

FRANCISCO JOSÉ EIROA OROSA  
UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA

Mental health activism as  
identity transformation

# Summary

Recovery

Activism

Citizenship

# Recovery and mental health activism

RECOVERY

ACTIVISM

CITIZENSHIP

- Recovery movement started as a cooperation between...
  - Psychiatric/psychosocial rehabilitation professionals and
  - Mental health activists (also called psychiatric survivors or consumers and their families).
- Transformation of mental health services in most English-speaking and many European countries.

# What is Recovery?

RECOVERY

ACTIVISM

CITIZENSHIP

- The recovery model emphasizes:
  - Participation of consumers and their families in service planning
  - Promotion of recovery not as a clinical fact but as a process of change
  - Individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential

# How Recovery spread

RECOVERY

ACTIVISM

CITIZENSHIP

- The consumer movement involved in protests against coercive practice
- Advocacy for change, along with academic, researchers, policy makers, and practitioners.
- Ability to connect internationally soon spread the concept around the world.
- Funding for pilot activities elsewhere.

# Stigma and identity

RECOVERY

- Illness identity: accepting a definition of oneself as mentally ill

ACTIVISM

- Mental illness = incompetence and inadequacy
- Impacts hope and self-esteem
- Which further impact suicide risk, coping, social interaction, vocational functioning, and symptom severity (Yanos, Roe, & Lysaker, 2010).

CITIZENSHIP

- Provider stigma is related to processes of disidentification (Harris, Leskela, & Hoffman-Konn, 2016).

# Recovery and identity

RECOVERY

- The "ideal self" is related to more advanced phases of recovery in contrast to perceptions of "a person mentally unwell" (Buckley-Walker, Crowe, & Caputi, 2010).

ACTIVISM

- Recovered users (Chadwick, 2011)
  - show less differentiation between their different selves
  - greater self-esteem; and experienced sense of control
  - higher degree of quality and quantity of support, hope and goal setting

CITIZENSHIP

# Mental Health Professionals With Mental Illness: the double identity

RECOVERY

- Mental health professionals speaking out about their own experiences face identity-related dilemmas

ACTIVISM

- “professionals” as relatively socially powerful and
- “patients” as comparatively powerless.

CITIZENSHIP

- Positive identity discourses that integrate experiences may include
  - “personhood” and insider “activist,”
  - Discourses of “personal recovery,” “lived experience,” and “use of self.” (Richards, Holtum, & Springham, 2016).



# Peer-run interventions

RECOVERY

- Peer support groups and interventions developed by staff with their own mental health experiences.

ACTIVISM

- Peer Support may be defined as the help and support that people with lived experience of a mental illness are able to give to one another.

CITIZENSHIP

# Defining Activism

RECOVERY

Community engagement

ACTIVISM

CITIZENSHIP

IDEOLOGICALLY  
LOADED

IDEOLOGICALLY  
NEUTRAL

# Activism, identity, and well-being

RECOVERY

- Activism plays an important role in identity development
  - Teenagers
  - Empowerment of stigmatised groups.

ACTIVISM

- Activists show greater levels of subjective vitality and mental health (Klar and Kasser, 2009; Sohr, 2001).

CITIZENSHIP

- Participation in activism is linked to a higher sense of mastery compared to volunteerism (Gilster, 2012).

# Activism and emotions

## RECOVERY

- Rewards for being involved in activism include contact with others, sense of meaning, success in achieving goals (Gomes, 1992), stress compensation, self-efficacy and joy (Eigner, 2001).
- Positive identity and emotional processes
  - In relation to other members of the group
- Anger and contempt
  - In relation to individuals and institutions that are the target of advocacy activities (Becker, Tausch, & Wagner, 2011).

## ACTIVISM

## CITIZENSHIP

# Mental health activism and well-being

RECOVERY

- Participation in first person mental health associations

ACTIVISM

- contributes to identity reintegration?
- increases the psychosocial well-being of the activists?
- Facilitates their recovery process?

CITIZENSHIP

# First person activism against stigma

RECOVERY

ACTIVISM

CITIZENSHIP



# Testimonies of mental health activists I

RECOVERY

ACTIVISM

CITIZENSHIP

- As the delegation has grown, I've grown as person. I am very proud of the changes I'm making, because when before, doing something, meant letting “a thousand ghosts and fear” appear, that does not happen anymore.
- Rather all the contrary, when they appear, I can cope, move forward and overcome them.
- I cannot do this alone. Beside me there is people who are willing to accompany me in the way that I am doing. I also feel that I am part of a group of people where we all have voice and vote, and we all treat ourselves as equals.

# Testimonies of mental health activists II

## RECOVERY

- I think that each of us have our illness, our defects and our virtues, our low and our best moments.

## ACTIVISM

- But the important thing is not knowing how to fall but know how to get up.
- Each of us is different with our problems but we all have inside us that brave person that makes you fight and if you do not have it, sooner or later it will come out.
- In this life the most important thing is first to know yourself, to fight against your fears and then the future comes alone

## CITIZENSHIP



# Beyond Recovery: Citizenship

RECOVERY

ACTIVISM

CITIZENSHIP

- Citizenship involves the strength of people's connections to the rights, responsibilities, roles, resources and relationships that society offers to people through public and social institutions (Rowe, Kloos, Chinman, Davidson, & Cross, 2001).
- The concept of Citizenship has been used as a framework for opening up opportunities for social participation to members of stigmatized groups (Rowe et al., 2001, 2009).

# Citizens Project

RECOVERY

- Citizens Project participants
  - persons with mental illnesses, substance misuse, and previous criminal charges.

ACTIVISM

CITIZENSHIP

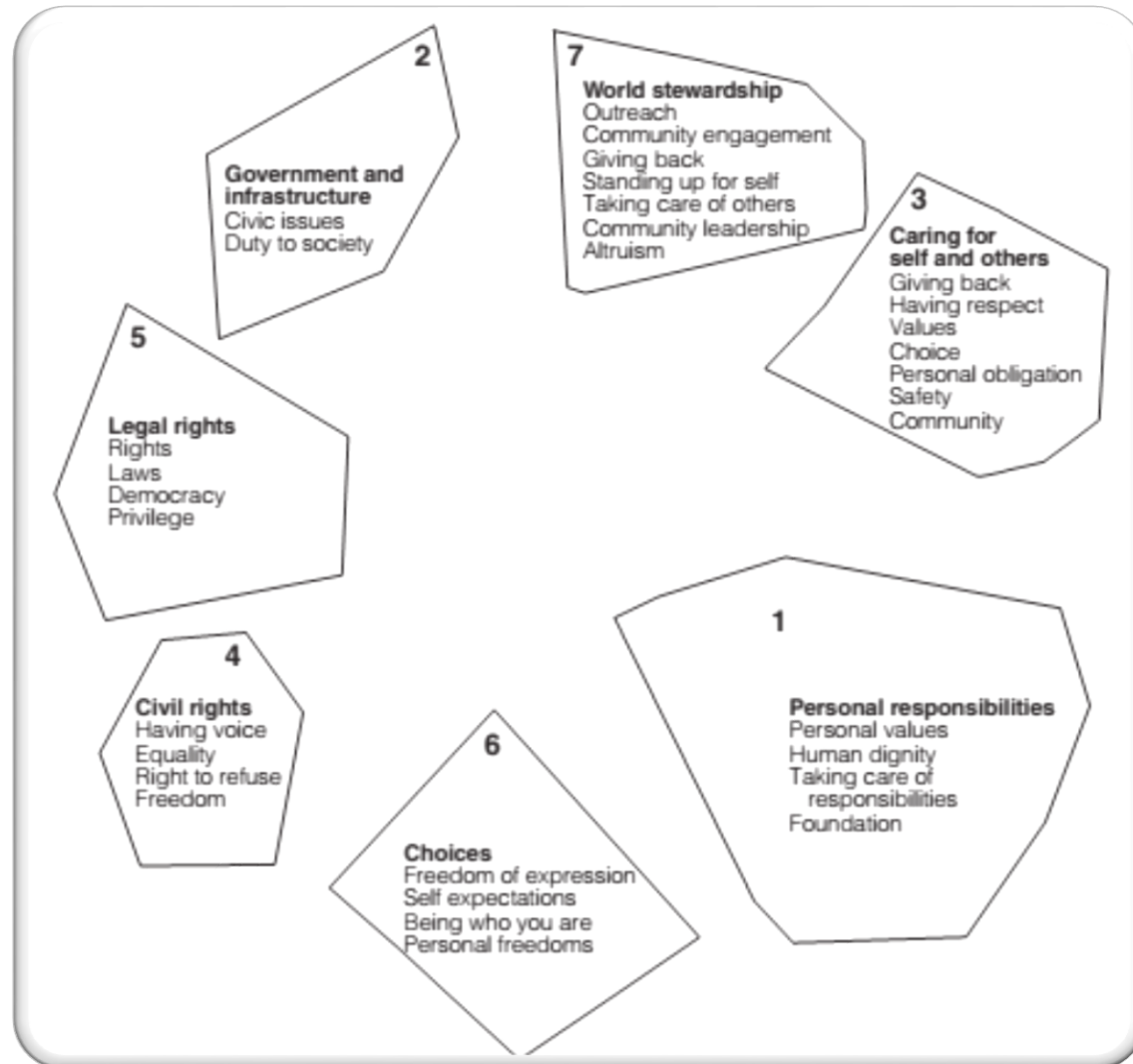
- A RCT comparing a citizenship intervention to usual care, showed that it successfully reduced substance use, and increased quality of life (Clayton, O'Connell, Bellamy, Benedict, & Rowe, 2013).

# Measuring citizenship

RECOVERY

ACTIVISM

CITIZENSHIP



# References I

- Becker, J. C., Tausch, N., & Wagner, U. (2011). Emotional consequences of collective action participation: Differentiating self-directed and outgroup-directed emotions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37, 1587–1598. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167211414145>
- Buckley-Walker, K., Crowe, T., & Caputi, P. (2010). Exploring identity within the recovery process of people with serious mental illnesses. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 33(3), 219–227. <https://doi.org/10.2975/33.3.2010.219.227>
- Chadwick, S. L. (2011). *Investigating Recovery in Psychosis : A Personal Construct Repertory Grid Study*. University of Hertfordshire.
- Clayton, A., O’Connell, M. J., Bellamy, C., Benedict, P., & Rowe, M. (2013). The Citizenship Project part II: impact of a citizenship intervention on clinical and community outcomes for persons with mental illness and criminal justice involvement. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 51(1–2), 114–22. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-012-9549-z>
- Eigner, S. (2001). The relationship between “protecting the environment” as a dominant life goal and subjective well-being. In P. Schmuck & K. M. Sheldon (Eds.), *Life goals and well-being: Towards a positive psychology of human striving* (pp. 182–201). Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe and Huber.
- Gilster, M. E. (2012). Comparing neighborhood-focused activism and volunteerism: Psychological well-being and social connectedness. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 40, 769–784. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20528>
- Harris, J. I., Leskela, J., & Hoffman-Konn, L. (2016). Provider lived experience and stigma. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 86(6), 604–609. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000179>

# References II

- Klar, M., & Kasser, T. (2009). Some benefits of being an activist: Measuring activism and its role in psychological well-being. *Political Psychology, 30*, 755–777. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2009.00724.x>
- Richards, J., Holttum, S., & Springham, N. (2016). How Do “Mental Health Professionals” Who Are Also or Have Been “Mental Health Service Users” Construct Their Identities? *SAGE Open, 6*(1), 215824401562134. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015621348>
- Rowe, M., Benedict, P., Sells, D., Dinzeo, T., Garvin, C., Schwab, L., ... Bellamy, C. (2009). Citizenship, Community, and Recovery: A Group- and Peer-Based Intervention for Persons With Co-Occurring Disorders and Criminal Justice Histories. *Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery, 4*(4), 224–244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15560350903340874>
- Rowe, M., Kloos, B., Chinman, M., Davidson, L., & Cross, A. B. (2001). Homelessness, Mental Illness and Citizenship. *Social Policy and Administration, 35*(1), 14–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9515.00217>
- Sohr, S. (2001). Eco-activism and well-being: Between flow and burnout. In P. Schmuck & K. M. Sheldon (Eds.), *Life goals and well-being: Towards a positive psychology of human striving* (pp. 202–215). Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe and Huber.
- Yanos, P. T., Roe, D., & Lysaker, P. H. (2010). The Impact of Illness Identity on Recovery from Severe Mental Illness. *American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation, 13*(2), 73–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487761003756860>

MERCI  
THANKYOU  
ARIGATO OBRIGADO BEDANKT  
GRAZAS SHUKRAN GRÀCIES GRAZIE  
KÖSZÖNÖM VIELENDANK  
GRACIAS

feiroa@ub.edu