

Abstract

Schizophrenia has historically been constructed as a devastating biological illness that takes over and controls the lives of those diagnosed with it. Literature on schizophrenia often implies that those diagnosed with schizophrenia are largely passive, being “victims” of the condition and being afforded little or no agency with respect to their symptoms and the professional treatment they receive. Medicalised discourses of schizophrenia thus communicate low expectations and hopelessness. However, individuals with such a diagnosis can resist these medicalised discourses and even the category schizophrenia when constructing themselves. Mindfulness, which has been conceptualised as an alternative approach to dealing with experiences of schizophrenia, offers discursive resources for producing this type of resistance. Discourses of mindfulness contrast medicalised discourses as it constructs distress as something that is not an inherent consequence of certain experiences, but a consequence of individuals’ response to an experience. This study adopted a social constructionist framework in order to answer two research questions emerging from the literature on schizophrenia and mindfulness: 1) How do individuals with a diagnosis of schizophrenia who are using mindfulness-based approaches resist the medicalised discourses of schizophrenia? and 2) What role does this resistance play in the construction of the self? These questions were addressed by using discourse analysis to analyse a sample of online discussion forums and blogs involving individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia that use mindfulness-based approaches. The analysis revealed that participants resist the medicalised discourse by using the online platform on which these discussions took place, by avoiding the term “schizophrenia”, by creating alternative non-pathologised discourses using mindfulness as a resource for doing so, and by employing professional and empirical discourses. By resisting the medicalised discourse participants constructed themselves as active agents and as being “more than a disorder”. The discursive practices used by participants in the study thus challenged the nature of schizophrenia and invited others in the field to do so.