

Meanings Associated with the Core Component of Clubhouse Life: The Work-Ordered Day

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Abstract Despite the clubhouse model's 60-year existence internationally, the central nature of its core program, the "work-ordered day" (WOH) (Beard et al. in *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal* 5:47–53, 1982), is not well understood; hence, the primary focus of the present study was to explore members' experiences of the nature and meaning of the WOH. The study drew on qualitative interview data collected in 2009–2013 through open-ended questions and probes with 102 members and 24 staff from 5 Clubhouse International-certified clubhouses (2 US and 3 Finnish). Participant observation supplemented the interviews and all data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz in *Rethinking methods in psychology*, 1995; Glaser and Strauss in *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*, 1967). Two major themes clustered around: (a) WOH in service of autonomy (things to do, sense of accomplishment, respite, development of occupational skills) and (b) WOH in service of relationships (receiving support; collaboration; and making contributions to the clubhouse community). Clubhouse members appeared to experience the WOH as meaningful because it helps them, as its best, reconstruct a life, develop their occupational self and skill sets, and experientially learn and live what parallels a good life in the general community. It appears that these experiences, interconnecting with the fundamental human needs for autonomy and relationship, point to wellbeing and recovery as part of personal growth. These findings can guide clubhouse daily practice in assessing members' psychosocial strengths and needs pertaining to recovery. Future research should elaborate on influences of sources of meaning, including work designs and the contributions of everyday socio-cultural interactive and reciprocal processes to these meanings.

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“Work-ordered day and medicine [work]... hand in hand
The work-order day put color in the tapestry. It brought depth.”
—A member of an Ohio clubhouse

Introduction

Contrary to Kraepelin’s classic deterministic view on the downhill progression of schizophrenia, longitudinal studies of severe mental illness in the 1980s and since [e.g. [1–3]] showed that, with appropriate support, approximately two-thirds of individuals achieved either full or a significant degree of recovery—a phenomenon framed as human resilience [4, 5]. These individuals lived “a satisfying life within the constraints of their mental illness” [6, p. 1035]. Some, indeed, held jobs and families, no longer requiring hospitalization. Mounting literature followed these seminal studies, confirming psychiatric recovery in the context of community-based mental health care [e.g. [7–10]]. Little of this recovery-related research, however, has examined the clubhouse model in particular, despite its sixty-year existence internationally, and its potential to promote recovery. Even within the literature that does exist on this model, no research has been conducted to date on the meaning and function of the core component of this model, which has been termed the “work-ordered day” (WOD). Thus, to address this gap, the following study aimed to explore and describe clubhouse members and staff perspectives on the nature and meaning of the WOD and its potential relationship to processes of recovery.

The Clubhouse Model: Review of Program Literature

Clubhouse for psychiatric recovery is a global, non-profit, non-governmental organization and provides community-based, non-residential, consumer-centered psychosocial rehabilitation programs for adults diagnosed with serious mental illness [11–13]. The current model covers: WOD; transitional employment (TE); evening, weekend, and holiday activities; community support; reach-out; education; housing; and decision-making and governance programs [12]. The clubhouse has been replicated initially under the leadership of the first clubhouse, Fountain House New York, and currently under the CI (formerly, International Center for Clubhouse Development). As of 2014, there are about 150 CI-certified clubhouses around the world with the most (about 100) in the US, followed by seven in Finland.

The WOD constitutes the core of this model of rehabilitation, since all program activities are designed around it [14]. The program originated in a day activity group therapy program [15] introduced in 1955 by John Beard, the first director of Fountain House. Drawing on his prior experience working with small groups of psychiatric inpatients [14, 16], Beard designed the program to encourage staff and members to work together to build and operate the clubhouse. The CI Standards [12] defines the WOD by its structure, member-staff partnership, strengths-focus, non-profit policy, no payment policy, and policies on unit, unit meeting, and work task and opportunity.

Review of Empirical Literature

Systematic research on CI-certified clubhouses to date, while documenting the empirical evidence for its effectiveness in the area of employment outcomes [e.g. [17, 18]], has generally overlooked the processes or mechanisms by which individuals reach these outcomes. Recent literature has begun to clarify psychosocial processes such as gaining a sense of belonging and community [e.g. [19]], a social support network [e.g. [20]], and peer support within the clubhouse context [e.g. [21–23]]. This literature has yet to identify which aspects of the model might contribute to which outcomes. And, despite the centrality of the WOD component [e.g. [14]], only two studies [24, 25], to the authors' knowledge, have explored this component in a more focused fashion.

Norman, through participatory research at a Swedish clubhouse, explored rehabilitation processes perceived by members who experienced “turning points.” The initial focus group identified “work” as the model's essential concept comprising three subthemes: “meaningful work tasks,” “meaningful relationships,” and “a supportive environment” [[24], p. 187]. Further, seven individual semi-structured interviews revealed aspects of rehabilitation processes entailing a gradual increment of activity involvement, an oscillating movement from a sense of exclusion to inclusion, expansion of social network over time and space, and self-development from a lack of awareness of one's strengths to utilizing them to support others as a role model. The WOD was found to be the initial resource for these transformative processes involving “turning points” toward voluntary commitment and responsibility, mediated by daily work tasks that are experienced as meaningful when needed for the operation of the clubhouse.

Drawing on participant observation and in-depth interview data collected from 45 members and 11 staff of a US clubhouse, Tanaka [25] focused on peer support patterns in the WOD context. This study illustrated peer-to-peer collaboration, side by side during the WOD and personal peer relationships—how they emerge and develop as secondary to WOD participation—revealing various self-help effects including feelings of “We are not alone” and what has been described as the “helper therapy” principle [26] whereby people feel they are being helped themselves by their efforts to help others.

While both studies have begun to explicate the nature of the WOD, research in this area still is at an early stage. The findings also are limited to local clubhouses. More data are needed across diverse cultures and societies to identify transnational theoretical underpinnings of this internationally-diffused model. In this context, the present study continued to explore the WOD in a cross-country context. We sought to answer questions such as: What is the WOD? What does it mean to members? How does it help members' recovery? How might cross-cultural data confirm or disconfirm existing local knowledge?

Materials and Methods

The present qualitative study drew on data obtained for IRB-approved studies that the first author conducted in 2009–2013 at five CI-certified clubhouses, two in the US and three in Finland. One-hour interviews were conducted using open-ended questions and probes with 102 members [45 for New York (NY), 33 for Ohio (OH), and 24 for Helsinki or nearby] and 1.5–2 h interviews were conducted with 25 staff (11; 10; and 4, respectively). The first author conducted all the member interviews and 19 staff interviews. A colleague of the author led six staff interviews in OH. A bilingual Finnish research assistant fully interpreted 10 member interviews and one staff interview that were in Finnish; others were in

English. Purposive sampling was the primary sampling method. OH member participants were compensated for their transportation fare (\$5). The researcher and her assistant visited meetings to recruit participants who volunteered to talk about their WOD experiences. Participant observation also was used to include more perspectives on these qualitative data [27]. Data from the members were analyzed using a grounded theory approach [28–30]. The staff interview and participant observation data were used to supplement the member interview data. (For more detailed procedures, see 25).

The clubhouses under study consisted of 1–8 units at the time of the research administration, each of which had a set of responsibilities in service of the clubhouse operation. Average daily attendance was about 300 members for the largest, 60–70 for the medium-sized, and 15 for the smallest. As to the member interview sample, 64 % were male. All participants were age 69 or younger with ages 50–59 the largest group (29 %). The length of membership varied from 1 week to 39 years with 39 % for 3 years or less. Participants' average daily and weekly WOD participation were 5.0 (SD = 1.7) hours and 3.5 (SD = 1.3) days, respectively. The demographic patterns were not significantly different across the three geographical sites except that the average weekly participation was somewhat longer at the New York site (3.9 days) than the two other sites (3.1–3.2 days). For the staff participants, the OH clubhouse had more females (70 %) but the other two sites had about equal ratios of men and women.

Results

A typical building was either a large beautiful old house or a plain but clean ordinary office setting. Inside, attractive paintings were on the walls and flowers on the tables, desks, or counters. Each clubhouse had a front desk and members there cordially greeted the researchers. As if the symbol of clubhouse, every single unit had a whiteboard. WOD tasks to be completed on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis were listed on this whiteboard. The WOD began with “a unit meeting,” for which members and staff gathered around this whiteboard:

Now with [my] unit ... usually 9 o'clock, 9:30, you know, the first meeting of the day and everyone ... tells what they're going to do, how long they're going to stay and all that ... what you want to choose to do. We don't have any janitorial or cleanup staff. Again, even cleaning up at the end of the day, on the board, they'll, 'ok, who will do housekeeping?' ... somebody will volunteer to clean out the garbage ... clean the toilet, the bathrooms and all that. So *Clubhouse* is self-functioning. But ... we have the right to do what we want there. It's not anybody forcing you. (Mike, Member, NY)

Another participant, when asked what he normally did during the WOD, listed numerous chores without a pause:

Chopping stuff, cooking like putting in a pan, putting trays in the oven, marinating meats, making salads, cutting bread, putting fruit ball, cutting pies, putting juice out, going to stores to get food, preparing food, making orders out ... getting it done on time, trying to do everything fast so if I had time, things get done quicker, waiting on tables, bussing tables, help cooking dinners, helping lift heavy things ... coming up with ideas to cook things, doing favors to people, trying to do the best I can. (Frank, Member, NY)

Participants indicated various opportunities and activities available at the clubhouse; one member said he still did not know how to do some of these tasks after his eight-year membership. Some were involved in more complex work activities as well, such as tutoring or teaching classes (driver's license, computer, math, etc.) for fellow members, fund-raising, producing daily internal news, creative writing or drawing for clubhouse magazines, or serving on the board of directors. Ad hoc projects also were available, such as making videos or advocating for human rights. Overall, however, partitioned routines seemed to constitute the WOD.

Participants, members, and staff alike, shared a myriad positive aspects of their WOD experiences whereby they came to see intrinsic values of a working life. Out of these stories, two kinds of meanings emerged. Some meanings did not appear directly concerned with other people whereas other meanings did. For the former, the ultimate source of happiness seemed autonomy or independence in life and for the latter, it was more a matter of relationships with others.

WOD in Service of Autonomy

WOD tasks, including seemingly small chores, seemed to play important roles in meaning-making processes related to the promotion of autonomy. Five subthemes emerged in this regard.

Having "Things to do": Structure and Daily Rhythm

One of themes that emerged recurrently throughout the interviews was the value of having "things to do." Although participants were either regularly working for WOD or for their jobs outside at the time of the study, their stories revealed that they had had virtually no involvement in activities that they felt were "meaningful," "constructive," or "productive" before they had come to the clubhouse. Some participated in mental health programs for a couple of hours per week but otherwise had "nothing to do" but idling time at home, unemployed, watching TV or reading books on a couch for hours in isolation. WOD in this context began to offer them the semblance of a life, as Lassi, a Finnish clubhouse member, shared:

You get something meaningful to do here. ... if I was at home, I was probably lying at the sofa and reading or something, which of course is ... good thing, also, but ... [at the clubhouse] mostly, things related with computers ... any task is meaningful. ... doing itself is meaningful. I tend to do nothing at home, nothing productive.

Participants appreciated they could forget about their illness and problems by focusing on work or health. The WOD offered them a structure to help members keep organized and busy, thereby living their lives and staying "out of trouble." Participants described how they might otherwise have ended up leading an unhealthy life, getting sick, or returning to the hospital.

The WOD keeps you coming here every day, keeps you out of the hospital. Last time I was hospitalized was way back in [1995] ... it keeps you very active and keeps you going to your appointments ... when you see your friends back in the kitchen doing something you wanna be back there helping them cutting up the vegetables, going to the store, waiting on tables, doing something being active.... (Ben, Member, NY)

Alpi, a Finnish member, while waiting for a TE internship position, appreciated his morning routine, or rhythm of life—take medicine, feed pet rabbits, brush teeth, putt on clothes, and try to be at the clubhouse on time. Similarly, Lassi above, while waiting for the result of his recent application for school, stated that his life now has a purpose that puts his day into order and forms a routine that makes sense.

This place has given purpose. It's about being unemployed. And when you come here, it's like you are working. ... in a positive sense. ... It helps to maintain a routine. ... it has order in it now. During the morning and the day, I do things here. And then I go home and I have some extra energy. ... to do something meaningful there [at home].

Sense of Accomplishment

Another cluster of meanings that repeatedly emerged related to autonomy was the development of self-confidence. Participants often stated they liked WOD because, as Pete, a NY clubhouse member explained: “It gives me a good feeling ... about myself... about being able to accomplish.” For some new members, just getting out of bed and coming to the clubhouse may be all they can do at first. For those, doing a seemingly simple WOD chore can be uplifting. Lassi, the above Finnish member, also stated: “Yeah, definitely [this place] has helped ... in the issues dealing with self-image.”

Members who regained their confidence with small tasks are then encouraged to do more demanding tasks. Susie, a NY member, recalling slicing tomatoes was all she could do on her first days, sounded proud of her current involvement in multiple leadership roles. She had, for example, been helping collate 25 different pieces of paper to build notebooks for an in-house training. The work took her weeks at first but then she found a system to finish it “so well” in a couple days. As she said: “I have such a feeling of satisfaction that I realize how much better I'm feeling because I was able to do this.”

Job Skills

WOD can also mean preparation for a job to live independently. Lynn, an OH member, compared the clubhouse to school. WOD, then, may be classroom. While WOD chores are needed to run the clubhouse, they also serve to help members learn a wealth of job skills that can serve as initial steps toward more complex tasks. An OH member, who chose the kitchen unit, saying, with a smile, she had learned how to make salad, was waiting for a job opening. Lynn above chose to work at the front desk for her WOD because she wanted a secretarial job. Explaining how challenging it could be at times, she was becoming adept at managing multiple chores simultaneously—greeting people in a friendly manner and assisting them with their initial or daily registration while responding to phone calls and forwarding them to the right person.

Discovery of Occupational Self

Job skills and confidence were not the only things that members acquired through the WOD. Interviews suggested that members also learned valuable things about themselves, about who they were and what they were interested in, through the process of choosing the units and tasks they liked and by trying out, on their own choice and at their own pace, different units and tasks until they found their own niche in the clubhouse. In the process,

they discovered or recovered their strengths and aspirations on the basis of which they could begin to conceive of themselves as workers. An OH member, Mary, chose her unit because: "I think I like quieter environments to work in so that's why I am on [this unit]. I like when they do the newscast." Another OH member, Lewis, found his niche in the kitchen, saying: "If you want to work you have to ... like what you are doing."

Respite

Finally, some participants described finding a sense of respite in the WOD. For them, being encouraged to do simple household chores of their choice and at their own pace served as a reminder of their need for a space to heal and to nurture their own sense of well-being. As Jeff, a NY member, said:

It's therapeutic to show up to a place that's not offering me any type of therapy but just involvement. Just doing something, you know, even just answering phone or wiping off the phone or mopping a floor....

In sum, this aspect of WOD is experienced as comprising seemingly trivial chores that have the somewhat paradoxical power of healing members by giving them the energy and impetus to break the cycle of meaningless routine they have fallen into in their homes. By coming to the clubhouse and participating in a structured day in which they focus on meaningful (if seemingly simple) work, they regain an order and rhythm to everyday life, discover or recover their interests and strengths, and develop a sense of self-confidence in their ability to accomplish things. In this sense, WOD can provide initial scaffolding for everyday life, without which the person's autonomy cannot be cultivated and reclaimed.

WOD in Service of Relational Life

As one Finnish member suggested when he said that WOD meant "more than just work," participants described a second aspect of their experiences that referred to positive relationships which emerged within the context of their daily lives in the clubhouse. These were primarily of collegiality and friendship that involved both other members and staff. Often, their accounts also described their gaining a sense of belonging to a community that comprised the clubhouse as a whole. Three subthemes emerged with respect to this relational aspect of WOD: receiving support, collaborating, and making contributions to the clubhouse community.

Receiving Support

Participants appreciated various forms of support, such as being guided, feeling recognized, or feeling understood, by other members and staff during WOD. The support was appreciated not only because it helped progress and growth toward a more autonomous life but also because of the relational experience itself, a process in which the individual may best learn how best to help others build their own autonomous lives.

Guide Interviews indicated that members expected to be guided as a major part of the staff's role. To illustrate, during participant observation a new member was asked what she wanted to do for the WOD. The member murmured with an unsure tone, asking what the staff wanted her to do. The staff then directed the member that she could do anything she wanted. Mary, aforementioned, recalled her early day experience in search for her unit:

“[A staff] suggested that I try working on [this] floor or maybe [that unit] or something different.” Mary also shared her observation of a staff engaging a member for vacuuming, which she felt was very patiently, positively, and gently done:

[A member said,] I’ve never done that, and [the staff] says, would you be interested in doing it, well I don’t know, well we have a vacuum and we could teach you how to do that, would you be interested, and he finally said yes.

Frank, earlier mentioned, appreciated a supportive push he received from staff: “She’s like, oh, you can do anything you want, just do it ... you don’t have to worry about it, like that. And that made me feel good. (*And you really do it.*) Yes.... I felt satisfied.” All these directions were part of tacit everyday practice yet convey to members that the clubhouse expects, or trusts, that they are capable. A Finnish staff, when she talked about a member’s recovery, was asked if it might have involved a turning point. She said that the member later explained to her pleasantly: “I can never get rid of you if I don’t come with you.”

Recognition Recognition of others’ contribution was another common situation associated with WOD. Susie, previously mentioned, did her job building the notebooks “so well that [she has] been asked to continue to doing it.” Frank above, enjoying waiting on tables, was happy about a peer customer who gave him praise: “You’re the best waiter in NYC!” Doing WOD tasks led to him feeling great, which certainly may have reinforced his motivation to work. Mark, an OH member, explained in common sense terms how members appreciated the power of recognition:

People like ... applause, you know that’s one of the reasons we do recognition ... in the [internal] news ... we’ll say I want to recognize so and so for helping you know, and it’s just mundane things like taking nails ... out of some wood.

Feeling understood WOD participation, while expected and appreciated, is “never forced,” as Mike said in the beginning. Members appreciated the clubhouse’s non-judgmental atmosphere in which they felt safe to be themselves, to say no, to do the work of their own choice and at their own pace, and to be able to make a mistake in service of growth. Liz from the OH clubhouse, for example, recalled the time when she was overwhelmed by some WOD tasks and was grateful of staff’s empathic understanding of her struggle:

[The staff] told me ... you should try something else, ... it seems like it’s very overwhelming to you and she was very understanding and ... you know, she never yelled at me and said ... what I think I should do the [unit I liked] ... she was great with that.

Collaboration

Despite the fact that the Clubhouse models requires division of labor and breaking the operation of the house down by unit and further partitioned into manageable small tasks, members did not seem to experience themselves as “automata” of cold machinery or “iron cages” (as predicted, e.g. by Marx [31] and Weber [32]). Rather, they described having the sense of being part of “a crew” [24]; they felt autonomous enough to find value in being a part of the whole, in playing a complementary role to other people, knowing what the whole is, where it is going, and in what way the part is needed. Overall, the work crew seemed to be enjoying “working together” or “helping each other” on the same boat.

Recognizing the importance of this sense of collaboration, the CI Standards [12] defines a typical WOD as “working side by side.” Three patterns of working side by side emerged both among members and among staff and members. The first pattern, “task-sharing side by side,” entailed task division in a narrow sense of the term. The second pattern, “teaching side by side,” involved step-by-step instructions, modeling, or mentoring. The third, “leadership side by side,” signified shared decision-making. Because of this physically side-by-side mode of work collaboration, WOD had a mish-mash outlook that made staff and members indistinguishable.

Some highlighted practical values of task-sharing side-by-side, such as efficiency or quality assurance because other team members can check against errors. Others were grateful of teaching side by side, in which members felt their possibilities respected and expanded. Still others found the value of leadership side-by-side. John, a NY member, appreciated the inclusiveness of decision-making processes whereby group members’ input was taken seriously, which felt “completely opposite” to the traditional hierarchical style:

[Staff] are often open to hearing suggestions. I know I made quite a few suggestions ... and that’s what they are looking for. ... input from the members ... people who might know it ... in a conversational way, not a confrontational way, a non-direct way ... in a roundabout way. And that brings in everything ... a broader view that way.

Members felt in this way that their involvement was welcomed and valued: “Yeah, they do listen to me, you know. I appreciate ... that respect, ... for both staff and members ... it’s a very positive experience.” (Jeff, Member, NY) Some sounded empowered through the side-by-side process. For example, Tara, an OH member, expressed a sense of equality in terms of autonomy and ownership, illustrating how members play a crucial role in operating the house:

We do the news at one, a member puts together the news, members do the actual news ... staff is always there to help but the point is the members are doing all this work, the members cook, the staff there helps them and directs, the members serve.... The members have people sign in ... sell the bus tickets. Every now and then [staff] will do it. The members ... do everything ... without the members the [house] would not be run.

The sense of autonomy and ownership, however, did not seem to preclude the experience of connection. To the contrary, implicit in Tara’s description of the staff’s role was her trust in their equally needed contribution. By “equal” and “helping each other,” she seemed to convey partnership—a relationship that respects each parties’ autonomy—as opposed to either party bossing the other.

Other participants highlighted the closeness or connection aspect of work collaboration side-by-side: “The staff here is wonderful.... Everyone I have ever worked with, I have really enjoyed working with. And I miss some of them. ... even now ... I’ve really enjoyed working with [a staff]. ... we’re getting along.” (Mike, Member, NY) The sense of togetherness was not limited to member-staff dyads. Participants indicated a sense of belonging to a larger whole—that they were parts yet connected to each other mediated by work and to the clubhouse as a community. Jeff above was articulate about the sense of camaraderie he experienced: “Thanksgiving Day event ... it would never happen if there wasn’t both staff and members working together ... which is beautiful, absolutely beautiful. ... that cooperation.”

Personal Space

Support for members' personal needs, such as social security or employment, was woven into WOD. The side-by-side partnership may help breaking down a psychological barrier to seeking help [33]. For instance, Mike above sounded comfortable asking staff to assist with his resume while working with her for WOD. "We were side-by-side in that I could ask her even though she was working with somebody else, I said ... can you just look at this [resume] and she would look at it while she was on the phone."

Participants appreciated their expanded social network, particularly trusting friendship, which evolved as a result of WOD participation. Although parallel to the regular world of work, activities other than work were not the norm during WOD, leisure time during work seemed to play an important role in humanizing the work environment. Work meant to some shy members "a good chance" to initiate a conversation with others in order to achieve a shared goal. Some friendship started from a small talk while working side by side. Others found a good friend through ordinary interactions during WOD. Or, a member may listen to a peer who is having a bad day when there is "enough privacy" while, for example, making salad. An OH staff clarified, "We can talk about things as we're working and ... doing it. And there are times that people really need issue, and we'll go off and talk. ... in a more natural way than in a clinical setting." Mark, aforementioned, who was appreciative of people listening to him and understanding, articulated the paradox: "therapy without therapy."

Making Contribution to the Clubhouse Community

David, a NY staff, explained the clubhouse's intention to encourage members' participation in the operation of the clubhouse. He emphasized how critical this is for members whose sense of self-worth is typically "battered" by societal exclusion. Members' narratives verified this account. Susie, earlier mentioned, for example, expressed a sense of inclusion, power, and self-worth associated with the contributions she made to the clubhouse:

Colleagues have to fill out evaluation forms at the end and what I do is to write a report ... It took me an hour to do on a computer, but I felt I was involved in colleague training, ... I'm also on a counsel ... I have more to speak ...for the counsel meeting, I take notes and I write minutes and then ... a staff member ... takes my minutes and edit ... it is an important function I have been taking, I'm good at it and I'd like to do it.

Work in this context is experienced as "real," in that one's contribution benefits the entire community, as opposed to "make-work," which may help keep someone busy for some time but is experienced as neither being needed by nor useful for society. Susie indeed expressed her sense of "voluntary responsibility" [24] for the work that gives the sense of dignity:

It's not make-work. You don't put something together and then the next person is taking the part. ... It's real work. You're doing things that are, ah, useful, ... they had to be done. And if members ... couldn't help, staff wouldn't have time to do it.

Meaningful Life

Participants highlighted relational contexts in which they experienced their altruistic satisfaction about making contributions. For example, Frank in the U.S. and Alpi in Finland, both aforementioned, loved working in the kitchen because seeing their customers happy made them feel happy. Two other members, also previously mentioned, shared their transformative experiences. Lassi in Finland, whose life once felt meaningless, now reports living an autonomous life that has a purpose. Similarly, Joe in the U.S., comparing and contrasting his life before and after he joined the clubhouse, now sees his life as meaningful:

If a new member shows up or somebody that isn't familiar with what I do, they can observe and watch and they can, that way they learn. And this is just my routine, you know ... before I ever heard of the clubhouse... my routine was just uh, stay at my apartment or wherever I was living, stay to myself and that was basically it.

Joe, like Frank and Alpi, appears to see himself an autonomous agent who contributes to the clubhouse community welfare, which, in turn, increases his own sense of self-worth, or dignity, through their appreciation of his presence:

It's very important because ... [I] have something constructive and meaningful to do, ... I am doing something not just for myself but for the clubhouse as well as ... it gives me something to look forward to, it gives me I feel that I am needed when I am here and that I am missed when I am not here.

Joe indicated his aspiration for employment outside the clubhouse. When asked how he felt about not being paid for WOD, however, he underscored his insight into an intrinsic value of work, that a good work life has to do with meaningful roles and relationships.

I don't have a problem with it [no payment for WOD] at all, I mean I am on [social welfare] and that's how I get my income but I've found that ... the work is it's own reward just being having a place to come to, for a few hours every day. You know, get out of my apartment, have something to do, have something to look forward to do, and people to see, and that's ... more than fine by me. You know, I'm not [employed], if and when I can do a paying job I will, but this is just fine. And also ... a lot of the most important relationships in my life have been as a result of being a member of this [clubhouse] ... there have been staff that I was close to in the past ... the current staff I am close to like [Tricia], and there, I made friends here. Um, someone who is very important to me I met [the friend] through the [clubhouse].

Discussion

The primary purpose of the present study was to explore from members' and staff's perspectives what the clubhouse WOD is, what it means to members, and how it might relate to their recovery. Emergent themes included (a) WOD in service of autonomous life (constructive things to do, a sense of accomplishment, respite, and development of job skills and occupational self) and (b) WOD in service of relational life (receiving support, collaboration, and making contribution to the clubhouse community). Data also suggested interconnection between the two overarching themes. By and large, the extracted themes seemed consistent across the clubhouses located in different geographic regions, which may not be surprising given that all were CI-certified [22] and in Western countries [e.g. 9].

Themes identified in the study seem to present the antithesis to a meaningless life in the general community endured by the many of people in the population under study [34]. The WOD, then, may mean a reversal of such deprivation in service of a meaningful life. The study findings can contribute to the WOD literature in two ways. First, the WOD landscape presented by the study situates the peer support component delineated by Tanaka (2013) in more a holistic context. Second, the current multi-site data from the US and Finland replicated the major themes identified in Norman's (2006) study in Sweden: meaningful work, meaningful relationship, and a supportive environment; thus making the WOD picture more convincing.

The findings can be compared to the literature on mental health occupational therapy [e.g. [35–38]], and to the general literature on the meanings of paid work [e.g. [39]]. First, meanings in service of autonomous life extracted in the present study seem relevant to “identity, normality and wellbeing” [[35], p. 3] discussed in the occupational therapy literature. Particularly volunteer work as a form of meaningful activity [e.g. [35, 38]] is deemed an opportunity to meet people, develop new skills, and build confidence thereby making a contribution to the community [37]. These themes emerged in the current data, indicating the spirit of WOD's origin, activity group therapy [15], is alive in today's WOD. Second, Rosso identified key psychological mechanisms through which paid work becomes meaningful, including “authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, and transcendence” [[39], p. 112]. Overall, these mechanisms, despite the fact that WOD is not an employment program, seem to correspond to, if not strictly one to one, themes and subthemes identified in this study under occupational self, sense of accomplishment, self-worth, collaboration, and making contributions and leading a meaningful life. This suggests a parallelism of experiences between WOD and workday in the general world of work.

Lastly, the two overarching themes, of autonomous and relational life, present a theoretical implication concerning the link between the meanings of WOD and recovery. Whereas some meanings, such as sense of accomplishment, dealt directly with a person's sense of autonomy or independence, others, such as collaboration, were concerned with relationship. Further, these two seemingly opposite themes seemed interwoven. Participants appeared to appreciate the relationship when they felt their autonomy was supported. Conversely, they seemed to feel they existed as an autonomous person within the context of a relationship or environment to which they felt like they belonged. This picture is supported by Blatt's (2006) fundamental insight into human development being comprised of two interconnected needs for personal growth and self-definition on the one hand and relatedness to others on the other hand [40].

The relatedness dimension is primarily concerned with connecting to others whereas self-definition deals with the development and maintenance of a positive, autonomous sense of self. Blatt and his associates [e.g. [40–42]] conceptualized psychological development as a life-long evolution “through a dialectic synergistic interaction” [[42], p. 172] between these two polarities. In this light, the WOD, as its best, can be seen as conducive to this fundamental human developmental process, promoting recovery [43] through members' shared experiences of addressing these two fundamental and intertwined needs for autonomy and relationship. Recent empirical findings on emotional support and control at work as related to wellbeing support this formulation [e.g. [44]].

The current study drew upon data saturation [30] on the basis of a large number of participants from multiple CI-certified clubhouses including major clubhouses from two most leading countries using the model. The generalizability of the findings to other

certified clubhouses is, therefore, compelling [22]. The interpretation of the findings, however, calls for caution because only one researcher conducted data analysis.

These findings can inform clubhouses of positive key mechanisms or best process outcomes against which members' strengths and needs can be assessed. Negative experiences were not identified in this study and are less likely in this sample of positively consenting participants; however, had they been reported they could have deepened our understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Knowledge of the meanings of WOD can be advanced by examining the influences of sources of meanings such as work design specified by the Standards [12] or organizational missions on the key mechanisms, or meanings, identified in this study. Another important research focus should be daily socio-cultural interactive and reciprocal processes that construct the WOD meanings. The findings from these research endeavors should critically evaluate not only the employee-based meanings of work theory [39], but also clubhouses concerning organizational policy and practice and/or everyday micropractices that ensure members' meaningful work experiences and a life in community.

Conclusions

Clubhouse members appeared to experience the WOD as meaningful because it helps them, as its best, to reconstruct a life, develop an occupational sense of self and skill sets, and experientially learn and live what parallels a good work life in the general community. It appears that these experiences, with interconnected fundamental human needs for autonomy and relationship met, point to wellbeing and recovery as part of personal growth. The findings on the meanings of WOD can guide clubhouse daily practice to assess members' psychosocial strengths and needs pertaining to their recovery. Future research should elaborate on influences of sources of meaning, including work designs and everyday socio-cultural interactive and reciprocal processes on the mechanisms to meaning.

Conflict of interest All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000 (5). Informed consent was obtained from all patients for being included in the study.

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