Productive Margins (PM): Regulating *for* Engagement, University of Bristol. ESRC Reference Number: FS/K002716/1

PI: Helen Manchester

Summary/Overview

'Alonely' is an interactive theatre piece, and a portable set/installation, building on research conducted as part of the Productive Margins: Regulating for Engagement project. The theatre piece was co-devised with community researchers engaged in a co-produced research project taking place in Bristol and Merthyr Tydfil and illustrated current concerns around the isolation and loneliness of older people and possible alternative futures. We presented diverse stories of loneliness and encouraged creative dialogue between communities, professionals, academics and artists in order to make visible assumptions about the future whilst looking for creative possibilities in the present.

At the Utopia Fair people were invited into an installation designed by Stand + Stare in collaboration with the community research group to hear a series of monologues co-written by a dramaturg and the community research group. These monologues were also available to listen to through headphones on the exterior of the installation, along with iPads that displayed some of the research material collected during the project. On one wall was a space for visitors' feedback, asking people to finish the sentence 'Loneliness is...' The monologues were then reworked and performed at the Tobacco Factory Theatre in Bristol.

Participation

Alonely was coproduced with a community research group of 7 older people in Bristol along with a curator, dramaturg, artist collective and director in Bristol and a photographer, storyteller and poet in Wales. The project was based on research with 100+ participants in Bristol and a similar number of participants in Wales.

Utopias festival: Over the course of one evening and two days at the festival we performed over 20 monologues with at least 10 people in the audience for each of these events. In addition, we had numerous conversations with members of the public including a large number of young people and their parents visiting UCL for their open day, who showed a great deal of interest. We also spoke with other academics and with policy makers, including a senior medical officer in the Welsh government.

Tobacco Factory theatre performance: 180 people attended the performance at the Tobacco Factory.

Outcomes of evaluation and learning/reflections on activity

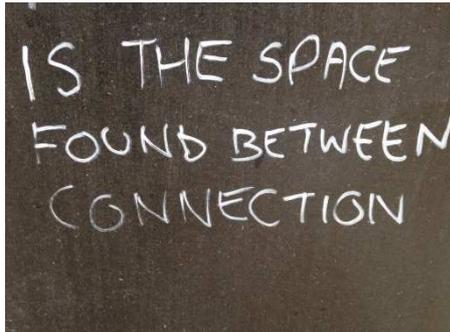
As a research and engagement activity, developing the monologues and installation was seen as fun, creative and engaging by the community researchers. We also found that this activity provided the group with the opportunity to combine research findings from the two geographical sites of the project (Merthyr and Bristol) as well as explore differences across the findings and within the group. Before this we had analysed findings and been interested in coming to a group consensus. Having the chance to explore diversity and individual perceptions of findings was valuable. Group members enjoyed the process of working with a creative team. Not all members performed and those who did not perform enjoyed being part of the discussion sessions and seeing the research come to life.

The installation and monologues appeared to be an engaging way of communicating research findings and starting conversations about loneliness. After each performance at the festival we found that audiences tended to stay to engage in discussion with the community researchers. The conversations we had were very positive, and we found there were a wide

range of personal, political and professional responses to the monologues that were useful for us in taking the project forward. We felt that people wanted, and valued, the opportunity to reflect on the topic of loneliness. Many people said that there should be more awareness of the topic and more space to discuss related issues. In addition to this we felt that the festival gave our community researchers an opportunity to practise their monologues and get used to performing. The chalk board also gave us a chance to ask people for their thoughts on loneliness (see below for e.g.s). Alongside our records of the responses received these comments on the chalk board will be very useful in writing future research bids.

Summary of any feedback received:

From the Festival:



From feedback forms completed at the tobacco factory performance:

- Brilliant!
- I think you should present at the Edinburgh Fringe
- It would make a really powerful radio play/documentary which might reach those very isolated
- Take project to schools
- Get more funding for Bristol wide project especially culturally diverse communities
- Great performance thank you
- It would be good to take the show to schools and old peoples homes, clubs etc.
- Great and thought provoking show. More!
- Moving, Honest, Thoughtful all under the lovely umbrella together
- What a fantastic performance. Powerful and terrifying Older people really relective on research process
- This is a good idea to perform the research in this way because makes many people to be involved
- I thought the show was very powerful and emotional having a background of working with older people and being a loner and having a loss of parents I have heard every scenario that you played out
- It was a wonderful show which made some very realistic comments on society and an ageing society today. I would like to see a society where through positive use of social network media people were able to build an inclusive society.

Details of any follow up activity which have occurred or are planned

Alonely is being performed again at the Celebrating Age festival in Bristol in September and we are planning on taking it to care homes and older peoples events in both Bristol and Merthyr Tydfil (this is to be confirmed). It will also be performed at engagement events in Bristol in the autumn, including at the opening of a new research institute and in a local shopping centre. We also hope to develop a bid and apply for funding to take the show on a national tour of schools and care homes.