

## Background

This study addresses the meaning of meaningfulness in everyday life for people with mental health and substance use challenges. Across countries, recovery-oriented and community-based care has become a leading vision in mental health and substance use services (Pincus et al., 2016). Recovery may be described as non-linear, personal, social, relational and contextual processes through which people strive to overcome their difficulties over time, with or without support from professionals and informal networks (Klevan et al., 2021; Sommer et al., 2021).

Davidson et al. (2008) suggest the term 'dual recovery' to replace the term 'dual diagnosis' for acknowledging that people with mental illnesses and addictions are first and foremost people rather than their diagnoses or disorders. We use the term 'mental health- and substance use challenges', to avoid a medical illness perspective on the two problem areas. With use of the term 'dual recovery' we recognize that there is an interdependent relationship between mental health challenges and substance use challenges. As Davidson et al. (2008) suggests we recognize the similarities in pathways of being in recovery from both challenges.

Meaning in life is identified as one of five recovery processes characteristic of the recovery journey (Leamy et al., 2011). Schnell (2010, p. 354) defines meaningfulness as: '*a fundamental sense of meaning, based on an appraisal of one's life as coherent, significant, directed and belonging*'. The wish for a meaningful everyday life of people in dual recovery is similar to the desire for meaning in life of people in general (Borg & Kristiansen, 2008; Davidson et al., 2008; De Ruyscher et al., 2017; Ness et al., 2014; Slade, 2012; Sørensen et al., 2015). Studies show that the first-person recovery discourse recognizes a meaningful everyday life as a facilitator for dual recovery (Davidson et al., 2008; De Ruyscher et al., 2017; Hansen & Bjerge, 2017; Ness et al., 2014). As a personal process, to experience recovery can be a source of meaning in life itself (Pilgrim, 2009). This suggests that there is a mutual reinforcing relationship between recovery and meaning in life.

Relational recovery is processes of interdependency between the person and her/his context (Price-Robertson et al., 2017). Concerning context, holistic and individually tailored support from professionals is often recognized as a facilitator for recovery (De Ruyscher et al., 2017; Ness et al., 2014). Recovery unfolds within the context of 'normal' everyday environments and activities because challenges are an integrated part of people's lives (Borg & Davidson, 2007). Recovery-oriented practices are thus about supporting everyday solutions for everyday problems (Nesse et al., 2020; Slade, 2012) and to shape the service to the subjective experience of what might give meaning in the person's everyday life (Borg & Kristiansen, 2004).

The recognition of meaning in life as vital to human beings implies that recovery-oriented services may be about contributing to fulfilling the desire for a meaningful everyday life of people in recovery. Understanding meaningfulness as a human need also involves recognizing professionals' need to experience meaningfulness in their daily work. Understanding recovery as relational, collaborative and mutual processes suggests that there is an interdependent relationship between contributing to meaningfulness for others and experiencing meaningfulness for oneself (Klevan et al., 2021). However, how professionals balance the need for meaning in everyday life for the person they support with their own need for meaningfulness has been little explored. Through working on the analysis in this study, this mutuality became apparent and hence, the aim of the study developed. The original aim of the study was to explore: How do recovery-oriented professionals in a supported housing facility for people in dual recovery assume to support the residents' need for meaningfulness in their everyday life? Through the analysis, this aim was supplemented with an additional aim of exploring how professionals fulfil their own need for meaningfulness. Thus, the aim of the study may be perceived as multi-layered.

# Methodology

## Research design

This is a qualitative study with a collaborative and explorative design, examining experiences of meaningfulness as part of dual recovery in a supported housing unit in Norway. As part of the collaborative research design, a 'competence group' (Klevan et al., 2020; Trangsrud et al., 2021) was formed, consisting of former residents, staff members and researchers. The group has met four times a year until the time of writing, with 5-10 members at each meeting. The purpose of the group has been to contribute to the overall research process, and to present a broad range of views rather than reaching consensus (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Gergen, 2015, 2020; McNamee, 2010).

The aim of the study was explored through interaction and co-construction of meaning in the different research phases. Initially the competence group helped us to contextualize the study through providing valuable information about the housing facility and in developing the interview guide. The group made important contributions to the choice of methodology. What we interpreted as contradictions in the material was recognized by the members in the group, which led us to the choice of doing a double analysis. For instance, the members confirmed a tension between being an 'open', including house and a more 'closed', excluding house, at the same time.

When the competence group later discussed the themes developed from the contradictions, they differed in their reflections on the findings and our identified discourses influencing practices. The members who had been residents themselves were curious about the idea suggesting that the staff at the housing was performing their work in such a way that it was also meaningful for themselves. The 'ordinary' staff members were more sceptical to this idea. This was a difference between the staff members who were former residents and the 'ordinary' staff members, that we did not see between the two in the focus group interview.

Following Joelsson (2004), who recommends the use of a collaborative research group when searching for multiple meanings, we found that diversity in meaning making made different discourses visible. Thus, a decision to conduct the analysis using two different approaches was made: 1) reflexive thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021b, 2021c), and 2) hermeneutic decoding, inspired by the works of Joelsson (2004). This two-part analysis may be characterized as a process of double hermeneutics: restoration of meaning when coding data through reflexive thematic analysis and deconstruction of meaning when decoding data. Double hermeneutics recognizes that data involve many layers, which corresponds to the layered aim of the study, and thus provides reasons for searching for seemingly overt and more covert interpretations of data.

### **Research context**

The context is a supported council housing facility in Norway, where the residents have co-occurring mental health and substance use challenges. The housing facility contains forty-two independent flats, in addition to a common area where staff and residents meet for meals and different group activities.

### **Participants and recruitment**

Nine staff members participated in the study, recruited by a team of researchers. Four had professional education and training, and five were peer workers (some of whom had been residents of the housing facility). There were five females and four males, aged from twenty to forty-five.

### **Data generation**

Data were constructed through a semi-structured focus group interview. Focus group interviews are considered suitable for an explorative design (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview lasted for about one hour, and was audio taped and transcribed.

## **Research ethics**

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data approved the study (ref no.: 2018/54801). The study participants provided written informed consent before participation regarding their right to be anonymized in the process of transcribing the interview and their right to withdraw their consent at any time. The information was repeated verbally at the start of the interview.

## **Epistemological positioning**

Research can never be conducted in a theoretical vacuum because researchers always make assumptions about data and how knowledge is developed (Braun & Clarke, 2021b; Terry & Hayfield, 2021). We lean on social constructionism in developing knowledge and are thus concerned with processes of communication as opposed to an interest in discovering phenomena in the 'real world'. The focus is on people's co-constructed meaning-making and knowledge production, understanding practice as well as research as based on assumptions or understandings that are situated within relationships and socio-cultural contexts. Neither practice nor research is value-free, meaning that there are always taken-for-granted logics and discourses in any culture (Gergen 2015, 2020; McNamee, 2010). Language creates rather than simply reflects meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2021c), and as researchers, we play an active role in constructing meaning through our, interpretative engagement with data (Braun & Clarke, 2021b).

Understanding discourses as taken for granted ways of speaking and acting (McNamee, 2015a), and meaning as effects of discourses (Braun and Clarke, 2006), we are in line with Baumeister et al. (2013) who argue for how meaning of meaningfulness in everyday life is cultural and influenced by discourses. Discourses can be revealed through double interpretation (Joelsson, 2004) and in contradictions (Davies and Harré, 1990), and in the current study, we use the contradictions in the material as resources to reveal complexities in meaning of meaningfulness. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that no data set is without contradiction, and that such tensions and

inconsistencies should not be smoothed out or ignored. Reflexive thematic analysis allows for a multifaceted interpretation of data and contradictions can be highlighted instead of overlooked. Acknowledging how data might be understood as reflecting possible discourses and drawing on the analysis of this study, we will in the discussion section discuss possible discourses revealed in the process of analysis.

## **Analysis**

In our reflexive thematic analysis, we strive for open and reflexive coding in an inductive data-driven manner, following and distinguish between coding of semantic (surface, obvious, explicit) meaning and latent (implicit, “hidden”, underlying) meaning. For the purpose of deepening the analysis we moved on the continuum from a semantic, descriptive level to a more latent, interpretative level (Braun & Clarke 2006, 2019, 2021b). Due to what we interpreted as contradictions in the data, we chose to supplement the thematic analysis with a hermeneutic decoding approach.

To decode meaning is to interpret an underlying meaning, and to explore what might be unsaid, ‘unintended’ and latent. Decoding concerns those aspects of self-understanding and meaning-making that can operate outside the participant’s awareness, in a more ‘unconscious’ manner. The aim is not to re-present, but to offer a different reading and construction of the story (Joelsson, 2004). We understand Braun and Clarke’s levels of semantic and latent coding as partly overlapping with Joelsson’s restored and decoded levels, but also with important differences. When Joelsson (2004) refers to ‘latent’, it can mean ‘unconscious’, while Braun and Clarke (2006) use ‘latent’ to describe underlying assumptions (2006).

Through the analysis we aim to tell a thematic story, pointing out contradictions that we assume to see in the story (Braun & Clarke, 2021b; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019). We suggest that a different story can be told based on the contradictions, a story on a more unspoken

and 'unconscious', level. Our assumption is that all people strive for meaningfulness in life, and thus we suggest that the participants, parallel to their assumed contribution to the residents' everyday life, also in a more unnoticed manner facilitate meaningfulness in their working day. This facilitation shows in the contradictions and is substantiated in the dialogues in the competence group.

Inspired by Braun and Clarke (2021c), we used a six-phase process for conducting a reflexive thematic analysis. However, the process does not need to be followed rigidly (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021b).

First, we familiarized ourselves with the data (phase one), reading through the data and searching for possible preliminary ideas of interest (Braun & Clarke, 2021c). In this phase we constructed an overall organizing idea of how to interpret the data: 'staff give residents a more meaningful (everyday) life'. We recognize this as an assumption held by the participants in the interview, and because of its taken-for-grantedness we suggest it to be a discourse. Within this overall organizing idea, we subsequently suggest three patterns of shared meaning (themes). At the end of our analysis, we challenge this overall organizing idea with an alternative overall idea: 'staff as also facilitating their own meaningful working day'. When we discussed both of these organizing ideas in the competence group, we received different responses. Some participants found the idea of staff facilitating meaningfulness for themselves to be interesting, while others gave a more dismissive response. Both responses are included in the discussion section of this paper.

We then began coding the data in search for codes (phase two), using the first part of the layered aim to guide us. We understand codes as representing a different level of complexity from themes. Themes are built from codes and are analytic output/outcome and reflect patterns at a broader and more abstract level. Themes are usually difficult to identify in advance of deep analytic work (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021a). We coded almost every sentence in the interview by writing notes, underlining and highlighting. Then we started visualizing the codes in a map, reducing the initial codes into sixteen codes, and constructing connections

between them. We view this process as organic and iterative (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019), where codes were arranged and rearranged in different maps, combined with each other, or kept separate. At this point our construction of meaning consisted of multiple, multi-coloured, quite chaotic, handwritten sheets of paper.

We then constructed initial themes from the codes and coded data (phase three). Themes are patterns of shared meaning, organized around a central idea (Braun & Clarke 2019; Braun, Clarke, & Hayfield, 2019; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019). At first, we constructed six themes, while in the next phase (phase four, reviewing and developing themes) we merged these into three. We chose to use the term 'theme construction' (Braun, Clarke, & Hayfield, 2019; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019) to underline our social constructionist epistemological positioning, thus acknowledging that there are always alternative ways of constructing themes. All themes focused around a common overall idea ('staff give residents a more meaningful (everyday) life'). Additionally, each theme fused around its own central idea, namely, to provide meaningfulness for the residents through (1) openness and inclusion (2) framework and exclusion (3) change for the better.

We reread the coded interview to determine whether all the sixteen codes were accommodated by the themes, and we concluded that all but one code seemed to fit with the three themes. On the surface the constructed themes formed a coherent overall story (Braun & Clarke, 2021b) of patterned meaning across the dataset (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019). On a more latent level we saw some contradictions.

Possible contradictions in the data are those between ideals and 'reality' with regard to practices and changes in attitude towards residents during the interview. Seeing these contradictions led us to decide to supplement the reflexive thematic analysis with hermeneutic decoding (Joelsson, 2004), and consequently to construct a fourth theme organized around a more unspoken central idea: the staff as facilitating their own meaningful working day. We reread and coded the material with this organizing idea, which led to a richer and more layered story.



Finally, we defined, named and refined the themes (phase five) by working on various thematic maps, ending up with a final outcome from the iterative construction of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021b), consisting of three themes from the coding process, and one theme from the decoding process. When writing up this paper (phase six), we chose quotes from the identified, listed, and collated descriptions of each theme that we considered representative of the themes, in order to tell a rich story about the data.

### **Co-constructed findings**

The four themes constructed through the analysis are (1) *An open house with a high ceiling: an inclusive 'we' as meaningful* (2) *A house framed with roof and walls: an exclusive 'we' as meaningful* (3) *A house of change for the better: moving on and going somewhere as meaningful* (4) *The house of giving: meaningfulness for the staff themselves*. Rather than being viewed as completely diverse and separate, these themes are entangled and in combination can be perceived as telling a rich, layered story. While the themes explore shared patterns of meaning, we also argue that there are several contradictions in the stories told about practice by the participants. Acknowledge these contradictions, pushes the story forward and makes it more versatile.

#### **Theme one: An open house with a high ceiling: an inclusive 'we' as meaningful**

The participants described how they made great efforts to create an open house with various organized touchpoints between staff and residents, such as meals, coffee breaks and different group activities. In addition, they tried to be available by offering to wake up residents, to remind them about appointments and accompany them there, to ask how they were doing and to remember what was going on in each resident's life. The residents were also welcomed to just pop by the common area for a chat without making an appointment because the door was always open. Further, the

participants used phrases like 'be nice to', 'to respond to individual needs there and then' and 'just to listen and talk to the residents'.

The participants wanted to create a house of acceptance, tolerance and normalization. In order to promote belonging to a community, the participants told how they tried to normalize the residents' ways of being by using experiences from their own lives. One participant talked about when she persuaded one of the residents to come into the kitchen for coffee, even though he did not want to because his hands were shaking with anxiety. She said that she did this because she wanted both the resident with the shaking hands and the other residents at breakfast to have the experience of how everyone would accept the unusual behaviour. Shaky hands would thus be normalized. *'You can just come and sit down with your coffee and shaky hands, because here nobody cares'.*

The participants aimed to normalize, tolerate and be inclusive by having a 'we' attitude instead of one that distinguished between 'us' and 'them'. To create an inclusive, equitable environment they used phrases like *'we in our house'*, meaning both those living there and those working there. Being inclusive is about creating an equitable community by recognizing the challenges that the residents face and tolerating unusual behaviour, creating what the participants referred to as 'a house with a high ceiling'.

Being inclusive was not just about including the residents, it also involved the participants' wish to be 'more than just staff'. This wish was manifested by attempts to connect private life with professional life, and vice versa. They integrated parts of their private life with their professional life, assuming that this made the residents' lives more meaningful. One participant said that she could tell a resident: *'I learn a lot when you talk, things I didn't know'*. Another participant agreed: *'Yes, those of us who work here learn a lot from the people who live here. They've taught us a lot'*. The participants also described how they talked to residents about experiences from their private life, and how they dealt with personal challenges:

*To normalize it a bit, you can use yourself, I do that a lot. Yesterday I was supposed to go and visit some people, but I didn't really want to go, because I wasn't feeling well, but I tagged along, I didn't say much, but nobody cared.*

And:

*Here (we) start the day with porridge and coffee; this is a way to try to get people up. (...) and so it's a bit like when you're sitting at home, maybe with your children (and you ask:) 'So what's happening today then, have you got any plans?'*

This participant thus talked to residents in a similar way as she normally did with her family, initiating a conversation around their thoughts and plans for the day. She used her experience from a setting in her home in a similar setting in the house to create a positive environment for the talk at the breakfast table.

An open house with an inclusive 'we' was constructed through an accepting attitude towards the residents, but also towards the participants themselves. The participants also told how new tenants or people visiting the house are surprised by the physical and mental openness between the staff and the residents.

In conducting the analysis, possible contradictions became apparent, and because we aimed for a multifaceted interpretation of data, we highlighted the contradictions instead overlooking them. We assumed that a different story could be told based on our constructed contradictions. Contradiction one, between ideals of practice and actual practice: the participants tried to balance two different roles; being equal to the residents and at the same time setting limits to keep order. The inclusive attitude of 'we in our house' has some limits, as shown in this quote:

*We're forced to balance two roles with the residents, we should be kind of friendly (...) just being with them up in the common area, then you're often quite equal, I mean, you're happy to eat with them and talk about the same things, you do the same things really. But then it's*

*also important that you have a role where you can set boundaries too without there being major conflicts.*

The second possible contradiction revealed through the analysis was that the story told in the data shifted from normalizing and tolerating the residents' ways of being to an attitude of promoting change towards normality and a 'normal life'. One participant said:

*(...) it's not necessarily a bad thing to be ill (...) a lot of people who've had different mental health problems have achieved a lot of good things. Who's to say what's wrong and what's not wrong (...)?*

Two other participants said:

P1: *(...) things are required, you're part of society, and things are required of you. You wash your hands, so you don't get sick, and so others don't get sick, you...*

P2: *master the rules.*

P1: *get your life back on track in a way, maybe.*

The participants reported sharing things from their own life, which they did with the aim of representing what they called a normal life or normality:

*It's normality we're looking for, and things should flow smoothly, but for example, yes, you should wash your hands when you go in the kitchen, people have to do that in my house as well, no one is allowed to open my fridge without washing their hands.*

To be equal with residents and tolerant of their ways of being while also promoting change towards normality through showing and setting limits was a challenging contradictory double position for the participants. Both these two contradictions are actualized in theme two: a house framed with roof and walls: an exclusive 'we' as meaningful.

## **Theme two: A house framed with roof and walls: an exclusive 'we' as meaningful**

Within the open inclusive house (theme one), the participants shared how they aimed to tolerate and normalize the residents' ways of being. By contrast, within the framework of the exclusive house, the aim is to keep the house in order with rules and demands. The inclusive 'we' attitude becomes an exclusive 'conditional we' attitude because there are conditions the residents must fulfil to be part of a 'we'. The participants shared how they wanted to be representatives of a 'normal life'. This involved efforts to represent normality through setting limits, expectations and demands because this could create feelings of security and mastery, and thus enhance meaningfulness in the residents' lives. To receive expectations and demands can lead to a feeling of responsibility, which the participants believed was helpful and necessary in establishing a normal and responsible life, which in turn is vital for a meaningful life. The participants also told how the 'we' attitude was fragile:

*P1: (...) there may sometimes be a period when it's like the staff (and the residents), so there will be such a big gap between us. There will be, I don't know what to call it... Not...*

*P2: There's a big distance?*

*P1: ...not a battle either, but a distance, yes. Yes, and it spreads fast that way of thinking. Once it's become like that.*

The participants stated that many of the residents followed the rules and acted upon the expectations and demands of the staff. Some of the residents did not follow the rules, and the staff could thus meet resistance. An expectation of washing one's hands before entering the kitchen could involve what one of the participants referred to as a 'battle'. The residents who did not follow the rules were excluded from the inclusive 'we' because 'you have to behave properly' in the house community.

**Theme three: A house of change for the better: moving on and going somewhere as meaningful**

The participants talked about how they encouraged the residents to 'move about' in their everyday life, such as coming out of their flat into the common area or leaving the house to go to activities such as voluntary or ordinary work. One of the participants put it like this: 'being alone in your flat is not a meaningful life'.

This encouragement towards physical movement was complemented by a 'mental' movement: having a life that is going somewhere, developing towards something better by doing new and challenging activities. The participants used phrases such as 'getting your life back in place' or 'being willing to make changes in life'. Both physical and mental movement was about making changes for the better and making progress in life, which are considered vital elements of a meaningful everyday life. By contrast, staying where you are without any progress is considered a meaningless everyday life.

Moving on and going somewhere was about encouraging and motivating the residents towards changes in their lives, and towards normality. One participant said:

*We've had people who have been in a really bad way here, but they've somehow managed to either motivate themselves or kind of get some input or made some moves so that they've got into some kind of activity, and I look at everyone who's somehow managed to keep going for a while, they've improved at some level, although there may not have been major changes, at least there have been positive changes to put it that way.*

Not only is the present everyday life vital in terms of change, long-term thinking and the future are also important. One of the participants said:

*I think like long-term, you may have a goal for, or something that's a bit further ahead. (...) your everyday life should work in a way, and that's a goal, but I think you sort of have to have a goal for what you're doing."*

Having a flat in the house was only temporary, and the participants described how the goal for the residents is to qualify to live in ordinary council housing. This requires being a good neighbour and a good tenant, which implies following the rules and acting responsibly. One participant talked about how some residents can seriously disturb everyday life in the house:

*You cannot behave like that, and responsibility is important for everyone, you have to take some responsibility for your own life, otherwise you can't just rush around, then your life is completely meaningless.*

The three themes can be interpreted as patterns of shared meaning across the data material, each united by a central idea: openness, framework and change. Together the themes are united by the overall idea that the participants give the residents more meaningful lives through openness and inclusion, framework and exclusion, and change for the better.

A third contradiction became apparent through the analysis: in addition to providing an open space for the residents, the participants also arranged different group activities and served meals during the week. Few of the residents (sometimes only one) took part in these organized activities, but despite this, they still maintained this practice. Keeping up a practice even though very few participated aroused our curiosity further towards more unspoken aspects of the participants' way of acting, and thus we decided to perform a hermeneutic decoding of this practice. Our constructed decoded finding is seen theme four: the house of giving: meaningfulness for the staff themselves.

#### **Theme four: The house of giving: meaningfulness for the staff themselves**

In the following we present our findings from our constructed decoding of meaning in the data. We thus offer a different, richer and more nuanced reading of what the participants said about their promotion of meaningfulness in the residents' everyday lives. We explore what might be unsaid in the data and suggest a meaning-making that might operate outside the participants' awareness.

This is not an alternative, but an addition to, the three constructed themes, aiming for multiplicity in the story that tells about exploring meaningfulness in everyday life.

The participants described how they kept up some practices even though few of the residents joined in. Instead of changing their way of doing practice, they continued. When we asked about the reason for this, one of the participants said: 'Doing something is better than doing nothing' and another added 'Even though not many join in, it's better to have a music group than not to have any groups at all'. The participants seemed to enable giving even though few residents participated, and they gave more than the residents wanted. An interpretation of this practice may be that it secures the participants in a position where they are able to give, and that this position can be meaningful for them in their everyday work. To provide an open inclusive house and have a position of giving inclusiveness, openness and tolerance can be meaningful for the participants. The participants talked about how they integrated parts of their private life with their professional life, assuming that this made the residents' life more meaningful. In connecting and bridging their two lives, the participants believed that they became more than just staff, and on a more equal footing with the residents, 'we in our house'. They felt that an equitable relationship was meaningful for the residents in their everyday life. Integration of professional work and private home life may provide a feeling of wholeness and continuity in life, which might have been meaningful for the participants.

The participants were part of a setting where change was possible. Their physical presence in the house made them available for the residents so that they could encourage and motivate them to make changes for the better. If a resident seizes the opportunity to make changes, it might make their job in the house more meaningful. Conversely, a resident who rejects this opportunity might make the staff's work less meaningful. This also applies to situations where the residents do not participate in keeping order in the house, such as when normal expectations trigger a 'battle'. On the other hand, residents following the rules can enhance staff experiences of doing the right thing by making demands, which might also be meaningful for them in their work. When the residents follow



the rules, it maintains practice and can provide some kind of order, not only for the sake of the residents, but also for the work environment for the staff.

In summary, the participants seemed to have unspoken and perhaps unaware reasons for doing practice the way they did like when they continued to organize activities even though few joined in. We suggest that a possible interpretation may be that they did this to maintain a way of giving, and that being in the position of giving might have been meaningful for the participants. When the residents make changes in life towards 'normality', they become part of an equal 'we' construction, and when they do not make changes, they can easily become part of an 'us and them' construction. For the participants we suggest that the first construction may provide more meaningfulness in their work than the latter.

## Discussion

Our constructed findings suggest that recovery-oriented professionals assume that they promote meaningful everyday life for residents by constructing (1) *an open house* (2) *a house with a framework*, and (3) *a house of change*. On a more unspoken level they also construct (4) *a house of giving*, which suggests that there is an interdependent relationship between providing meaningfulness for others and experiencing meaningfulness for oneself.

The two-part analysis may be characterized as a process of double hermeneutics: restoration of meaning when coding data through reflexive thematic analysis and deconstruction of meaning when decoding data. Double hermeneutics recognizes that data involve many layers, which corresponds to the layered aim of the study. This way of analysing provides multiple meaning constructions of the data and is feasible when attempting to develop possible overt and more covert interpretations.

Based on the aims and findings, we will concentrate our discussion on (1) giving and meaningfulness, and (2) professionals with 'skin in the game'. The aim of the discussion is to enhance knowledge of professional practice by presenting discourses recovery-oriented professionals seem to be influenced by when promoting meaningfulness in everyday life for people in recovery.

### **Giving and meaningfulness**

We argue that to be in a position of giving in 'the house of giving' enables a form of self-transcendence, which can give meaning in life. According to Schnell (2009, 2011), self-transcendence is commitment to objectives beyond one's immediate needs, such as taking responsibility for societal matters unrelated to one's immediate concerns. Social commitment is a form of self-transcendence. Among different sources of meaning in life, self-transcendence particularly increases the likelihood of living a meaningful life. Topor et al. state that many informants in recovery research emphasize the importance of having a reciprocal relationship with a professional and that in such a reciprocal relationship, the professional gains something over and above a salary (2011, p. 96).

According to Baumeister et al. (2013), meaningfulness is associated with doing things for others, and the position of giving provides more meaningfulness in life than the position of taking. Giving is about making positive contributions to other people, to their (individual or general) welfare or to other culturally valued activities. Giving is about self-sacrifice, thus involvement with things beyond oneself and one's own pleasure, and the possibility to devote oneself to helping others increases meaning in everyday life. Because being a giver is positively related to meaning, while being a receiver is negatively related, givers may be perceived as having more meaningful lives than receivers. Following Baumeister et al., we suggest that 'the house of giving' can provide the staff with an important source of meaning in life, and that a discourse of professionals as people in the position of giving seems to be dominant in the professional culture in the house.

We ask whether the position of being those ‘receiving’ might deprive the residents of the possibility to also give, and thereby have limited access to this important source of meaningfulness in life. Borg and Davidson (2007) argue that always being in the position of receiving represents an imbalance in the experience of recovery. More balance is achieved if the person in recovery is also obliged to give, thus experiencing being part of something greater than oneself. The first-person discourse on recovery suggests that participation, through both receiving and giving, is fulfilling and meaningful for the person in recovery (Behrman, 2005; Borg & Davidson, 2007; Borg & Kristiansen, 2008; Davidson et al., 2008; De Ruyscher et al., 2017; Doroud et al., 2015; Edward & Robins, 2012; Gail, 2008; Hipolito et al., 2011; Ness et al., 2014; Ørjasæter et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2018; Sørensen et al., 2015; Whitley, 2012). Klevan et al. (2020) suggest that recovery is not a one-way process where the professional guides the service user. Breaking with the traditional professional and service user roles, and alternating between giving and taking, might allow for more reciprocal relationships. Hancock et al. (2015) conclude in their study on sources of meaning for people in recovery that meaningfulness centres on inter-dependence: being with others, belonging, giving, or contributing and being valued by others.

### **Professionals with ‘skin in the game’**

Among both the staff interviewed and the members of the competence group, there were peer workers. In the competence group we discussed our idea of staff performing their work in such a way that it was also meaningful for themselves. There were different responses to these interpretations; some participants were curious about the idea of professionals making their own days more meaningful for themselves, while others were more sceptical. We argue that the reason for this restraint could be that the discourse for practices in the house is that professionals are there for the sake of the residents. Gergen (2015) argues that some interpretations are socially preferred

over others. We suggest that an interpretation of the staff as facilitating meaningfulness in their working day is a less socially preferred interpretation.

The peer workers talked about how being able to give back what was once given to them was meaningful. People who are able to 'give it back' seem to have what Taleb (2018) refers to as 'skin in the game'. To have skin in the game is often used in a financial sense, meaning that one risks losing something, whereas if one gives financial advice without skin in the game, one is not risking one's own money. This difference in what is at stake is a hidden asymmetry in the game or the relationship. We ask whether there is a larger hidden asymmetry in the relationship between the residents and the staff who are not peer workers than between the residents and staff who are peer workers. Those who are peer workers thus have more 'skin in the game'.

Romaioli and McNamee (2020) suggest the need to consider our taken-for-granted ideas and discourses and their potential implications for people's lives. McNamee (2015b) describes what she calls a 'professional' discourse, which is a discourse of understanding in abstract terms such as right/wrong, good/bad, healthy/unhealthy, or as in our case, an abstraction of giving/receiving. When engaging peer workers in professional practice a different discourse can be revealed: the 'giving it back' discourse, which might create an imbalance in the taken-for-granted socially constructed abstraction of the receiving service user and the giving professional. A 'giving it back' discourse can allow for a more equal relationship between the person in recovery and the professional. Such an equal relationship can be more circular, interdependent and in line with relational recovery, that perceives meaningfulness as emerging at the intersection and interdependency between people, their relationships, and their environments (Price-Robertson et al., 2017).

## **Concluding remarks**

Through our two-part analysis characterized as a process of double hermeneutics we constructed four themes. Three themes dealt with how the participants assume they can give the residents a more meaningful everyday life. In the fourth theme we suggested that the participants also facilitated their own meaningful working day, but this was not recognized and talked about openly.

With this systemic understanding of giving/receiving in the professional support relationship, we challenge the discourse of the professional helper as the giver. We suggest that professionals learn from a 'self-help discourse' where a more complementary relationship replaces a symmetrical relationship between the two (Bateson, 1971) and allows for reciprocity and shifting between the one who gives and the one who receives. Knowing that the position of giving can provide meaningfulness in life (Baumeister et al., 2013) and that meaning in life is vital for recovery (Leamy et al., 2011), we suggest that if professionals wish to promote recovery, they should provide opportunities for service users to give, not just to receive.

## **Strengths and limitations**

Our aim has been to present reflexivity and transparency in all steps of our analysis. Thus, we have carefully accounted for our epistemological positioning that guided our methodological choices. We have also explained all analytical steps carefully, to enable readers to follow our situated reasoning and argumentation. We do not attempt to claim truth, objectivity or generalizability. The collaborative and explorative research design allows for a research practice where co-constructed findings can be discussed in a competence group, not with the aim of reaching consensus, but in order to enhance understanding through presenting a broad range of views.

We consider the mix of formal and experiential knowledge as a strength, because of its potential for multiple ways of co-constructing meaning. Decoding meaning involves the desire to interpret and explore what might be unsaid. One might argue that there is a risk of misinterpretation; however, we believe the same argument applies to all interpretative research, and more importantly, that multiplicity in interpretation should be an ideal.

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