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# Sanism and Mad Pride: Critical Perspectives on Mental Health

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# Sanism and Mad Pride: Critical Perspectives on Mental Health

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# Learning Objectives

- To introduce the concept of 'sanism'
- To explore links between sanism and occupational therapy
- To encourage productive dialogue and brainstorm solutions to combat sanism

# Warning

# TED Talk: Dr. Jennifer Poole Sanism

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZvEUbtTBes

# Terms

**Sanism**:

(Perlin, 1992, 2003; Poole et al., 2012).

**Mentalism** Chamberlin (1990)

**Psychocentrism**: (Leblanc & Kinsella, 2016)

**Mad** (reclaimed term)

# History

From the beginning of recorded history to the asylums

Late 1960's:

- rise of ex-patient/survivor movement; deinstitutionalization
- term sanism was coined in the 1960s by activist lawyer, Mortin Birnbaum (Birnbaum, 2010; Fabris, 2011).

1970's: Coining of the terms *mentalism* (Chamberlin, 1979)

1990's: Perlin popularized the concept of *sanism* (Perlin 1992).

# Theory: Perlin (1992) (Law)

- Stereotyping
- Labels
- Through stereotypes and labels "any act that fails to follow standards set by a dominant group becomes a deviation" ( p. 379)
- "Them not us" mentality leads to less empathy
- 10 sanist myths

# Sanist Myths "Mentally ill people are:

1. **Different** than normal people
2. **Dangerous** and frightening
3. **Incompetent** to participate in "normal" activities, to make autonomous decisions about their lives (especially in areas involving medical care), and to participate in the political arena" (p. 394)
4. If a person in treatment for mental illness declines to take prescribed antipsychotic medication, that decision is an excellent predictor of (1) future dangerousness and (2) need for involuntary institutionalization.
5. Mental illness **can easily be identified** by lay persons and matches up closely to popular **media** depictions.
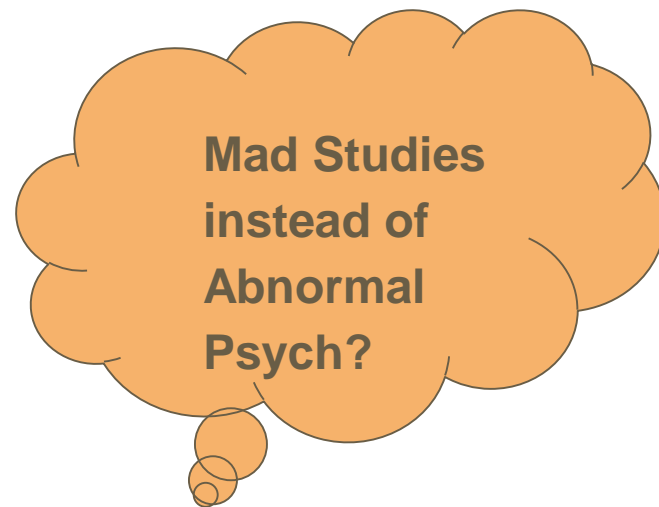
6. It is, and should be, socially acceptable to use pejorative labels to describe and single out people who are mentally ill.
7. Mentally ill individuals **should be segregated** in large, distant institutions because their presence **threatens** the economic and social stability of residential communities.
8. The mentally disabled person charged with crime is presumptively **the most dangerous** potential offender,
9. Mentally disabled individuals simply don't try hard enough
10. If attorneys had not meddled in the lives of people with mental disabilities, such individuals would be where they belong (ininstitutions), and all of us would be better off.

# Theory: Poole et al. (2012) (Social Work)

- Need for anti-oppressive practices (anti-sanist work)
- Intersectionality
- Social Model of Disability

- **Call to action:**

  Education and language

**Mad Studies instead of Abnormal Psych?**

# Theory: Leblanc & Kinsella (2016) (OT)

Medicalized 'psy' discourses have marginalized alternative perspectives on madness.

**Epistemic injustice**:  suppression and dismissal of Mad person's knowledge, experiences, and perspectives

**Anosognosia**: "Lack of insight"

**Psychocentrism**

**Sane Privilege**

# Sanism ≠ Stigma

# Where's Sanism?

**Institutional/Systemic level**

**Media**

**Policy**

**Personal Actions/Behaviors**

**Language**

**Poster 1 (blue):**

That's so...

ridiculous
indiscreet
ignorant
absurd
pointless
careless
irrational
un—
irresp senseles
unnecessary
uni
illogical
trivial fruitless
ill-consid dull

...and
you choose
retarded?

Buy a dictionary.

11x17"

**Poster 2 (red/orange):**

That's so...

heinous
silly
hideou
uncout
contem
hapless
foolish
corrupt
prep inau
unfortunate
ridic
trashy
deplorable
atroc

...and
you choose
gay?

Buy a dictionary.

11x17"

**Poster 3 (green):**

That's So...

implausis
inane
irrational
senseless
unpredictable
misleading
eccentric
absurd
impractical
ridiculous
aggressive
foolish illogical
disturbed
preposterous stupid
erratic strange

...and
you choose
insane?

Buy a dictionary.

Created by Stephanie LeBlanc Phd candidate, OT Reg. (Ont.) | slebln8@uwo.ca | 2016

# What's behind a word:

Consider the meaning behind these commonly used terms:

- Mental illness
- Unmotivated
- Noncompliance
- Suffers from …
- Symptoms
- Positive and negative behaviors
- Chronic and persistent mental illness
- Committed (suicide)
- Consumer
- Gravely disabled.
- Hysterical (Greek word for uterus)
- Lunacy (moon, menstrual monthly cycle)

Other terms:
https://www.autistichoya.com/p/ableist-words-and-terms-to-avoid.html

Questions:

- What are the subtext and context of this language?

- Whose discourse are we adopting?

- In whose interest is it?

- What does it make visible and what does it remove from sight?

# Sanism and OT

LeBlanc - OT in Canada

Hamer et al.  (2017) New Zealand

Morrow & Hardie (2014) (*An intersectional approach to inequity in "Creek's Occupational Therapy and Mental Health" 5th edition*)

Occupational justice

- Occupational apartheid  - based on category of disability, diagnostic requirement
- Occupational marginalization
- Occupational deprivation

# Small Groups: Sanism & OT

Where are we, as OTs in a system, being sanist?

What have you seen, heard, or done that is sanist?

What are your sane privileges?

Problem solve what you would have or could change now  to decrease or eliminate sanist practices.

# Ideas for change

What are universal practices we can embrace in our personal and professional lives to reduce sanism?

# Mad Pride

- **Mad Studies**: Embracing Mad knowledge and Mad narratives
- **Language**: Reclaiming power using a word that weaponized against a group of people E.g. Queer

- **Madness might be seen in different ways:**
  - A gift, a strength, something positive (it just seems mad to others)
  - Something that is detrimental in one sense but a gift or a strength in another sense
  - Something that is detrimental, but the pride is in the strength and the skill one develops to respond to such a challenge

# How can I get involved?

**Host a Madpride event :**

Cork, Ireland, Toronto, CA, Dominican University of California April 8-12 2019

# Interested in Learning More?

- Mad in America: Their mission is to serve as a catalyst for rethinking psychiatric care in the United States (and abroad). www.madinamerica.com

- Webinar coming up The next webinar in our Mad Studies series, "Politicizing Contradictions, Cultivating Solidarity: Neurodiversity at the Crossroads of Multiple Experiences," has been scheduled for **Monday, April 22nd, at 2:30pm Eastern, 11:30am Pacific.**

- The Icarus Project. The Icarus Project is a support network and education project by and for people who experience the world in ways that are often diagnosed as mental illness. https://theicarusproject.net/

- Mindfreedom International www.mindfreedom.org

# Shameless Plug: OT in Mental Health April 27, Santa Cruz

OTAC, POTAC, Greater Los Angeles Mental Health Network and San Diego Area Mental Health Community of Practice

Online Registration www.otaconline.org / OT in Mental Health

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