Community, rurality and older people: critical comparisons of older people's experiences across different rural communities.

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1 Introduction

Community has long represented a central tenet of academic, policy and popular understandings of rural living. Rural community has been, and continues to be, imbued with positive sets of meaning, providing attachment to place and social cohesion; it is also positioned and discussed in relation broader processes of urbanization and globalization, representing a local social organizational structure that connects with both the past and place, and provides a mechanism for resisting externally induced change. In his analysis of the rural idyll, Newby criticizes the focus on the loss of a sense of 'communion' in rural villages:

> village inhabitants formed a community because they had to: they were
> imprisoned by constraints of various kinds, including poverty, so that reciprocal
> aid became a necessity. The village community was, therefore, to use
> Raymond Williams's term, a 'mutuality of the oppressed' (1979: 154).

Thus, for Newby, the sense of communion in rural England was driven by structural and economic factors. Woods (2006) argues that the generative structures of 'communion' have changed so that rural life is no longer defined by a 'rural politics' concerned with the management of rural land, and is better understood as a 'politics of the rural' in which the idea and regulation of 'rurality' has become centrally important. What follows from this transition is that the key shaper of rural community is no longer 'constraint' but the protection of particular 'ways of life'. As Woods comments, 'the ideal rural community is defined by the presence of certain facilities and services, and the disappearance of these can be perceived as undermining a traditional way of life' (ibid., 587).

Community is also increasingly discussed in relation to the ageing of society. Gilleard and Higgs (2005: 126), for example, examine the changing role of community for older people's sense of identity, highlighting how older people are expected to choose 'between two equally mythical forms of "community": an aspirational heaven or an actual hell'. The former is associated with the 'potentially illusionary "third age" community', and the latter with a more passive approach to

ageing that relies on traditional, but dissolving, forms of solidarity (127). Similarly, Phillipson (2007) argues that community can impact on the lives of older people in different ways: 'some groups of older people can actively re-shape communities which are meaningful to them in old age, others are relatively disempowered from the option of managing community and neighbourhood change' (336). In the context of the UK and other global North countries, ageing represents a particularly significant process in rural areas, given that movements of young people to cities and the in-migration of middle-to-older age groups to rural places are increasing the proportion of older people within the rural population (see Stockdale, 2011). These demographic changes in combination with the centralisation of rural services within key settlements are impacting on older people's sense of community (Manthorpe and Stevens, 2008). With austerity placing more emphasis on local communities and the voluntary sector as providers of social services to older people, so the presence of different groups of older people in different places will influence the nature and level of social support available to older people in rural areas, resulting in 'an increase in inequalities between areas, with dynamic and growing rural populations having greater access to resources than declining ones' (Manthorpe and Stevens, 2008, 466; also Munoz et al., 2014).

Our aim within this paper is to explore the shifting relations between older people and community in rural places. We do this by drawing on materials from recent research we have undertaken on older people's experiences of community in three rural places in England and Wales. The paper is structured around two main sections. In the first of these we develop a frame for our empirical analysis based around critical theory and, more specifically, the cognitive construction of community. Within this theoretical context, we provide a critical review of recent writings on community, and expound a framework that explore developments in institutional and interpersonal discourses on community. The second section of the paper presents our empirical analysis of these discourses on community in relation to older people's understandings and experiences of rural living in our case study localities. Here we make use of materials from interviews with older people and relevant local policy actors, elected representatives and service providers to examine institutional and interpersonal discourses of rural community.

2   Critical Theory and Community

Bell and Newby's (1971) devastating critique of the role of community studies within sociology (and rural sociology) turned many scholars away from research on community as both an organizing concept and empirical case study for the next three decades. Recently, however, academic interest in community has been rekindled by a recognition of its continued importance and usefulness (Delanty, 2009). While previous work on community tended to be limited to descriptive accounts of people's interactions in particular places, recent research has taken a more critical approach to community to make interesting connections between social imaginaries and social actions (for an interesting discussion, see Phal 2005). For example, Amit (2002) suggests that 'community arises out of an interaction between the imagination of solidarity and its realization through social relations and is invested both with powerful affect as well as contingency, and therefore with both consciousness and choice' (18). Others argue that a distinction needs to be made between solidaristic and individualistic notions of community. Day (2006: 17, 18) distinguishes between conceptions of community that provide 'stress on the recovery of community, and the reinstatement of old ways of doing things, which he associates with Etzioni's (1995) communitarianism, and those that view community 'as a means through which people can seize their own destinies', which are connected with Williams' work on community (Day, 2006: 18 citing Williams, 1989). While community combines imagined solidarities and their actualization in practice, Schirmer and Michailakis (2015) argue that the narratives connecting people through practices of community can rely on solidaristic *or* individualistic discourses.

Neal and Walters (2008) suggest a need to 'bring the social back in' to research on community given that the 'imagined [rural] community gives rise to a series of material activities and everyday labours to realize more tangible and more concrete structures of community feeling' (282). Similarly, Thrift's (2005) work on misanthropy and sociality within the city highlights the cognitive basis of social and moral action, and the ways in which social gatherings are precognitively and cognitively organised:

based around forms of expression which are not conventionally regarded as political but which may well conjure up all kinds of sometimes ill-formed hopes and wishes that can act to propel the future by intensifying the present (145).

This interest in how community and sociality may combine pre-cognitive and cognitive concerns means, for Thrift, focusing on how 'affect is as much a nexus of a set of concerns – with what bodies can do, with the power of emotions, with the crossover between "biology" and "culture" – as it is a finished analytic' (2005: 138).

This combination of emotion, prejudice and the corporeal involved in the stabilization of a cognitive realm of social connections among individuals, draws attention to just how much 'the world we take for granted is a cognitively ordered world and that we act together by making the presupposition that we share such a cognitive order' (Eder, 2007: 396). For older people, this cognitive order can emerge from such things as the enactment of personal autonomy by interacting in neighborhood shops, acts that serve to reconfirm membership of community (Stewart et al., 2015).

Critical theory is concerned with examining the nature and implications of social practices, including people's options: what they are trying to achieve, and the practices that allow them to achieve their objectives in a socially justifable way (Cooke, 2006). Contemporary critical theory can be described as critical to the extent that it carries out context transcending critique. This is a type of critique that starts from people's contextually embedded experiences, and follows how views or understandings can transcend context and become more generally recognized (Cooke, 2006). A particular view of knowledge is needed in order to follow how understandings emerge from within contexts and then transcend these contexts. Habermas' (1984, 1987) proposal is to follow how validity claims incorporate idealisations of a very pragmatic sort that can simultaneously be understood here and now, and that transcend context and can be taken up and discussed elsewhere. Habermas' (1987) concept of the lifeworld reflects community experiences because it refers to a social context where people share idealisations that may turn out to be falsely held, but are enough to enable people to get on with their collective life. The critical edge of Habermas' approach rests on the individual's capacity to engage in communication and to think about their community experience. Using these

capacities, the individual can make moral judgements on community and think about more socially adequate arrangements. However, for Delanty (2009), this moralism encounters difficulties with extreme forms of community such as nationalism, because these forms of community leave individuals with little scope for critique, which ultimately leaves Habermas' critical theory unsuited to critiquing community (Delanty, 2009: 89, 90).

An alternative strategy is possible that stabilizes critique using cognitive concepts. This considers experience within community in light of the judicious balancing of competing pressures in a generally accepted cognitive framing of community (see Strydom, 2015). This approach starts with the conclusions of Habermas' analyses of communicative action, and moves on to consider the effect that these pragmatic idealisations have on culture and action. As Strydom (2009, 2015) shows, this provides a way of thinking about both how humans create culture through communication, and this culture can take on an independent existence that in turn shapes humans. Rather than following how communicative action enables people to draw on validity claims, this approach follows the presuppositions and idealisations that people have to commit to in communication. This means focusing on how the use of language activates idealisations and presuppositions that are held at a transcendental level, and used as tools by creative competent individuals to bring about their desired effects. As a form of critical theory, this approach emphasises the role of culturally or transcendentally held presuppositions, and how these transcendent ideas can incorporate various, often competing, moral prescriptions. Following Strydom (2009a, 2015), these transcendent ideas can be understood as cognitive frames or schemes.

According to Cohen (1985), community needs to be understood as cognitively constructed, with Liepins (2000a) locating this cognitive dimension in social contexts where practices and meanings provide the material upon which community is constructed. Community thus needs to be viewed as a set of practices, shared symbols and modes of communication that provides a rich source of possible meanings for its members to draw upon as they negotiate a shared life (Strydom, 2009a). In relation to older people, we suggest that community is being deployed as a resource with which to manage the demographic transition, with various ideas of

community-based social support being developed and tested to manage the increasing older population in rural areas (see self reference).

First, communities are not just groups of people who collaborate in certain practices, but also social systems that shape meanings for members, draw social boundaries, structure existing roles and practices, and determine how new practices are incorporated into the community (see Cohen, 1985, Wenger, 2000). From the point of view of critical theory, cognitive constructions are developed in discourses that unfold over time and through learning processes. For Miller (2002) discourses make social learning possible in the sense that they include affected parties and are not blocked or distorted by particular interests. Discourses thus allow agreement to be established, allowing new knowledge to emerge. Three elements of cognitive and cultural discourse are identified by Miller as being important to community. First, new ideas and practices are produced through discourses to the extent that discourses take on the properties of social systems. Frequently, discourses are prevented from unfolding according to their own logics as individuals or groups systematically distort communication (Miller, 2002). In these cases, individuals or groups exert power or control over the discourse, and manipulate the discourse to produce knowledge reflective of their interests.

Second, discourses not subjected to distortion from factional interests unfold as different points of view are taken into account (Miller 2002). A community discourse can be understood as a system in which differences are identified and resolved to manage a collective existence. However, for the community discourse to identify difference, those affected need to become involved in some way. Strydom (2009b) highlights how such involvement is developed through incorporation of the views of experts in a *virtual* way, community representatives in a *formal* manner, and all members of the community in *real* terms.

Third, while developing new knowledge, discourses also develop rules to organize their own learning processes. Eder (1999) identifies three increasingly inclusive social levels –interpersonal, organizational and institutional – where new rules are developed and applied, which provide social contexts for organizing how ideas and knowledge are developed and stored. The first of these is interpersonal learning

where people (i.e., children, tradesmen, scientists, politicians) collectively generate rules that they can use to organise their own lives (1999: 205, 206). These rules may become codified, but they are first of all developed by groups of people in communities trying to coordinate their own action between themselves. Second, Eder distinguishes organizational learning where organizations are understood as social forms that are designed to learn about their environments and how to act on this environment. Here '[l]earning is a process of seeking and processing information on the environment in order to reduce the uncertainties with which any organization is confronted when dealing with its environment' (1999: 206). The third form of learning is institutional learning where such learning takes place 'by defining interorganizational spaces and naming these spaces' so that institutions 'enable communication between organizational actors and constrain at the same time the mode of communication by normative and cognitive rules' (1999: 207). Social learning understood as rule learning focuses on the emergence of a discourse around a topic that is carried and allowed to unfold so that, to the extent that it is not constrained in any way (Miller, 2002), will allow the emergence of new forms of knowledge. Interpersonal, organisational and institutional spheres depict spaces in which rules come under pressure and may be renegotiated.

Community can be approached not just as a social system, but also as a set of learning relationships between its members, although it should be recognized that members may not always be aware that learning is taking place. Some may only become aware that their experience of community has changed, or find that their interests are not adequately accommodated within the community, which then triggers a need to learn. As such, learning often takes place at the margins of communities. To illustrate this process in more detail we draw on Habermas' (1993) theory of moral development, which is concerned with how people use norms within their engagements with others in particular contexts. For Habermas (1993), moral consciousness is composed of a set of skills and capacities that unfold as the individual gains the concepts with which to understand and evaluate their social world. He proposes three stages of discourse development: a *pre-conventional discourse* that refers to the structure of reason available to the individual discovering that a norm or symbol impacts on themselves as well as others; a *conventional discourse* consisting of the form of reasoning bound up with an individual accepting

the authority of community norms and subjugating their own will to that of their community, and; a *post-conventional discourse* that involves reasoning about the norms that the community needs to incorporate to better reflect individuality. Regardless of which social level (organizational, interpersonal or institutional) the discourse takes place within, it unfolds to take into account different points of view and to ensure it is not distorted by particular interests. As this happens, difference can be recognized and accommodated through increasing inclusivity – from virtual to formal and to real forms of inclusion. At the same time, ideas and norms developed in discourse become integrated within people's everyday practices; they also shape people's views on the social adequacy of these norms within the three stages of discourse development. This then provides a robust multi-layered framework with which to analyze community as a learning process.

In the next section of the paper we examine these different aspects of discourse formation within the context of older people's experiences of community in three rural places. We begin by considering the *institutional* discourse in each place, and, more particularly, the extent to which this includes different people within a community discourse. We then analyze the *interpersonal* discourses used by older people, which allows us to focus more on people's experiences of living in relation to socially produced symbolic constructs. In doing this we examine pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional discourses of community in our case study places.

3   Exploring institutional and interpersonal discourses of community amongst older people in rural places

Our research on community forms part of a broader study of the well-being and welfare of older people in six rural localities in South-west England and Wales. These localities were selected to reflect different geographies and degrees of affluence: Llanarth in Ceredigion and St Breward in Cornwall were viewed as relatively remote and deprived places; Rhayader in Powys and East and West Stour in Dorest were chosen as indicative of less deprived and less remote localities, and; Raglan in Monmouthshire and Painswick in Gloucestershire were selected as being

relatively affluent and within city regions. In this paper we focus on Llanarth, St Breward and Rhayader for a couple of reasons. First, our intention is to provide an in-depth account of community within these places and restricting our analysis to a smaller number of places allows us to do this. Second, the places selected provide interesting examples of community discourse formation, with Llanarth and St Breward presenting contrasting local discourses on community despite having structural similarities, and Rhayader characterized by a distinct community discourse. Interviews were conducted with 32 older people across the three places together with 12 local or regional stakeholders, consisting of representatives of local community or parish councils, branches of Age concern, and local council representatives and council officers with responsibility for older people services. Table 1 provides further information on the interviewees.

Our analysis takes two forms. First, we examine local institutional discourses on community in the case study places to identify how and where political discourses on community connect with local experience and develop new forms of knowledge on community. Second, we consider interpersonal community discourses, and the ways in which older people develop shared understandings of community that connect their personal interests with those of their co-residents. In doing this, we explore the presence and operations of pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional discourses on community. We do not present an analysis of organisational discourses here as an analysis of social learning processes in this context would require a separate paper.

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3.1 Institutional discourses on community

Institutional discourses provide the most inclusive level of communicative practice. On this level, learning focuses on enabling inter-organisational communication by defining the spaces in which this communication takes place and structuring communication using norms. Institutions do this by providing a moral order and by mapping the way communication is organized. The case studies provide examples of communities engaged in reflections on different issues. In Llanarth, those involved in

the community were reflecting on the use of Welsh as the medium of communication in the community. Those living in both Rhayader and St Breward reflected on how to harness community action to protect the services and facilities in the area. We consider these reflections in turn.

Research on the role of the Welsh language in community life has shown how it is used both 'as a barrier to defend the locality from changes being imposed upon it from outside' (Morris, 1987: 115) and to counter the perceived pressure of an increased 'anglicisation of much of Welsh rural lifestyles' (Cloke et al, 1998). Indeed, all of the interviewees in Llanarth pointed to minor ways in which established Welsh speakers tended to gather together in separation from English speakers. The issue here is how these minor everyday separations are transposed into institutional practices. For instance, those seeking membership of the community council are informed 'that the meetings are held in Welsh' (Llanarth, community council). Non-Welsh speakers are free to hire translators to participate in the community council (Llanarth, community council), but the decision to conduct its business through the medium of Welsh means that many people who might have participated in the council are unable to do so. The local Women's Institute (WI) conducts its business bilingually, which creates divisions between English and Welsh speaker. As an ex-president of Llanarth WI comments:

> I remember in the WI there was…one woman [who did not speak Welsh] finished and wasn't keen. And she told me one day, 'you're always speaking Welsh', she said to me. So I said to myself, 'Oh am I? I [will] try and conduct the meeting in English, mind, and repeat it in Welsh again'. And she wasn't very happy with me at all. She must have finished because I had too much Welsh. (Llanarth 1, female, always lived in the area)

Here, this person reflects on the discontent expressed to her by a member who decided to leave the WI because of the way she felt one language dominated proceedings. This interviewee clearly felt that sufficient effort was being made to include non-Welsh speakers. In another case, a non-Welsh speaking president felt the rules governing language use could be suspended when the meeting was held in her home, but experienced a great deal of opposition from members:

> They ... the girl who was president [of the WI] was English, and they [the WI] had a meeting… [describes decision to meet in the home of the local president]. They were all talking in Welsh in her [the president's] kitchen … and she walked in and they were all talking in Welsh and she said 'do you mind, in my house, speaking English'. And there was a big kafuffle over it. It got to the WI, to our sort of office in…Aberystwyth and there was letters written and it, it was really, really nasty. (Llanarth 2, female, 12 years)

Llanarth thus provides an example of a community organized using an institutional discourse that restricted the scope of practical discourse in a formal way.

By contrast, in St Breward the community council viewed its work as shaping opinion and eliciting authorization to pursue certain courses of action:

> […] we've looked at Green Energy. We're quite convinced because we have four wind farms round here in North Cornwall and the local communities get very little benefit from them. And our idea is...half the population think windmills look nice and half think they're a terrible blot on the landscape, but I think all the community would think, if you were getting significant sums of money into your community from those windmills, that you would look at them differently. (St Breward, Parish Council)

From the point of view of our learning framework, the community discourse of St Breward represents a real form of discourse insofar different members of the community are included within it and ideas developed that attempt to navigate the interests and needs of different people. The community was learning to negotiate a common opinion from among a diverse set of views. The potential of community as a form of public was underlined in a story about how the community responded to the threat of the closure of local post offices by coming together through public meetings and expressing collective opinion through a local referendum:

Yeah, so you've got to frighten the shit out of them first so they leave you alone […] we can never prove that it made one iota of difference, but our four post offices in our cluster, none of them have shut ... (St Breward, Parish Council)

In Rhayader, community was understood in terms of the willingness of members to be there for others in the town:

[…] you just take it [community] for granted when you're younger, it's on your doorstep and you just … you just take it for granted, but you don't realise what a good community you do live in. You know, how many people do help on … have to rely a lot on volunteers. Which is a shame but it … also it's good because people are willing to work together (Rhayader, Community Council).

In a rural town containing a range of facilities and groups, the willingness to overcome individuality through voluntarism became the basis for a distinction between members of the community council representing the community, and community members willing to act on these decisions. Whereas the parish council in St Breward assumed that members of the community were interested in participating in the development of their community, the community council in Rhayader assumed people were not interested in attending committees but were willing to volunteer.

In terms of learning theory, Rhayader provides an example of a formal form of community discourse. Here, the community discourse is open to all residents, but there remains a gap between those involved in discussion and all other members of the community. Alongside this there was an awareness of the fragility of local services and facilities. In the effort to sustain these, the community council sought to reduce the costs of running some facilities and services by transferring their management to the local authority. However, the costs of running the leisure centre increased while opening times reduced 'so Saturday night you have to be out by twelve o'clock and … or the bar has to close by twelve o'clock while the pubs are open till two' (Rhayader Community Council). Whereas the community council was cognizant of the interests of the entire community in sustaining facilities, the Local Authority had to pay attention to the interests of those particularly affected:

This is one of mine and …and a lot of the councillors' bugbear … is that we have a fantastic facility up there and we can't use it. […] a couple retired to the town, who lived opposite … live opposite the leisure centre, and so many and so many and so many complaints and it [late evening activity in the leisure centre] all stopped. So … my argument is, along with everybody else's, they knew exactly where they were buying. They got what they wanted. (Rhayader Community Council)

This tension between the interests of particular individuals and the wider community was also mentioned in relation to a voluntary organization in Rhayader, with a successful funding application leading to accusations that it was becoming a more professional organization with key positions filled by people 'from outside [who] come in and do it for six months then go. And I think that can actually be quite detrimental to community (Rhayader Voluntary sector).

3.2 Interpersonal discourses on community

While the above analysis points to the different directions in which local community culture was unfolding, older people also lived in the environment of these discourses. The rules organizing interpersonal relationships are developed by groups of people in communities trying to coordinate their action among themselves (Day, 2006). Groups find ways of ordering relationships using symbols, practices and structures while these keep the consciousness of a social order alive among the members of a community. In the following, we focus on the interpersonal sphere outlined above, but taking our cues more from the normative framework which points to the increasingly adequate status of norms coordinating action in these communities. Thus, we focus on the extent to which older people resist presenting themselves to others in their community (the pre-conventional discourse), the norms that cover social interaction (conventional discourse), and how these norms come under a univeralising critique (post-conventional discourse).

3.2.1 Pre-conventional discourse and community

The pre-conventional discourse combines recognition of the relevance of cultures and norms with a sense of personal indifference towards them. Within our research, the pre-conventional discourse was evident in all three places, with some people feeling personally indifferent to the dominant culture of local community. For some, issues their personal lives prevented engagements with community. One person commented that he sometimes did not welcome visitors 'because if I'm not well I don't want to see anybody' (Llanarth 7, male, always lived in the area). Another stated that she would 'love to get involved more [in the community]. I mean when I first came [friend's name] and I used to go to dog shows and that, but I can't do that anymore, I can't walk round. I can't walk round, you see, and I don't like not going and not taking part (Llanarth 3, female, 9 years). A third person whose partner had died shortly after moving to the area felt too 'bitter' to become involved in the community.

Others were simply less disposed towards community. A retired policeman and ex-soldier described his lack of patience for forms of togetherness: 'I suppose I'm, I'm more happy dealing with someone who's bleeding to death in the street than I am than giving him cough mixture' (Rhayader 3, male, 15 years). One of our interviewees in St Breward described how his 'main interest is basically sitting on my backside constructing ships' (St Breward 1) meant he had little in common with people who lived locally. In another case, a married couple with a background in gardening who valued their solitude and personal connection with nature and had little interest in community asked 'why would [someone] who loves being on their own and away from people, want to go and join a community group (Rhayader 1, male, 2 years).

The pre-conventional discourse is based on a separation in the individual's relation with community culture. Such a separation was strongly expressed by some of those living in Llanarth. One person felt left out of a walking group 'because I couldn't walk very fast; they all used to go off in cliques and I was on my own so I stopped going' (Llanarth 3). In other cases, reference was made to the use of Welsh as an everyday language:

Now I was there helping the Welsh ladies do the cow [at a local Eisteddfod event], they were all jabbering away in Welsh. It didn't affect me, because they think in Welsh. This is what I can't get through to people. English people that come in, [say] "they're ignorant". They're [the local established Welsh community] not. They think in Welsh. (Llanarth: Interview 5, female)

While recognising the importance of the Welsh language, English incomers felt it distanced them from members of the established Welsh language community, which meant they had to make alternative community connections. For example, one person had forged friendships with other migrants and another had made herself useful in the village by helping neighbours.

3.2.2   Conventional discourse and community

In conventional discourse, the individual engages more with others in their community, and allows shared norms and expectations to shape their selves. In a sense, the individual sacrifices some element of their individuality to engage more with their community. In engaging with their community, people experience the common culture in ways that are partly shaped by place. Like Thrift's examination of the affective aspect of symbols, community entered into people's everyday lives in subtle ways such that the affective aspect of symbols are as important as their cognitive content. For instance, in St Breward, it was claimed that community was not 'as close as you might feel it would be in a place like this personally, but at the same time, if you really needed help, there would be somebody there to help you' (St Breward 2, female, resident for 14 years). Here, the everyday sense of community arose from the feeling that everyone in the place was willing to be there for each other if required. This spirit of community was typically discussed in relation to dealing with the problems of winter weather:

the four wheel drive person is doing their bit, giving back to the community to the people that they know haven't got, or can't get, or there's no bus service today because it's stopped because of the snow (Llanarth 4, female, 23 years).

In this case, the class and capital aspects of the vehicle are replaced by its practical transportation benefit to highlight the camaraderie of everyone 'doing their bit'.

In Rhayader, the interpersonal discourse involved a separation between established members of the community and outsiders. One interviewee commented that members of the community 'are all virtually related one way or another' while he and his wife were 'outsiders' (Rhayader 8). The separation between insiders and outsiders was felt acutely by one person who had moved to the town with her family when she was young, moved away following her marriage, and returned a few years later after her divorce:

> when I came back I was considered as like old Rhayader sort of rather than
> new Rhayader. Sort of, it takes you a while to be sort of […] accepted into the
> community, […]. We'd been in Rhayader, my mother came here to be head
> teacher at the infants school and my father had a garage and it still took sort of
> five or eight years to be accepted as "you were Rhayader now". And sort of, I
> was accepted back into sort of what I call "old Rhayader" (Rhayader 4, grew up
> in area and returned 22 years previously)

One interviewee felt that being a member of the insider group, of 'old Rhayader', was important because people could rely more on help from other families and friends in the area, more than they could rely on organizations:

> […] I don't think anybody is against anybody coming you know because usually
> within the town here, if you are in trouble you get so much help from the people,
> […]. And that is our main strength here is that we can't rely on anybody else but
> we can rely on our own people within the town. Friends and relatives and that
> sort of thing. (Rhayader 5, female, always resided in the town)

Against this background of community as symbolized by social connections, older people in Rhayader talked of the friendly atmosphere of the town:

> Oh it is smashing [place to live] I mean in as much I go downtown now and I
> only go into the local shops for whatever, bread, milk or whatever is needed […]

and you know it should take you ten minutes and you are there twenty minutes because there is this woman to speak to and somebody shouts hello from over there. (Rhayader 5, female, always resided in area)

However, problems associated with the close-knit nature of community were also mentioned, linked particularly with people's personal status and reputation in the community. To maintain access to informal community resources, the individual needs to maintain their reputation as trustworthy, with the positive and supportive social mood based on a set of social rules governing access to social resources. The following interview extract illustrates what can happen when these rules are broken:

I've got a problem with a guy that owes me some money, stupid, stupid thing, stupid thing because that will go around and around and around and people are going, 'you can't trust him, you can't trust him, look what he did to [interviewee]. Remember what he did to so and so', and they start looking at other problems. It snowballs. You don't upset people. I don't know whether it's because you're in a rural area and people tend to depend on each other more, whether it's part of the Welsh psyche or not, I don't know, but I will guarantee, you upset people at your peril. (Rhayader 6, male, resident less than 5 years but with a long term connection with the town)

Conventional meanings of community emerged in St Breward from widely shared positive representations of place and landscape. Important here was the natural attributes of the landscape and people's engagements with local nature through walking:

[…] You know, and it's quite a popular walk, I have quite a lot of people walking past here who do it. There's a holiday complex just a bit further down from where you turned, and they have holiday cottages and people from there come walking round and they stop to chat, it's quite nice really. (St Breward 2, female, over 30 years in the county)

A symbolically coordinated community was also evident in St Breward. Here a feeling of togetherness emerged from individual performances in community. For example, one interviewee described a football match held for someone who was

about to undergo treatment for cancer, with the organization of the event giving her a real sense of involvement and being as important to her as the actual football game. Another person described the support provided by the community in driving his wife and another resident to hospital for cancer treatment:

> But then the treatment was for six weeks and we had so many offers from people in the village to take her that I didn't have to go every day you know so it was quite good. And we had another lady who had no transport, had cancer, so they compiled a list in the shop we've got here of people willing to drive. And, I forget how many there were on it, it was oversubscribed anyway. And took her in everyday you know to have her treatment. (St Breward 4, male, 18 years)

These stories recount actions in response to the needs of particular individuals, with the help provided by people making them feel they are contributing to the community. In addition to responding to individual needs, older people in St Breward talked about how the roles they performed in relation to local clubs and groups provided them with a feeling of community involvement:

> I gave an illustrated talk in the village hall. Loads of people came. I was amazed, I thought I'd be talking to myself but no, about forty or fifty people came and listened and they were all quite interested in it so that was fun actually, yeah. That was good. (St Breward 5, female, 11 years)

For older people living in Llanarth, these conventional senses of community appeared to be more problematic for different reasons. For instance, one person lived in a *cul de sac* and only saw his neighbours 'when they come to collect the parcels' (Llanarth 7, male, 22 years). A woman from England was living on an isolated farm and her nearest neighbours were a Welsh speaking family living across the valley (Llanarth 8, female, 40 years). Another woman described how her sense of community came from her journeys on the local bus than in the village:

> not only that you meet people on the buses, whereas you drive in the car, apart from the shops you go in you don't speak to nobody, you go on the bus and

there is always somebody you are going to have a word with even if it's just good morning or what have you. (Llanarth 6, female, 10 years)

While there was a sense of disconnection from community in Llanarth, residents still found ways to construct a positive social mood. An interviewee living in a hamlet a few miles from Llanarth described how towns lacked the sense of 'camaraderie that you get in a village' and are reliant on the willingness of others to be there for them (Llanarth 5, female, 40 years). For this reason, this woman made herself useful to her neighbours. In the village itself, a positive public mood had been eroded by the local authority policy of placing 'problematic' tenants in local social housing. This was perceived to be impacting detrimentally on local feelings of community as 'before you could leave your house open, didn't lock the door, you daren't' do that these days' (Llanarth 9, female, all of life). It was felt by some that the reputation of the place had become tarnished by this experience, leading to some people living nearby not wanting to send their children to the village school.

Community loss was also discussed in broader and cultural terms. A long-term resident of the village described how local life used to mean that one could 'walk into somebody's house, knock on the door, in you go. You can't do that these days. There's not that welcome that used to be' (Llanarth 1, female, all of life). As another established person commented:

> everybody wants to be private […] It's a shame, I don't know what it is, I think because we've had so many incomers you know. Before you knew everybody, if there was something you'd walk down the village or talk, you'd meet different people every day. And if there was anything wrong or if you'd upset somebody they'd say "you know you've upset so and so", "oh have I" and then you'd go and talk to them and finished, you know. But you don't get that these days. (Llanarth 9, female, all of life)

Several people contrasted the present, characterized by the desire for privacy, with the past, where social interaction and a willingness to share problems in order to solve them represented the community norm:

> There was a community and a closeness. You know, I remember [name's daughter] being a baby and I was working in the post office in Llanarth. My mother used to look after [my daughter]. But the offers I had: amazing. I will look after her for a morning, we'll look after her … You don't get that now, do you? (Llanarth 1, female, all of life)

What is evident here is the focus on the effort to generate togetherness, and regret at the loss of this orientation. The cognitive and affective dimensions of community are more closely aligned in past representations than experienced in the present, but still shape the present and structure expectations of how community will operate in the future.

3.2.3   Post-conventional discourse and community

Post-conventional discourse operates by subjecting existing norms to critique from the point of view of more adequate universal and justifiable norms. What emerges from our research is that the significance of this discourse varied across the case study places. In Rhayader, there was little pressure to develop more socially adequate practices, and so residents did not draw on this discourse. People did articulate incredulity about decisions that affected their lives. For example, some considered that a recent cut in funding for local arts projects would reduce levels of volunteering and social interaction amongst older people. However, all interviewees felt that their own needs and problems were being met by the local community. Indeed, one woman who was unable to leave her house for reasons of ill health, felt she was still able kept abreast of local gossip, stating that 'quite often I've heard it before somebody else has heard it' (Rhayader 4, female). So older people in Rhayader found they were able to live within the community and had no need to subject community norms to a universalizing critique.

The post-conventional discourse also highlights inadequacies in how existing norms deal with personal experiences. In St. Breward, there was an expectation that residents should adapt to the dominant local culture. As one person commented, you need to do 'your best to fit in…if you move to Rome you do as the Romans do ..." (St

Breward 6, female). It was felt that people could only be critical if they had first made the effort to find a space for themselves in the existing culture. That said, it was claimed that the community culture did value difference and support the incorporation of migrants into local life:

> [...] I think he was chairman on the council at the time and I always remember him giving his speech that the indigenous population ought to remember that unless we had some new thinking coming in, brought in by the new population there's a lot of things we wouldn't do. And that got quite a good round of applause […] What we found is that we didn't move down here to tell these people how to live, run their lives. We wanted to find out how to run our lives ... within their group. […] So we went out and mixed straight away and joined different things, and we did the rest of it piecemeal you know … but I think that paid off because we got to know so many people that we get on easily with now. (St Breward 4, male, 18 years)

The applause for the council chair's statement on the value of incomers encouraged this interviewee to join in groups sooner than he would have planned following his move to the area. However, other interviews reveal limits to the incorporation of new people and opinions within existing community. For instance, an incomer recounted a story of his participation in a campaign to keep a snooker club open in his village, only to find that the community council intended to close it:

> They'd wanted to shut the snooker club because it was half of the village institute […] so they wanted to shut the snooker club and we'd stopped them. And how would I have known that? They didn't tell me ... until after we'd kept it going for another whatever, so when it got to the end of year two, they had a meeting and closed it but didn't actually invite us because they didn't want us to keep it going, and they were very happy. But, you know, we visitors would never have realized what the rules were. And that's a perfect demonstration of village life, there's an agenda that you don't know about... (St Breward 7, male, 7 years)

This example indicates that local institutional discourse does not always permeate the interpersonal level of community discourse.

Turning to Llanarth, as discussed earlier the local institutional discourse here is strongly associated with the Welsh language and culture, which has created particular issues for recently arrived older people moving from England. Amongst such people, there was a feeling that they had to live within an existing fixed culture without any real opportunity to develop new forms of community that were capable of accommodating difference:

> So you know I found it hard when I came to Wales to realize how much the English were really resented. But you know you just … well if you want to live here and you want to enjoy it you've got to get over it a bit really. But … every now and again I think "oh damn them" (Laughs). (Llanarth 2, female, 12 years)

4   Conclusions

It is clear from this study that interpersonal constructions of community are situated inside local institutional discourses, with the performance of self and the mode by which people connect with others shaped by organizational rules and structures. In Rhayader, the institutional discourse focused on sustaining community services and facilities through voluntarism, developing ideas and methods suited to securing these facilities in the longer term. In this area, the conventional discourse was organized around a notion of how individuals could rely on community. Apart from some critical observations on the insider nature of community in Rhayader, the interviewees living in this area felt little need to draw on post conventional discourses. The institutional discourse in St Breward was associated with a public perspective on community issues, with rules of conduct developed that were able to reflect the diversity of views within the community. Here the conventional discourse concerned the helpful roles that people could play for one another in times of need, while the post-conventional discourse focused on how migrants could adapt to the local community culture. By contrast, in Llanarth, we find an institutional discourse that emphasised the importance of the Welsh language. By conducting business through the medium of

Welsh, the discourse unfolded in a formal way, constraining possibilities for all members of the community to become involved in local debate. In the interpersonal realm, these restrictions positioned migrants on the margins of community.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

By focusing on the kinds of knowledge that members of communities are developing, the learning theory of community reveals the differences between community cultures. The interpersonal discourses used by older people were situated within institutional discourses that gave shape and meaning to these discourses. However, these were again situated within wider social and cultural discourses. Had there been other resources that local residents sought to shape and develop in Llanarth, then there may have been less value attached to a culturally structured rule system, and the local community council may have been able to draw on the opinions and skills of a wider pool of local residents. Such a situation may not have had an extensive impact on the conventional discourse, but could well have mitigated post-conventional critiques. Rhayader provided an interesting example of a community where both established and migrant groups appeared content with the community. This was a rural town with a range of highly valued services and facilities that were being threatened by public sector spending cuts. However, despite the use of a formal institutional discourse, interviewees did not articulate post-conventional critiques suggesting that the local institutional discourse did not provoke a sense of injustice. Like Llanarth, St Breward was selected as a case study of a deprived and remote area. But unlike Llanarth, there were a variety of local groups and facilities of interest to older residents. In addition, St Breward is now largely populated by in-migrants with few residents who could trace their family history to the older Cornish populations. St Breward therefore provides an example of a community shaped by people who have chosen to live there and who seek to shape local life in relation to their aspirations of community (see Gilleard and Higgs, 2005; and Phillipson, 2007).

Our case study research has explored how critical theory could help to overcome the constructivist problem in cognitivism. Simply put, the constructivist problem is that by understanding community as a cognitive construction the analyst tends to lose sight of how community is grounded in 'actual social relations' and how people put

representations into practice in various ways (Day, 2006: 179). By viewing discourses and constructs as cognitive schemes that are held together with competing ideas in the minds of individuals, groups and communities, we view cognitive constructs as immanently rooted transcendent concepts. By embracing the cognitive, not simply as a symbol or representation, but as a range of ideas, practices and cultures that people activate as they draw on them, we link experience and responsibility with repositories of meaning. This allows us to think through community as both a social system and a space in which individuals learn to live with others in the context of common practices and rule systems. This shift of the cognitive into a dynamic process of meaning making through discourse and learning provides a fruitful way of analysing and comparing communities.

There are, however, limitations to this approach. A critical approach that uses cognitivist concepts to justify and stabilize critique, also encounters problems identifying and stabilizing these concepts. Strydom (2015) and Eder (2007) argue that critique needs to be based on the judicious stabilization of ideas competing in the public sphere. For example, there has been much public discussion of the role of community in managing an older population living in their own homes, and on the need to reshape services to buttress community based welfare services. But this discourse found little reflection in the discourses used by the older people or by local community representatives. To analyze community based on a discourse that is only beginning to take shape in the public sphere, whose meaning and implication for residents was not yet clear, seems hard to justify. These communities clearly did take on some roles focusing on older residents, but in an *ad hoc* way with little centralized support. Aside from the policy and resource issues, this issue also highlights the methodological limitation of relying on interview methods to analyse community. Given the complex phenomenology of community, it is likely that interviewees drew on discourses about their community that competed as much as overlapped with others discourses (see Pahl, 2005). It is also worth noting that the learning taking place within community can also be triggered by broader societal processes and discourses (see Phillipson, 2007). As such, a robust critical theoretic analysis would need the support of a broader range of methods.

What we can say is that the critiques raised by the older residents of these three rural places focused on local civic cultures rather than the practices that were needed to support the increasing population of older people. Reflecting on her study of three Antipodean communities, Liepins (2000b: 339) draws attention to the way rural populations negotiate meanings and practices that 'produce spatial and cultural forms of "community" that project points of connection, as well as patterns of control, marginalisation and contestation'. The fact that the cultures providing such 'points of connection' in these rural communities were defined by the community's own history and culture, and not by the interests resulting from a changing demographics, points to the enduring power of community culture. Insofar as community discourses unfold in relation to their own practices and cultures, then the critique of ageing communities needs to focus on the array of discourses shaping these communities. Reshaping community discourse will require civil society and state actors to bring new ideas resources and practices into communities, to transform ageing from a demographic descriptor of communities and into an essential component of shifting community discourse.

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