Leadership in Senior Volunteer Community: 
The Transition of Social Capital of Female Elder in Taiwan

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Abstract
As the trend of the increasing aging boomers, more and more women are willing to be the volunteers after their retirement. This research is an investigation of two volunteer communities in Taipei City and County. All the data were obtained through “in-person depth interview” and “focus groups”, indicating: (1)What really encourages their participation is the well-being in spirituality, self-esteem, companionship from others and the obligation to help others, which shows the aspects of altruism. (2) The challenges to hold back the female elder from community affairs is age-related. Younger women withdraw from the community because they are disappointed about the community affairs and training curricula; while elder members drop out because of physical frailty. (3)All the female elder regain the energy in the community and cherish the opportunity to share with friends. (4) Leadership has to show intensive relationship of inter-person and intra-person. And the leader or instructor of the senior aging community should be the “catalyst” or “facilitator” in the community.

Keywords
Leadership; Life Transformative Praxis; Senior Volunteer Community

Introduction
As the trend of the increasing aging boomers, the nature of the aging has to be redefined, the evaluation of aging group also need a kind of critical thinking, especially for female elder. Because women live longer, that is the “longevity revolution”.

In recent article, Wolf (2009) indicated strategies and underpinnings for a growing understanding and appreciation of the classroom or learning environment as a safe “holding environment”: for learners in transition, the resources of social capital which will advance their workplace and life success, especially for elder women learners. With the personal development and powerful transitions, it will facilitate the revolution which supports and develops their growing mastery of self, environment, and social milieu.

Based on Putnam’s political interpretation of social capital (trust, psychosocial support and information acquisition) (Putnam, 2000), it was in the article highlighted that “nurturing social capital” among learning communities and diverse interests could help women to acquire the bridging social capital to facilitate and support the female elder to maintain self-efficacy and improve the society around them. As Nanton (2009) indicated “the relational nature of women and the networking needs of adult education, call for a re-examination of the historical goals for adult education.” Women as adult learners are members of social capital networks made up of both dense and loose ties in families and communities, in which they participate. Through these networks, women gain support, their identity is shaped and affirmed, knowledge is constructed, and the volunteer communities are also changed by the dynamic interaction among their relationships, and social networks.

This research is to empower learners to improve their self-awareness about the conditions under which they and their family live and work much more satisfied. The article makes the interview with two learning communities for aging female volunteers. And it is tried to find the dynamic interaction and acquirement of the social capital inside and outside the communities.

Therefore, the research is to show the trajectory of involvement in volunteer communities of female elder, indicate the accumulating of social capital within inside and outside the volunteer communities and discuss the leadership in the volunteer communities of female elder.
Accumulation of Social Capital in the Volunteer Communities of Female Elder

More and more elder are willing to be volunteers after their retirement, therefore, the nature of volunteer communities for aging has been changed a lot, especially the communities for female elder. Having obligation to help others and society is a protective factor against losses in psychological well-being following functional decline in later life. A greater felt obligation to help close others and society protected against declining self-acceptance and personal growth in the face of more severe functional decline. (Greenfield, 2009).

Social capital as a construct is premised on the idea of membership in a reciprocal network with specific norms and behaviors. Membership affords access to information, knowledge, and resources which is generally of benefit to participant (Nanton, 2009: 13). According to Timberlake(2005), the way that men and women acquire social capital is quite different(p.42). Bruegel (2005), also pointed out that the women’s socialization has been primarily in the “bonding”, “exclusive” or “strong ties” aspect of social capital related to identity and support, as opposed to the “loose ties” or “bridging” and “linking” aspects. Therefore, the social capital networks acquired within the volunteer communities could help move beyond simply bridging and linking women, to a systemic network that already heavily favors male learners.

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) described “non-western learning,” which highlights the themes of “interdependence, communal, holistic, and informal learning” (p.237). As we know, women gain much of their significance from their relationships. The relationships and social networks connote collectivity and interdependence. The reciprocal nature of social capital membership is communal. Women’s membership in social capital networks can result in transformation and development that is holistic (Alfred & Nanton, 2009). And that is just the emergence of the wisdom and field-energy, which is treasured by human being.

With the close ties binding the aging and others, the elder adult can rebuild their social capital which has the tremendous influence on their physical health and self-efficiency (Alfred, 2009; Nanton, 2009; Alfred & Nanton, 2009). Actually, a recent article from Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s Healthy Aging Network, Prohaska and colleagues (2006) indicated that the need to identify factors influencing the physical activity patterns of the elder adults is one of the four key questions relative to physical activity. Indeed, self-efficacy is often relied upon as the sole social cognitive determinant of physical activity.

In recent article, Bandura (2004) also clearly articulated that the theoretical pathway from self-efficacy to behavioral outcomes is both direct and indirect. Individuals with higher level of self-efficacy have more positive expectation about what the behavior will bring about, set higher goals for themselves, and are more likely to take the view that they are capable of overcoming difficulties and barriers with effort and coping skills.

The Embodied Learning and Self-awareness

Learning in the experience is immediate, physical and emotional. It is a feeling reaction of rightness within an experience (Siegesmund, 2004). And the emphasis of “embodied or somatic learning”, “spiritual and narrative learning” are the new approaches of adult learning, because the whole person is made up of mind, body, and spirit (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007).

Embodied learning is about consciously using and developing somatic intelligence in the pursuit of our successes, about integrating body learning with mind learning and producing presence and performance. Very little of what we learn is simply brain or mind learning. Every skill we learn involves body, or somatic learning as well. For instance, when we learned to walk, we used both our body and brain.

The embodied learning is most often linked to experiential learning in the sense that we learn in an experience. Somatic knowing is also true of spiritual and narrative knowing, connected to adult learning through meaning-making. Attending to these non-cognitive dimensions of knowing can bring greater understanding to our lives; and they enable us to make our everyday experiences meaningful (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, p.192). That’s why Cheville (2005) summarized: “Only by ‘being there’ together in body did players enter into reflexive consciousness, the orchestration of bodily activity was the means to collective mindset. Learning is necessarily a political process, demanding that coaches and players negotiate their understanding through social and bodily engagement” (p.98).

The relationship among identity, learning, and the body has been explored in Becktt and Morris’(s2001) article. Their study about the workplace for aged-care
facility, most of staff were female with little formal training or education. However, their physical experience in the facility created a community of practice where their identities as health practitioners were secure. And Becktt and Morris’s characterized this workplace as a “site of powerful adult learning for the staff.” Therefore, reclaiming the body in learning can contribute to a broader theory and insight. We have to recognize the body as a source of knowledge (Cited from Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, p.198). And embodied knowing is linked to adult learning through its power to contribute to making sense of, or making meaning, of our lives (Matthews, 1998, p.237).

**The Concept of Life Transformative Praxis of Wholeness-infinity**

To response to the emergence of sustaining necessity in transformation to sustainable organizational development, researches on the spirit or psyche of organizations are increasing (Corlett & Pearson, 2003; Li & Lin, 2010). What Li and Lin (2011) refer to is ‘wholeness praxis’, and they proposed four approaches to organizational transformation including involutionary, evolutionary, revolutionary, and holovolutionary transformation (see Figure 1).

![FIG 1 WHOLENESS PRAXIS PARADIGM OF ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION](image)

**FIG 1 WHOLENESS PRAXIS PARADIGM OF ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION**

SOURCE: Li & Lin (2011)

Users of “involutionary transformation” approach focus on observable problems; quick, short-term solutions; cost-effective investment; and, most importantly, consensus reached through superficial participation. Users of “evolutionary transformation” tend to take one sided view. “Revolutionary transformation” is applied when an individual encompasses the wholeness of two seemingly contrasting and conflicting driving forces. And holovolutionary transformation arises from the collective inner world.

To highlight the trajectory of the transformation of communities or individual and indicate the growth of the individualization, Li and Lin (2010) integrated and adapted the Jungian and Buddhism ideas to be “Life Transformative Praxis of Wholeness-Infinity” as Figure 2, by which people can retrace his or her own journey of individualization honestly.

![FIG 2 LIFE TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS OF WHOLENESS-INFINITY](image)

**FIG 2 LIFE TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS OF WHOLENESS-INFINITY**

SOURCE: Li & Lin (2010)

**Methodology**

**Participants**

The participants of this research include two volunteer communities for female elder in Taipei City and County. The demographic analysis of the participants is as Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Subgroup</th>
<th>Aged 55-69</th>
<th>Older than 70</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>High*</td>
<td>Middle*</td>
<td>High*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community A</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*High= people graduate from college or university
Middle= people graduate from high or elementary school

**Design of Measurement**

The measurement includes “in-person depth interview” and “focus groups”. In-person depth interviews were conducted so that respondents could reflect on their own experiences and each interview lasts for about 1.5 hours. In addition, the focus group is arranged after all the interviews are finished. The interview is held through drawing the Life Transformative Praxis of Wholeness-Infinity as Figure
2.

Result

The data analysis includes the value created and shared, rhythm created for the community, level of participation, and the obstacles to community development. Through the narrative analysis, all the records of interview are organized into two parts: the “identical analysis” which describes the similarity of the heroine’s journey of Community A and B; while the “different analysis” describes the heterology of the heroine’s journal in different age groups.

The Identical Heroine’s Journey of the Seniors

Through the narrative analysis, the similarity of the heroine’s journey is shown as Figure 3:

FIG 3 THE IDENTICAL HEROINE’S JOURNEY OF THE SENIORS

The identical heroine’s journey of the seniors shows the similarity among members:

(1) Most of the female elder having the same characteristic are under the obligation to help others. And they feel satisfied and well to help others.

(2) What challenge the female elder encounters is frailty and weakness on body. They feel tired easily, also feel frustrated not good at computer work.

(3) The turning-point of their involvement is the bonding and strong ties within the volunteer communities, which is the social capital related to identity and support, and helps move beyond simply bridging and linking women, to a systemic network (Bruegel, 2005). Therefore, they feel energetic once join the community and feel calm in the group. Through learning and sharing with others, they regain the respect in their family and even make their best and have the capability to help others.

Age-related of the Heterotopy of the Heroine’s Journal

The following is the different transition of heroine’s journal between different age groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2 THE HEROINE’S JOURNEY IN DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aged 55-69 (8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>What’s the call?</td>
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<td>What’s the challenge?</td>
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<td>What’s the turning-point?</td>
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<td>What’s the breakthrough?</td>
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</table>

Comprehensive Analysis

(1) Different level of “Education” indicates the different involvement in reading and discussion. Some of the high-educated women feel disappointed with the growth of their community especially the younger subgroup (Aged 55-69).

(2) What really encourages their participation is the well-being in spirituality, self-esteem, companionship from others and the obligation to help others, which give female elder encouragement and refreshment in their daily life.

(3) The challenge or obstacles to holding back the female elder from community affairs is difference between the young and elder subgroups. Women in the younger subgroup withdraw from the community because they are disappointed about the community affairs and training curricula. While the physical condition affects their participation in the elder subgroup.

(4) All of female elder in Community A and B
regain the energy in the community and cherish the opportunity to share with friends.

Conclusions

The Hero-ine’s Journey of Community

The research indicates that both the heroines community A and B almost have the same mission from their inner heart which is the core value of our life to help other and have respect of their family and friends. According to the ideas of Quantum Psychology, observer can’t be left out of the description of the observation, and only the observer creates the universe of observation.” (Wilson, 1990) People who join the learning community can’t leave themselves out of the observation, what they can do is involve themselves in the interaction and value creating of their own.

From the Islamic faith, learning is indeed lifelong. It is also considered a sacred obligation to learn not for personal benefit, but for sharing with the whole community (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, p.217). Therefore, in the adult learning context, companionship and the obligation which is a kind of psyche or so called wisdom filed-energy can foster meaning making and thus enhancing the adult learning experience, and becoming a resource component of women’s social capital.

Transformation of Individualization in Aging Communities

The narrations in Table 2 indicate that their mindset has been located in the route of “evolutionary transformation” or “revolutionary transformation”. In the former, the participants tend to take sided view, and sense their consciousness of inner and outer world, what they really care about is to create the close relationship among them. Of course, few of them have reached the stage of “revolutionary transformation”. Most of the time, these participants trace their consciousness and unconsciousness of mindfulness. And the atmosphere of the communities helps nurture their positive relationship especially for the elder subgroups. Therefore, joining the volunteer communities can really nurture the bonding social capital, which is helpful to facilitate and support the aging to be self-confident and improve the society around them including their health promoting, especially for the female elder, which has been indicated in the literature.

But how can we lead the participants to having the wholeness relationship which makes them cross the boundaries in the outer world? Is it possible to lead the participants to understanding that all of us are actually one part of the cosmos? What we have to do is to show intensive relationship of inter-person and intra-person to lead participants to grasping the integration of the embodied mind and enlightened actions which are the basement of the physical and psychological health of the aging and then to develop the wholly and integral mindset about their relationship between people, people and the communities, even people and the earth.

Leadership in Female Senior Volunteer Community

Because women are acknowledged as central to their families and communities, fostering social networks not only sustains the women’s development and goal attainment but also extends their individual capital outward to community development initiatives. And this ultimately can promote their inside (or bonding) and outside (or bridging) social capital and improve the national, cultural, social and economic development.

As Li and Lin (2010) indicated that leaders are engaged in cultivating synergetic thinking for encompassing possibilities, they, as well as all stakeholders, will undertake both divergent and convergent dialogues on infinite mastery of problems and possibilities for awakening a collective consciousness of shared wholeness, ultimately enhancing convergent infinite practice of wholeness for nurturing a more sustainable world.

With the understanding of the trajectory of heroine’s journey in senior volunteer communities, it was suggested in this paper that leaders and instructors of the learning community should be the “catalyst” or “facilitator”, and he or she has the magic and catalytic power to improve the emergence of the wisdom and field-energy of the aging learning and volunteer community. The leaders or instructors have to value the organizational and individual psyche which is also the concern of the “Social Gerontology”, and do make room for its integration and expression in the systematic curricula and activities of any learning or volunteer communities.

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REFERENCES


Hsiu-Lan Chin was born in Taipei City, 09/20/1956/. In 1994 she earned Master Degree of Special Education and 2009 earned Doctor Degree of Social Education from National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei. And she majors in Project-designing for senior, counseling with people in special need and the elderly.

She has been a principal of public high schools in Taipei County for 7 years and had brilliant manifestation both on community involvement and school management. After retiring from principal, she earned Doctor Degree from National Taiwan Normal University and won the great achievement prize in the graduation theme. After that, she got the appointment as an assistant professor of Department of Aged Welfare & Social Work, Toko University, Chiayi County, Taiwan. Currently, she continues the research about the project-designing for senior, especially the senior groups in communities and elder in organizations. The following is her previous publications:


Chin, H. L. “The Implications of Emotional Aging on


Dr. Chin and colleagues established “Taiwan New Aged Health Development Association” (TAHDA) to improve the research quality and health promotion for the new aged in Taiwan, and served as a volunteer and the chief executive officer of TAHDA since 2011. Through contribution of TAHDA, Dr. Chin helps manage a national conference and a local symposium or workshop every year, and focuses on the promotion of health development for the elderly.