

Title: The Narratives of 12 Men With AIDS: Exploring Return to Work

Authors: Braveman, Helfrich, Kielhofner, & Albrecht

Major Finding: The direction of the participants' narrative was related to their ability to identify with the worker role and consequently enact that identity through participation in work-related activities.

Participants:

- 16 males who completed a vocational rehabilitation program for persons living with AIDS
- Age range: 32-52
- Ethnicity: 6 White; 7 Black; 3 Latino
- Education range: 10th grade to graduate level
- Living arrangement: 14 lived alone; 1 lived with a partner; 1 lived in supported living residence
- Sexual orientation: 13 homosexual; 3 heterosexual
- Mental health history: 4 with history of substance abuse; 4 with history of depression

Method: Four semi-structured interviews (60-112 min) were conducted over 1 year (1, 2, 7, and 12 months). The interviews included administration of the OPHI-II, and discussions about AIDS-specific issues, employment experiences, and participant perspectives of their narrative slope.

Analysis: Categorical content analysis using ATLAS.ti to classify narratives. A panel of 6 professionals, used to validate interpretations from 3rd and 4th interviews. Structural narrative analysis was driven by thematic focus of return to employment and direction determined from the time of entry into an employment program.

Findings:

- At initial interview all participants predicted a progressive narrative slope ("things would get better").
- Five participants created progressive narratives in which they enacted an identity as a worker and made progress towards work goals. Other roles were also positively impacted.
- Three participants described stable narratives. While this group made progress towards the goal of returning to work, other life events and roles were considered more important and they maintained the "status quo."
- Four participants exhibited regressive narratives, describing decreased identification with the worker role and an inability to make progress towards their goal of returning to work.

Conclusion: The progression of the participants' life history narratives, with respect to return to work goals, were found to be related to their perceptions of experiencing illness and disability.

Implications for future research: Further research should be conducted on how identity and competence might relate to the progression of narratives and on the use of structural analysis of narratives in persons with a variety of disabilities to better understand the return to work process.

Evidence-based practice implications:

- **Narrative approaches may be a useful way to understand the stories of individuals who are trying to implement changes within their lives.**
- **Appropriate classification of narratives must incorporate not only the attainment of a goal, but also the extent to which occupational identity changes.**

