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Glossary of Abbreviations

GC – Group Cohesiveness

SOCB – Sense of community Belonging

ABSTRACT

The research examined the empowerment of groups and individuals within community art programs, exploring the link between community art and narrative-based projects and their contribution to a sense of community belonging (SOCB), group cohesiveness (GC), and self-esteem. An intervention program was implemented, incorporating myths from around the world alongside art and personal narratives, following the "Hero's Journey" model developed by Joseph Campbell (1949).

Research Aims sought to examine anticipated correlations among adults' GC, SOCB, and self-esteem, assess the extent to which background characteristics contribute to explaining these variables, and explore whether participation in this program would generate immediate and lasting effects on them among older adults.

Methodology: This is mixed-methods research. Since this researcher also facilitated the intervention program, triangulation, including quantitative research and three qualitative tools, was used to ensure ethical conduct.

The four research studies collected data from 40 participants: 3 senior clubs in Jerusalem, community and social workers, and the researcher herself.

Research tools: Quantitative: Three questionnaires focusing on the three parameters: GC, SOCB, and Self-esteem.

Qualitative: Semi-structured interviews, the Researcher's Journal, and Metaphorical Collage.

Main Findings highlight the intervention's impact during the "Swords of Iron" war in Israel. Participants showed significant improvement in GC and SOCB. While self-esteem improvement was not statistically significant, qualitative data suggest a positive change. A strong correlation was found between improvements in GC and SOCB, indicating mutual reinforcement. Both measures were significantly higher one month after the intervention. Demographic analysis showed that GC improved more in less religious and unmarried participants, though background factors did not substantially affect the overall SOCB improvement. More importantly, participants with lower initial scores in both measures showed the most significant benefits with no demographic influences.

Conclusions: The collective use of the Hero's Journey model is innovative and positively impacts the sense of community, SOCB belonging, and GC. Myths are relevant tools in modern society, contributing to this change. The encounter between cultural and personal narratives helps create an empowered life story, further strengthened through artistic expression. Combining all three tools also promotes change in self-esteem (despite differences between quantitative and

qualitative results). Participants and coordinators emphasized the need for follow-up programs to sustain personal growth and community resilience.

The practical implications: The study aspired to support the development of a unique community art program based on myth, both in Israel and internationally, to foster GC, SOCB, self-esteem, and community empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Presentation of the Research Topic and Its Broader Context

This research focused on community development through empowering groups and individuals within a community art program. Community-based art programs have long been recognized as practical tools for social change, empowering individuals and groups. They are implemented across diverse populations, from early childhood to older adults, including marginalized groups, migrants, people with special needs, and mental health challenges, as well as so-called mainstream populations. Art offers a sensitive and inclusive space that emphasizes creative strengths and the capacity to connect.

This study explores the link between community art and narrative-based projects, drawing on ethnic, collective, and communal narratives to strengthen and unify communities around shared values and stories. In this context, the research fosters a multicultural atmosphere, incorporating myths from around the world, as framed through the "Hero's Journey" model developed by Joseph Campbell (1949).

Social and Cultural Background

Israeli society comprises various sub-groups, many of which experience internal conflicts. The research aimed to create a judgment and polarization-free space within this complex context, encouraging empathetic listening and creativity as venues for social transformation.

The use of myth, often associated with tribal and ancient cultures, is introduced here in a novel way. While the "Hero's Journey" model is commonly applied through its stages alone, this study seeks to reintroduce myths as an essential tool that initially informed these stages. Since Campbell's (1949) model was developed through extensive cross-cultural mythological research, identifying universal stages of human response to life's challenges, this study positions myths as meaningful tools with potential relevance in contemporary society and views them as capsules of ancient knowledge offering applicable frameworks for action. If they yield significant impact, these tools can contribute to

community art programs and narrative-based projects that foster awareness and deeper attention in multicultural settings in Israel and internationally.

Theoretical and Practical Background

Three main sociological theories underpin this study: functionalism, structuralism, and symbolism. First, they are relevant to the analysis of myth, a core component of the current research. Second, they support interpreting the two additional tools used in this intervention: personal narratives and artistic expression, potential agents of change. At the base of this research also lie two models: Campbell's (1949) "Hero's Journey" model and Basic Ph resilience model (Lahad & Ayalon, 1997)

The research resides within the fields of community art and narrative projects. While community art programs are often studied in other disciplines, e.g., art therapy or education, it is vital to ground their significance in sociological inquiry, given their meaningful contribution to social and communal life.

Gap in Knowledge

The sociological impact of community art programs is scarce in the Israeli context. Despite widespread implementation, such programs are rarely supported by research, and their outcomes are thus not systematically evaluated. Programs targeting older adults are prevalent and in demand within this field. However, they lack empirical study. While participants' and institutional feedback highlight their positive impact, assessing and improving existing programs is difficult without systematic research. Even internationally, studies on community art often fall within the domains of education and art therapy, resulting in a lack of sociological theory to support their potential for change.

Research Contribution

This study aims to contribute to the sociological understanding of community art programs while expanding knowledge of narrative-based projects that incorporate the "Hero's Journey" model. Such programs typically combine personal narratives with artistic processes, often focusing on individual development.

The current research introduces an additional layer, myths, which may deepen the potential for personal transformation when integrated with personal narratives and artistic tools. At the same time, the study emphasizes group-level development processes, offering insights into how myth-based narrative art programs may foster community cohesion and shared meaning.

When used in community art programs, the hero's journey model focuses on individual growth. This research aims to explore the additional growth process in the group.

Research Aims, Questions, and Hypotheses

Research Aims: (1) To examine the correlation between adults' GC, sense of community belonging (SOCB), and self-esteem, and investigate whether adults' background characteristics explain these aspects. (2) To examine whether the intervention of community meetings integrating myth and art would have an effect on and a lasting effect on adults' GC, Sense of Community belonging, and sense of self-esteem.

Research Questions

Before the intervention: (1) Does adult group cohesiveness (GC) correlate with their Sense of Community belonging (SOCB) and self-esteem? (2) What adults' background characteristics contribute to explaining their GC, SOCB, and sense of self-esteem before the intervention?

Intervention effect: (1) Will adults' GC, SOCB, and self-esteem improve during and after the intervention of community meetings integrating myth and art? (2) Will the durability effect of the intervention of community meetings integrating myth and art be found in adults' GC, SOCB, and self-esteem? (3) Will adults' improvement rate in GC correlate with their improvement in their SOCB and self-esteem? (4) Will adults' background characteristics and baseline measures contribute to explaining their improvement in GC, SOCB, and self-esteem?

Research Hypotheses

Before the intervention: (1) The adult GC will correlate with their SOCB and self-esteem. (2) The adults' background characteristics will contribute to explaining their GC, SOCB, and sense of self-esteem before the intervention.

Intervention effect: (1) Adults' GC, SOCB, and sense of self-esteem will improve during and after the intervention of community meetings integrating myth and art. (2) The durability effect of the intervention of community meetings integrating myth and art will be found in adults' GC, SOCB, and self-esteem. (3) The adults' improvement rate in GC will be correlated with their improvement in their SOCB and self-esteem. (4) The adults' background characteristics and baseline measures will contribute to explaining their improvement in GC, SOCB, and self-esteem.

Theoretical Background and Conceptual Framework

This study explored whether community accompaniment, using myths, links to personal stories, and art tools, can create individual and community empowerment. This empowerment derives from three variables (GC, SOCB, and self-esteem) and three tools (Myths, Personal Narratives and Art).

Key Concepts

Group cohesiveness (GC) refers to uniting a group through shared beliefs and values, which Durkheim (1972) called "mechanical solidarity", natural social harmony, involving social ties, geographic identity, shared resources, and values as outcomes rather than components (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). Research shows that stronger GC builds improved economic and social well-being. Arts play a vital role in building GC by creating shared experiences and trust (Lee, 2013; Sonke et al., 2025). This study focuses on GC as the program's key social change aspect.

Sense of Community Belonging (SOCB) is a fundamental human need for attachment rooted in Western and traditional societies (Delanty, 2009; Bruhn, 2011). Vogl (2016) described community-building as involving multiple parameters to foster a sense of belonging. The need for belonging increases with loneliness and individualism (Block, 2018). Today, communities often form through communication rather than location, allowing people to belong to multiple groups simultaneously (Delanty, 2009). Community art effectively enhances a sense of belonging, especially among migrants and youths (Afshar, 2018; Lewis, McLeod & Li, 2018). This study explores belonging in senior clubs to deepen connections beyond individual activities.

Self-esteem strongly correlates with life satisfaction and success (Westfall, 2020). Studies have found a two-way relationship between self-esteem and social connections, with each influencing the other (Harris & Orth, 2020). Community art projects help boost self-esteem by encouraging creative expression and personal growth (Lowe, 2000). This study examined self-esteem alongside SOCB to understand their relationship.

Myths: In religious anthropology, myths have been viewed variously as collective dreams, sacred narratives, or universal story structures (Lévi-Strauss, 1955; Von Henty, 2002). Lévi-Strauss focused on the common structures underlying myths worldwide, while Campbell (1949) developed the "monomyth" concept, detailing universal hero journey stages essential to this study. Myths carry symbolic meanings that link ancient and modern cultures and offer deep personal and social insights (Wickens, 2013). Though less common in community art, using myths can empower individuals and groups by clarifying values and fostering dialogue (Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, 2012).

Cultural Narrative Projects: Cultural narrative projects can transform difficult stories into hope and growth as part of community change research (Rappaport, 2000; Solinger et al., 2008). These projects rely on partners and shared storytelling, often healing historical traumas by linking people to place and culture (Balla et al., 2022). The current study uses personal narratives linked to myths to promote empowerment, particularly during collective trauma such as war.

Community-engaged art links artistic practice with social research, using art to activate communities and address social needs. Historically connected to protest and community support (Weinberg, 2018), it has been shown to empower socially vulnerable groups (Carrasco et al., 2016). This study uses art to foster individual and community resilience and change through cultural and personal narratives.

Community Empowerment: Empowerment is a social process that helps individuals and communities gain control over their lives and address inequalities in resource distribution. It includes personal empowerment (self-efficacy, motivation) and collective empowerment (belonging, participation) (Hur, 2006, in Carrasco et al., 2016). Creative community projects enhance empowerment by improving members' ability to manage their lives and engage in decisions about their futures (Dagan, 2015). Art supports dialogue and inclusion, making empowerment a complex, ongoing process tied to social change (Imran, 2021).

Theories and Models

Three main Sociological and Anthropological theories underpin this research.

Functionalism: A core sociological and anthropological theory focused on how social institutions fulfill society's needs. Durkheim (1972) argued that society is a powerful entity maintained by members' behaviors, and social phenomena serve organic functions in this system. Malinowski (1948) emphasized that cultural elements, including myths, respond to social needs and must be understood in their specific cultural contexts. This approach influences the intervention program's use of myths from multiple cultures and raises questions about their cultural relevance (Holmwood, 2005; Pope, 1975; Szymanski, 1972).

Cultural Structuralism: Structural anthropology, developed between the 1940s and the 1970s (Lévi-Strauss, 1978), studies the underlying universal structures common to myths and other cultural phenomena. Lévi-Strauss saw myths as collections of signs revealing hidden patterns repeated worldwide. His contemporary mythology researcher, Campbell (1949), developed the hero's journey (monomyth) model based on these structural patterns, central to this

study's intervention. This approach highlights the myth's structural role across cultures (Maranda, 1972; Turner, 1983; Badcock, 2014).

Symbolic Anthropology views culture as a system of shared symbols that give meaning to social life. Geertz (1973) described human behavior as symbolic actions interpreted within cultural contexts. Turner (1969, 1979) introduced the concepts of liminality and *communitas* to explain transitional ritual states and the strong bonds they create within communities. Eliade (1969; Hebrew edition, 2000) explored myths and rituals as symbolic links to a mythical "great time" that renews reality. These perspectives deepen understanding of myths' role in traditional and contemporary societies (Burke, 1989; Geertz, 2005; Eliade, 1969; Turner, 1969).

Hero's Journey – Campbell's Model

Campbell (1949), deeply influenced by Lévi-Strauss, continued to explore mythologies and developed the concept of 'Monomyth', which refers to mythical narratives as versions of a single story. An example is "A Hero's Journey," which describes mythological heroes' similar journeys and, simultaneously, anyone's symbolic journey (ibid) and their coping with diverse life circumstances.

BASIC Ph: Resilience Model in Crisis Situations, a mental model for coping with stressful situations, was added to the theories because the intervention program was timed during the Swords of Iron War. This complex timing was an opportunity to help participants find resilience. This was added to examine the intervention program's contribution during wartime. Since war and the challenges it entails are anchored in Israeli reality, it was right to seek an Israeli coping model developed after research about previous extreme circumstances in Israel. The BASIC Ph model (Lahad & Ayalon, 1997) is a multidimensional model of coping with crises that addresses individuals' coping methods in such situations.

Literature Review

Studies that support the research hypotheses and aims come from three main research fields: community art programs, narrative projects, and community-based interventions using the Hero's Journey model. Across these fields, evidence shows consistent positive effects on self-esteem, SOCB, and GC, which are the core aims of the present study.

Hero's Journey-Based Interventions

The PARTY project in South Africa applied participatory workshops based on the Hero's Journey model to empower marginalized San youth through personal storytelling, theatre, radio, and poster-making, strengthening agency,

identity, and hope (Sarantou, Kontio & Miettinen, 2018). Similarly, a week-long theatre and Gestalt workshop in Germany produced lasting personal transformation six months after completion (Lehner, 2022).

Multicultural and Older-Adult Community Art Programs

Community art initiatives, particularly in multicultural contexts, have demonstrated strong potential for fostering group identification, empowerment, and intercultural understanding (Kontinen, Mikkonen & Ylisuvalo, 2022; Lähdesmäki & Koistinen, 2021). The European DIALLS project underscored the role of structured reflection and safe spaces in enabling art to catalyze empathy and cross-cultural dialogue. Within older-adult populations, the Creative Journeys initiative showed simultaneous improvements in belonging, social ties, and self-confidence through collaborative artistic activities (Bungay et al., 2021; Dadswell et al., 2017), aligning closely with the goals of the current intervention.

Narrative Projects

Narrative-based initiatives further illustrate the capacity of shared storytelling to strengthen GC. The Nak'azdli Whut'en community project in Canada connected personal and tribal histories through intergenerational storytelling, reinforcing social bonds and collective identity in the face of cultural loss (Freeman et al., 2020). Similar narrative projects have demonstrated the transformative role of sharing personal and cultural stories to foster belonging and resilience across diverse communities.

METHODOLOGY

Since this researcher also facilitated the intervention program, triangulation, including quantitative research and three qualitative tools, ensured the researcher's ethical conduct. The research methodology for this study consisted of mixed methods to obtain a fuller perspective. Triangulation employed quantitative, qualitative, and observation tools. The structure was chosen so that it allowed cross-checking of information from several directions. Sometimes, information absent in qualitative questionnaires can become clear precisely in interviews.

First, three variables were quantitatively examined in groups that underwent the intervention program. Second, in the qualitative part, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of participants and social and community workers linked to the groups. Third, a journal was kept documenting the researcher's observations of all encounters. A fourth tool was added: the Metaphorical collage, which summarized the intervention program, was also conducted with a sample of participants.

Participants

The current study involved 40 adults (39 females and one male) who participated in three senior clubs in Jerusalem. These adults participated in an intervention program that connected personal narratives with community stories, myths, or legends.

Research Tools

The underlying goal of this intervention program was to utilize myths to help individuals and communities achieve fulfilling lives. When integrated into adults' private and communal experiences, myths can facilitate processes that impact self-esteem and foster a SOCB and unity within the community. This approach is a contemporary tool for accessing the timeless wisdom of traditional cultures and tapping into participants' creative potential.

- **Questionnaires: (1)** GC was measured using a questionnaire by Lese and MacNair-Semands (2000). Sense of community was assessed using Rovai's (2002) Sense of Classroom Community Index, with slight adaptations to the terminology. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Scale (1965), as adapted by Zvidat et al. (2015).
- **Semi-Structured Interviews**
- **Researcher's Journal**
- **Metaphorical Collage**

The Research Studies

The research comprised four studies, as detailed below:

Study 1 - Quantitative

Aim: To examine how a community program focusing on myths and arts contributes to a community in several aspects: (1) SOCB; (2) GC; (3) Self-esteem;

Research Tool: Quantitative pre-, during, and post-questionnaires, and a month later;

Participants: 40 program participants;

Data Analysis: Quantitative statistical analysis.

Study 2 - Qualitative

Aims (1) To analyze nine participants' mid-qualitative interviews regarding their attitudes to the intervention program and perceptions of the community program concerning GC, participants' sense of community belonging, and sense

of self-esteem, and find whether changes ought to be made to the program to improve and amend the community program. (2) To explore and conclude the community intervention program at the end of the 12 meetings.

Research Tools: (1) Semi-structured interviews (2) Metaphorical collage;

Participants: (1) 9 participants, (2) 6 participants;

Data Analysis: Qualitative analysis – by themes and categories.

Study 3 - Qualitative

Aim: To explore social and community workers' perceptions of the community program **regarding GC and participants' SOCB;**

Research tool: Qualitative semi-structured interviews;

Participants: 3 social and community workers;

Data Analysis: Qualitative analysis – by themes and categories.

Study 4 - Qualitative

Aim: To comment and summarize the community intervention program at the end of every meeting;

Research tool: Qualitative – Researcher's journal;

Data Analysis: Qualitative analysis by themes and categories.

"Hero's / Heroine's Journey" Intervention Program

The "Hero's Journey" program is a community art project that fosters self-esteem, SOCB, and GC among the elderly. This stage in life, often accompanied by questions of meaning and belonging, requires interventions that help enhance personal and social identity.

The "Hero's Journey" model by Joseph Campbell (1949) was chosen for the program because it illustrates the process of personal development and growth that each individual undergoes. The model incorporates elements of a universal myth, allowing participants to see themselves as part of a larger story and encouraging SOCB and identification with others in the group. Using this model added depth to each participant's personal journey while connecting them to the collective, creating an opportunity for shared experiences and creative expression in a group context.

The program was designed with the understanding that the arts, alongside the use of myths and personal storytelling, provide powerful tools for improving self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and GC. As part of the program, the myths integrated into the workshops served as a bridge between the personal experiences of the participants and a larger collective narrative, strengthening

the SOCB and unity. Through a combination of art, creativity, and personal storytelling, participants were given the opportunity to explore and express themselves artistically while forming meaningful connections with others in the group. The intervention program is concerned with personal stories, meeting community stories, myths, or legends, and examining whether, by using this meeting point, change can be brought about in individuals and communities.

Underlying the intervention program is the desire to use myths to help individuals and communities realize satisfying lives. At its foundation is the hypothesis that when encountering our private and community lives, myths can enhance developing processes, influence one's self-esteem, and promote SOCB and GC. The process is a modern key, allowing participants to dive into the infinite wisdom of traditional cultures and our creative power.

The Program's Characteristics

Participants: 40 adults (third and fourth age). Participants underwent (in three groups) a workshop process of 12 weeks each. Every hour-and-a-half session consisted of the following: (1) Learning cultural and mythological texts. (2) Personal stories and their connection to mythological/cultural texts were shared. (3) Participants created and echoed texts using writing and collage work. (4) The artwork was displayed at the end of each meeting and at the end of the whole process.

The groups' processes were assessed for its effect on community cohesiveness, sense of belonging, and self-esteem.

As the researcher also facilitated the workshop, ethical considerations were addressed.

Research Variables

Independent variables: time points before intervention (T1), during intervention (T2), after intervention (T3), and 1 month after intervention (T4) for community meetings aimed at promoting SOCB, increasing GC levels, and increasing participants' self-esteem.

Dependent variables: Participants' SOCB. (2) The level of GC. (3) Participants' sense of self-esteem.

Program Structure

The outline of the hero's journey is divided into three divisions, each consisting of four stages. The first division is departure on an adventure. It includes four stages:

(A separate session was devoted to each stage).

Departure

1. Call to adventure. This is the stage when the hero feels the call to go to a new place and experience its fresh essence.
2. Refusal: delaying factors. The stage where attention is on delaying factors: fears and anxieties.
3. Help and inspiration on the way - meeting the mentor. This stage addresses inspirational figures and elements that can help us on the journey.
4. Crossing the threshold. This is when the decision to “jump into the water” is realized. Coping with the departure itself.

The second division is the initiation, which focuses on the journey itself and the opportunities it provides. It is also spread over four sessions.

Initiation

5. Challenges – tests, allies, and enemies: This is the central stage of the journey. After the dedication and crossing the threshold, the challenges are revealed, which one must overcome to develop.
6. Resources - the powers within. This stage tests the hero's existing resources, powers, wisdom, and natural talents.
7. Reward: The Stage at which the hero is rewarded for challenges met.
8. Renunciation (symbolic death): At this stage, the hero's soul searches for what is worth giving up to introduce new qualities into life and live in this new way. It is also called ‘symbolic death’ because there is a willingness to allow the old identity or parts thereof to die to introduce the latest.

The third division is the return. Here, the hero returns to the community with insights, new knowledge, and his/her unique contribution.

Return

9. Miraculous escape, new quality: This stage is the first in the return to community chapter, characterized by the hero's miraculous escape and acceptance of a new magical quality he/she can use for personal or community well-being.
10. Crossing the threshold in return to community: At this critical stage, after assimilating the new power, the latest gift, the hero returns to the community.
11. Completion, balance: master/ mistress of two worlds: This stage is characterized by experiencing a new level of consciousness, a type of

‘heaven on earth’ when the hero who returned is more complete and can exist in it from now on.

12. Return with Elixir: Creating new harmony. The stage ending the process is also an introduction to the following process. Our life processes unfold linearly and offer opportunities to encounter the same themes from deeper places. This is the stage where the hero focuses on how to move in the world through deep harmony.

The mythological part is expressed in sessions as follows: Each session included examples from the formative stories of the Jewish nation and from myths worldwide. Since heroes in myths are predominantly male, examples from legends were introduced to include heroines as role models. The aims of every session were drawn directly from the sociological theoretical framework of the three theories underlying the research.

The artistic part of the session was expressed as follows: At each session, each participant created a card symbolizing the stage we addressed. The relatively small cards invited minimalist and accurate creation of an aspect of the hero’s journey during that session. The cards were created using a collage technique introduced to the participants, together with Australian native Dot Painting and the Mandala shape, which appears sacred in many cultures. The rationale for choosing cards was the desire to, through art, make felt the change each participant undergoes. Creating cards was selected from the vast experience of creating art in growth processes facilitated before. This art process helps bring change into our lives. Artworks that are not in use are forgotten over time. With cards, there is a much greater chance for repeated use and remembering the crossroads of life changes.

Over the years and with much experience with many groups, the Collage Technique was chosen for the artistic part of the program. It is a simple technique to understand and apply, even among those who have never experienced making art and for whom art is distant.

Program Uniqueness

The innovation of this program lies in its use of myths and artistic creation, which uniquely bring communities together through these forms; a parallel has not yet been found elsewhere. The program allows myths to connect with personal stories by reprocessing them through art. The opportunity to see a personal story from a new angle, as part of a broader cultural narrative, can construct a community by uniting its members around constitutive stories and create a new dialogue between multicultural groups around their individual stories. Campbell's Hero's Journey model underpins the process as a means for personal development. In this program, an attempt has been made to foster

collective development and build a new collective memory, connecting personal works into a more significant collective creation.

Ethics

This research, which examined the effects of an intervention program on SOCB, involved several ethical dilemmas. The central ethical concern was the researcher's dual role in conducting research and facilitating the intervention program. Special care was required when developing the research design, as the assumptions of its benefits had to be addressed with caution. For this reason, the triangulation approach was carefully considered and ultimately adopted. As it was impossible to know in advance whether the process would benefit participants, close attention was paid to their experiences and feelings.

Additional dilemmas arose from the researcher's understanding of myths and stories. The researcher actively explored participants' interpretations during the intervention, ensuring she did not impose her perspective. Ethical attention was also given to avoiding influencing participants' responses per the research aims. The researcher sought to anticipate and address ethical challenges appropriately, drawing on her long-standing role as a facilitator known for her moral sensitivity and attentiveness to complexity. Particular care was taken in participant selection, ensuring fairness and respect for privacy and dignity, despite practical limitations caused by the "Swords of Iron" war. While the study was based on hypotheses regarding potential improvements in key measures, the process remained open to unexpected outcomes, allowing the findings to emerge naturally.

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the intervention program, which used three main tools: myths, personal stories, and art, to influence three social measures: sense of community belonging (SOCB), group cohesiveness (GC), and self-esteem. The program aimed to empower individuals and groups in three senior clubs in Jerusalem, and the research shows the processes participants went through from their own perspective, as well as those of the coordinators and the researcher, providing a broad and deep understanding.

First, the quantitative results collected through questionnaires given four times: before, during, at the end of the program, and one month later, will be reviewed. Then, the qualitative findings will be presented, including mid-program interviews with participants, a metaphorical collage process at the end, interviews with club coordinators, and insights from the researcher's journal, to understand the program's impact better. All qualitative results are presented according to common themes and categories.

Quantitative Findings

Before examining the research questions and considering the limited sample size, Shapiro-Wilk analyses were conducted to determine whether the study measures (GC, SOCB, and sense of self-esteem) were normally distributed. The results indicated that all study measures followed a normal distribution (p -values ranged between .184 and .938). Therefore, parametric analyses were conducted (assuming a normal distribution of the study measures) to investigate the research questions. The results are presented in two sections following the research aims and hypotheses.

First, the quantitative results from questionnaires administered 4 times (before the program, during it, at its end, and a month after its end) will be reviewed. Then, the qualitative results will be presented, which include all of the qualitative research tools: mid-term interviews with some of the participants, a metaphorical collage process with some of the participants at the end of the program, interviews with the two club coordinators with a municipality social worker, and the results of the researcher's journal.

All qualitative results will be presented according to common themes and categories.

Part A: Before the Intervention

Q1: The Correlation Between the Adults' Group Cohesiveness, Sense of Community Belonging, and Sense of Self-Esteem Before the Intervention

Pearson correlation analyses examined the correlation between GC, SOCB, and self-esteem before the intervention. Significant positive correlations were found between adults' GC and their SOCB and self-esteem [$r(38) = .58, p < .001$, and $r(38) = .46, p < .01$, respectively]. Additionally, significant positive correlations were found between adults' Sense of Community belonging and self-esteem, $r(38) = .41, p < .01$.

It should be noted that these correlation patterns were observed for both the total score of the questionnaire measuring the Sense of Community belonging and its two subscales: connectedness and learning. These results indicate that as adults report higher GC, their SOCB and self-esteem are correspondingly higher prior to the intervention, and vice versa.

Q2: The Contribution of the Adults' Background Characteristics on Explaining Their GC, Sense of Community Belonging, and Sense of Self-Esteem before the Intervention

Multiple regression analyses were conducted separately for each measure to examine the contribution of adults' background characteristics in explaining their cohesiveness (GC), SOCB, and sense of self-esteem before the intervention. The adults' background characteristics were entered into the regression model stepwise, allowing only variables that significantly contribute to explaining adults' GC, SOCB, and sense of self-esteem to be included. The results of the multiple regression analyses show that adults' educational level contributed 10.8% ($p < .05$) and 30.8% ($p < .001$) to the explained variance in adults' GC and self-esteem, respectively. The positive β coefficients indicate that more educated adults report higher GC and self-esteem levels before the intervention. No significant contribution of the adults' background characteristics was found for the total scale or the two SOCB subscales.

Part B: The Intervention Effect

Question 1 in this section examined the intervention effect and hypothesized that adults' GC, SOCB, and self-esteem would improve during and after the intervention.

Question 2 examined the durability of the intervention effect and hypothesized that adults' GC, SOCB, and self-esteem would remain stable a month after the intervention and be greater than before.

To examine these research questions, one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for each study measure to investigate differences in adults' GC, SOCB, and sense of self-esteem across four points (before, during, after, and one month after intervention). Time was the independent variable, and GC, SOCB, and sense of self-esteem were the dependent variables.

Intervention Effect

As mentioned, the first research question concerns the effect of community meetings integrating myth and art on enhancing GC, SOCB, and self-esteem among adults.

A significant effect of time was found for adults' GC and SOCB (total score and the two subscale scores). Bonferroni's post hoc analysis indicates that adults' GC and SOCB (measured by the total score and the learning subscale) increased significantly during the intervention compared to before the intervention ($p < .001$, $p = .002$, and $p < .001$, respectively). These results indicate significant improvement from the baseline measure (before the

intervention) to the midpoint of the intervention. Additionally, adults' GC and SOCB (measured by the total score and the learning subscale) continued to increase significantly from the measurement during the intervention to the measurement after the intervention ($p = .006$, $p < .001$, and $p < .001$).

Regarding the connectedness subscale of the SOCB questionnaire, improvement from the baseline measure (before the intervention) to the midpoint of the intervention was not significant ($p = .410$). However, progress in this measure was significant only after the intervention compared to before ($p < .001$). This result indicates that the effect of community meetings integrating myth and art was more gradual. Finally, no significant effect of the intervention was found on the adults' self-esteem. Table presents the means, standard deviations, and F-values for GC, SOCB, and self-esteem across different time points.

Durability Effect of the Intervention

As mentioned, the second research question concerns the durability of community meetings, integrating myth and art to enhance GC, SOCB, and self-esteem among adults.

As shown in Table III.3, a significant effect of time was found for adults' GC and SOCB (total score and the two subscale scores). Bonferroni's post hoc analysis indicates that adults' GC and SOCB (total score and the two subscales) remained stable after one month following the intervention ($p > .05$). These results indicate that adults' GC and SOCB did not decrease after one month. Additionally, adults' GC and SOCB (total score and the two subscale scores) were significantly higher one month after the intervention than before ($p < .001$, $p = .003$, $p = .025$, and $p = .005$, respectively). These results indicate significant improvement from the baseline measure (before the intervention) to one month after.

Finally, no significant durability effect of the intervention was found for the adults' self-esteem.

Q3: The Correlation between the Adults' Improvement in Group Cohesiveness, Sense of Community Belonging, and Sense of Self-Esteem

To examine whether the improvement in adults' GC correlated significantly with changes in their SOCB, Pearson correlation analyses were conducted on the improvement rates. Table 5 presents the Pearson correlation coefficient between the improvement rates in adults' GC and SOCB from before to after the intervention.

A significant positive correlation was found between the improvement rate in adults' GC and the improvement rate in the total SOCB scale, $r(38) = .43, p < .01$. This suggests that adults who showed more remarkable improvement in GC also demonstrated more significant enhancement in their SOCB, and vice versa. However, while the improvement rate in GC was positively correlated with the improvement rate in the connectedness subscale, the correlation between the improvement rate in GC and the improvement rate in the learning subscale did not reach significance [$r(38) = .46, p < .01$ and $r(38) = .25, p = .112$, respectively].

Q4: The Contribution of the Adults' Background Characteristics and Their Baseline Measures on Explaining Their Improvement Rate on Group Cohesiveness, Sense of Community Belonging, and Sense of Self-Esteem

To examine the contribution of adults' background characteristics and the unique contribution of baseline measures in explaining their improvement rates in GC and SOCB from before to after the intervention, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted separately for each measure. Adults' background characteristics were entered into the regression model stepwise in the first block, including only variables that significantly explained the improvement rates in GC and SOCB. Baseline measures were entered in the second block stepwise to examine the unique contribution of the baseline measure of the study variables before the intervention and explain the improvement in these measures after the intervention, while controlling for adults' background characteristics. Table 6 presents the results of these hierarchical regression analyses.

Adults' religiosity level and marital status together contributed 24.8% ($p < .01$) to the explained variance in adults' improvement rates in GC in the first block of the regression. The negative β coefficients indicate that less religious adults and those not in a relationship or married show higher improvement rates in GC. None of the adults' background characteristics significantly contributed to explaining the improvement rates in the total score of the SOCB questionnaire or its two factors: connectedness and learning subscales.

In the second block of the regression, a significant unique contribution was found for the baseline measures of the study variables at T1. The baseline measures of adults' GC and SOCB (total score and two subscales) contributed significantly, -21.9 %, 32.1%, 39.5%, and 29.9%, respectively, to explaining the improvement of adults' GC and SOCB. All contributions had negative β coefficients, indicating a more significant improvement among adults whose GC and SOCB were low at the beginning of the intervention.

Qualitative Analysis

Referring to **question No. 1:** Does adult GC correlate with their SOCB and sense of self-esteem? This section presents the themes and categories that emerged from the nine interviews conducted during the hero-heroine's journey intervention program, along with results from an additional tool: the metaphorical collage. The semi-structured interviews aimed to examine the correlation between cohesiveness (GC), SOCB, and self-esteem, and the effectiveness of the tools used in the intervention program, aiming to achieve improvement in these three parameters.

Theme 1: Sense of Community Belonging

The topic of belonging is divided into three categories: the ability to express oneself before the group, inspiration or the feeling of closeness to other participants, and a general feeling within the group.

Table 1: Sense of Community Belonging

Theme	Categories	Sample Quotes
Sense of Community Belonging	Ability to Share	"I feel free to speak" (P1) "Openness, release, not to be ashamed, to talk" (P2)
	Recognition and Inspiration by group members	"These were the two stories that really.. constituted a mission in my life.." (P4). "...the Italian teacher, for example, gave so much sharing in depth to know how and what and how to express myself, lots of things in common.. She added a lot to how I can express myself more" (P6)
	General feelings in the group	"The atmosphere was enjoyable from the beginning, and the group was fabulous" (P3) "You find yourself in a group, and it like empowers us... It gave me a yes like you are among others; you are not alone; it is not a disaster or tragedy that you are alone and have to cope with" (P4)

This theme consists of three categories: **Ability to Share**: Six participants reported increased freedom to express themselves, supported by group feedback and deepening connections. Similarly, six participants noted **Recognition** and **Inspiration** by group members, who described gaining inspiration from others' stories, fostering empathy, and broader understanding. Overall, five participants emphasized the general feelings of the group, who described a relaxed and supportive atmosphere that strengthened their shared sense of not being alone.

Theme 2: Sense of Group Cohesiveness

One category emphasizes existing unity, while the second refers to ideas for future GC.

Table 2: Theme 2: Group Cohesiveness

Theme	Categories	Sample Quotes
Group Cohesiveness)	Existing unity	"A sense of caring existed in the group from the start. But there is no doubt that perhaps it does something again. You get to know the people, how can I put it, in other aspects of life, which I think is important." (P3)
	Ideas for enhancing unity	"In my opinion, to make the group smaller..". "...to include everyone. To try and include everyone. Yes." (P2). "... it seems to me that perhaps at the end, if you had asked each one to provide her creative process, it would be some sort of sharing again. Some sharing as if you present your image in another way." (P3)

Seven of nine participants described a strong sense of unity from the workshop, calling the group a “refuge” during the “Swords of Iron” war. Some felt GC existed before, while others experienced it growing through deeper sharing. Coordinators noted stronger personal connections, especially among outsiders. The researcher observed a joyful, close atmosphere despite external stress. Suggestions like smaller groups and more positive feedback reflect awareness of the need to maintain and deepen GC.

Theme 3: Sense of Self-Esteem

This theme is connected to research question No. 1, and it will be analyzed differently: instead of dividing it into categories, it will be analyzed using two tools:

1. **Interviews;**
2. **Metaphorical Collage:** This tool was used in a concluding process for the hero-heroine's journey workshop. Six workshop participants participated in this process, commenting on the workshop with collage art and words.

Table 3: Sense of Self-Esteem

Themes	Tools	Sample Quotes	
Sense of Self-Esteem	Interview	<p>".. Definitely, it provides you with a good place for yourself" (P2) "Of course, there is more confidence.. " (P6).</p>	
	Metaphorical Collage	<p>Image/Caption: Image of a young smiling woman Title: "<i>Facing Forward</i>" Handwritten: "<i>Giving up the need to prove</i>" Verbal Explanation: "I want to give up the need to prove what and who I am and focus on what fills me with joy and satisfaction" (PA).</p>	
		<p>Image: Hands holding dirt with a golden object above a pile of dirt Caption/Title: "<i>Come discover a treasure.</i>" "The treasure was in my hands; I just made it possible for it to get out"</p>	<p>"I had an unclear fear of going out into the world and discovering that maybe I do not know anything" (PB)</p>

Table 4: Metaphorical Collage - Self-esteem and Self-image

Images and Captions	Verbal Explanations
PARTICIPANT A	
Image of two elderly women - Above the image: " <i>I earned the wrinkles, honestly.</i> " Below it: " <i>I am starting to love them.</i> "	"I lovingly accept the third age, the maturity, and the wisdom that comes with it."
Side captions: "Grateful for what is." Title: " <i>You have reached an age where you can begin</i> " Handwritten: " <i>You can be happy</i> "	"I am young, and I do not need to prove anything. Inside, I am curious, eager for life, love adventures, and want to 'conquer the world'" (PA)
PARTICIPANT B	
Image: An older woman sitting and smiling in the center of the collage	"I am a nice and optimistic elderly woman going on an interesting journey and hoping for an enjoyable experience."
Caption: " <i>Another Journey</i> " (at the top center)	"Every day is suitable for a journey and soaring." (PB).
PARTICIPANT C	
Set of 3 images: Seagull soaring above the sea An elderly couple embracing on a beach with the man pointing to the sea A living room, furniture on a balcony, and the sea	"Little by little, I discovered there is a world inside me that had been forgotten, and I allow myself to gradually continue to bring it out to engage in what I love.." (PC)
PARTICIPANT E	
Caption: "Facing forward with great strength" "Against time"	"I look to the future with optimism and great strength!" "I forget my age and enjoy every possible thing." (PE)

Interviews: Six participants reported a good or high level of self-esteem, with some noting new behaviors outside the group, as P1 described trying a

challenging crossword for the first time: “...*I think it is from the workshop.*” All but one expressed satisfactory self-esteem, fostering self-reflection, reconnection to strengths, and nostalgia that enhanced self-worth. Sharing personal stories and deep reflection increased confidence and openness, particularly for those who were initially less expressive.

Metaphorical Collage: Six participants created metaphorical collages summarizing their Hero-Heroine’s Journey. Four collages explicitly addressed self-esteem and featured images of women, symbolizing empowerment and the “*giving up [of] the need to prove.*”

Theme 4: Reference to Workshop Components

This theme relates to workshop components intended to influence the parameters in research question No. 1. The three components that compose the intervention workshop are:

- (1) Myths; (2) Shared personal narratives; (3) Artwork.**

Table 5: Reference to workshop components

Theme	Categories	Sample Quotes
Reference to Workshop Component	Myths	"...the stories you bring. They are amazing and awaken and open in me so many paths, barriers, and the ability to talk about them" (P4) "...wonderful...it was very nice like reaching a certain point indirectly ...it works in a direction that every time went up a step..." (P7)
	Shared personal narratives	I discovered things about some of them that I had not known." (P5) "Their stories are fascinating... following the theme you presented to us". (P.2)
	Artwork	"I reveal the powers, recognize them, and perhaps put them down on paper, and it was wonderful" (P7) "I think I got into art; I have never touched art before. .. Even one of my friends told me, "Come to an art class, it suits you." (Laughs) (P1)

Seven of nine participants valued the **myths** segment for its richness and inspiration, with some linking myths to personal stories, such as the flood’s relevance during the “Swords of Iron” war. P7 noted the myths’ indirect approach encouraged reflection. Coordinators saw myths fostering personal growth despite some ultra-Orthodox resistance. Eight emphasized the importance of **sharing personal Narratives**, while five found **artwork** essential for connecting myths to their narratives; three did not engage with this part.

Theme 5: Workshop Contribution

This theme looks at the contributions of the program from participants’ feedback, focusing on the most meaningful aspects and suggested changes or additions for future workshops. There are two categories:

1. The most meaningful aspects.
2. Changes and additions.

Table 6: Workshop Contribution

Theme	Categories	Sample Quotes
Workshop Contribution	The most meaningful aspects	"...to hear the group, to get to know people a little, that is the main thing, and to get to know them through their artworks." (P3). "... The stories you bring are amazing and awaken and open in me so many paths, barriers, and the ability to talk about them." (P4). "Actually, it brought back many memories, many things from the past, the war reminded me, and conversations also awoke all sorts of things..." (P 5)
	Change, Additions	"I think that if we're small groups, more people would talk.." (P1) "...try and include everyone." (P2). "... more time to expand programs.... not enough (P4)

Participants emphasized the need for more time and opportunities to share personal stories, especially in creative parts, suggesting smaller groups and more individual attention. Coordinators advised adding visual and musical elements and prioritizing storytelling and art over myth study. Some changes were made during the program to improve engagement. Mid-program feedback enabled real-time adjustments, underscoring the need for flexibility.

This chapter presented quantitative and qualitative findings from questionnaires, interviews, metaphorical collages, and the researcher's journal. The results focus on enhancing SOCB, Self-Esteem, and GC, exploring the roles of myths, personal narratives, and artistic expression. Findings highlight rich participant experiences across three senior clubs, revealing growth, resilience, and meaning-making amid the "Swords of Iron" war context.

Research Limitations

1. The researcher conducted the program, requiring ethical caution and potentially influencing participants' responses.
2. The intervention program was conducted during wartime, so results reflect an exceptional context with no data for peacetime.
3. Myth selection was based solely on the researcher's knowledge, and different myths might have produced different effects.
4. The sample was limited to senior clubs willing to join a 12-session program.
5. The scarcity of prior research on community art with older adults in Israel limited the theoretical basis for the study

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The previous chapter reported the study's quantitative and qualitative results. The findings suggest that the intervention program enhanced older participants' sense of social cohesion and belonging.

The conclusions regarding self-esteem were conflicting. The qualitative data showed considerable improvement, but the quantitative analysis showed no discernible change. All subjects experienced the improvements, irrespective of their demographic background. However, the program was beneficial for people who needed a sense of community and a sense of belonging.

This concluding chapter summarizes the study's main conclusions and outlines recommendations for future programs and research.

Main Conclusions

1. As before, **the Hero's Journey approach in community art programs** prioritized personal development and self-determination. This intervention program greatly enhanced GC and a SOCB by extending its use to group empowerment. These results demonstrate how well the concept promotes community development.
2. **Using Myths:** Including myths from many cultures was another novel aspect of the intervention that provided participants with a broader variety of identification models. The multicultural content fostered internal growth, inspiration, tolerance, and the ability to hold many narratives within the Jewish-Israeli framework. Working in a multicultural setting for Israeli society has several benefits and could foster understanding between groups.
3. **The artistic component** was a central unifying and enabling tool that fostered receptivity to multicultural narratives. Community art proved to be a powerful vehicle for social change by activating creative forces and contributing to constructing more inclusive realities. The intervention enhanced the transforming process by fusing myth, personal narrative, and artistic expression. A significant, substantial shift is reflected in the ensuing increase in cohesiveness, self-esteem, and belonging.
4. **Older adults in Israel** make up a sizable portion of society. Senior participants can undergo both individual and group transformation. This group is an essential societal resource because of their life experience and capacity for reflection. Even though this demographic has access to a wide range of services, it remains challenging to encourage many of them to participate actively in the community. Internal group transformation was sparked by the intervention's identification and activation of these internal resources. This empowerment should be directed at citywide or neighborhood-based projects and broader circles of involvement.
5. **"Awakening the Heroines":** The intervention program's initial stage was an 'awakening of the heroines,' which should be followed by additional study and programming. Participants' individual and collective strengths must be developed and enhanced through sustained participation. While short-term interventions can lead to change, longer-term initiatives are required to maintain and strengthen individual and group empowerment. This aligns well with the municipality's broader objectives and needs.
6. **Internal resilience is severely tested in times of war**, particularly among older adults who support their children and grandchildren and often face trauma or loss. Adapting the intervention program to various

situations and extending it into follow-up efforts could help strengthen resilience, one of the Jerusalem Municipality's primary goals.

7. **Enhancing belonging and GC proved vital during the ongoing war. Both are key components in building resilience. The intervention offered participants a safe space to express fears, anxieties, and grief** while discovering shared experiences and emotional solidarity. The recognition that "I am not alone" emerged repeatedly in interviews and informal conversations, emphasizing the group's collective strength as a source of personal support.
8. **The lack of significant improvement in the self-esteem parameter** suggests the intervention's primary impact was group-oriented. The disparity between the qualitative and quantitative results could indicate several program goals. Quantitative standards for comparison were not found because prior Hero's Journey community art initiatives have been examined qualitatively. Nevertheless, in interviews, individuals expressed higher levels of self-esteem. This variable might be isolated in future studies, and methods to directly improve it could be investigated.
9. **The program's model**, developed in Jerusalem's senior clubs, could be extended to other cities, marginalized communities, or conflict zones. A practical paradigm integrating myth, personal narratives and art could help diverse populations make significant progress, especially those experiencing hardship. Many people in Israel have lost homes and have been displaced since the conflict in October 2023. The Hero's Journey framework provides an empowered narrative path forward and helps reconstruct an internal "home." Refugee populations worldwide may benefit from this strategy, and future studies should look at how it affects other cultural contexts.
10. **Program length challenges:** Some senior clubs found the 12-session format excessively lengthy. According to field comments, shorter formats were preferable, even if the program's duration helped achieve long-term outcomes such as belonging. Future research should examine whether an eight-session version yields similar outcomes for self-esteem, group cohesiveness, and a sense of community belonging.
11. **Ongoing Implementations in the Field**

Heroine's Journey Workshop during Wartime

After the intervention, on-demand workshop versions were made available at the municipality's request. One program helped English-speaking elderly women who were experiencing the psychological effects of the war; some were fresh arrivals, while others had been immigrants for a long time. They

encountered particular difficulties because they were cultural outsiders unfamiliar with local customs and had little prior combat experience.

The English-language session held at their club alleviated their personal distress and war-related worry. The artistic element took center stage, particularly the collage piece, which participants frequently continued on their own after each session.

Over time, many participants continued to hold biweekly meetings.

Since the events of October 7, it has become more crucial than ever to build resilience in Israeli society's subgroups, such as English speakers. High levels of cultural sensitivity and mediation are necessary for effective programming to consider cultural knowledge gaps, disparate mythologies, and emotional unfamiliarity with local narratives.

Workshops for Bereaved Grandparents

Due to the ongoing war with its many casualties, supporting grandparents who lost grandchildren became necessary. An eight-session version of the Heroine's Journey model was selected as a framework for dealing with sorrow. There were some emotionally charged sessions. Some participants laughed and told reassuring tales about their grandchildren, while others objected to specific activities or epic characters (like Job).

The reasons for participating varied; some wanted to fit in, while others needed to retell their tale to express themselves. In an attempt to identify themselves beyond their loss, some eventually withdrew. This workshop's dual narrative positioned the grandparents as the bereaved and the grandchildren as heroes. Helping grandparents see themselves as key players and discover purpose for their future was the most challenging task.

Turning the Intervention Program into a Course: "Guardians of Heroism"

As a municipal cultural project, an advanced workshop version is currently being developed. Graduates of this course will receive training to become "Guardians of Heroism" who can start community art projects or lead new groups, in addition to experience sessions. This enables senior citizens to contribute significantly and create constructive change in their local communities. The ultimate objective is to build a national and worldwide paradigm for assisting vulnerable and elderly populations so that they can serve as agents of revolutionary social change.

Future Applications

The Guardian of Heroism training and follow-up workshops are only two examples of how the idea could be applied to various segments of Israeli society. Working with at-risk groups, refugees, or those with impairments is a further example of applications.

Creating a comprehensive community model based on myth-narrative-art techniques is a long-term objective that could benefit communities in Israel and beyond.

Directions for Future Research

1. Working with Myths

Given their demonstrated relevance for participants, further studies should explore how myths can improve specific social indicators and deepen existing outcomes.

Fostering Self-Esteem Through the Myth-Narrative-Art Model

Due to the lack of statistical significance in self-esteem measures, future research should include a larger number of participants to allow for robust statistical analysis, examine whether follow-up programs might produce delayed improvements in self-esteem, and develop adapted versions of the program focused more directly on self-worth than group belonging or cohesion.

2. The Hero's/ Heroine's Journey

Further research should be conducted using the Hero's Journey model as a tool for community development. In addition, follow-up studies of the current research will focus on developing a model for enhancing social change that integrates myth, narrative, and art and is tailored to diverse populations.

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