

Am I Delusional?

“...we are all capable of having convictions and it is a universal human characteristic to hold on to our own mistaken judgements.”
(Jaspers (1913), 1963, p.63)



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1. Background

- Delusions are a significant feature of mental illnesses and can occur in many clinical conditions (Maher, 2001)
- The standard clinical definition (American Psychiatric Association. DSM-5 Task Force, 2013) is highly contentious.
- Much of the literature holds elements such as bizarreness of content and incorrigibility of belief as defining factors of delusion.
- On closer inspection, delusions are not so easy to pin down.

2. Objective

- Highlight some of the difficulties associated with the definition of delusion
- Clarify the phenomenology.

3. Methodology

- Examination of some of the philosophical, psychological and psychiatric literature with regard to the definition of delusion.
- Examination of first person descriptions of the experience.
- Consideration of my experience of my own mental activity and experiences from my therapeutic work.
- Identify areas for empirical research

4. Questions

Are delusions one kind of thing?



Are delusions a heterogeneous group?



Are we comparing oranges with armchairs?



What are the external characteristics of delusion?

Can we measure them?



“The fourth lamppost on the right was unlit... so I knew my wife was having an affair.”

“My wife is an alien”

“I am capable of doing any job that I choose, regardless of previous experience.”

“I am dead.”

“I have super powers and am capable of anything.”

“Everyone wants to do me harm... the housing authority, my neighbour, my doctor, my social worker, everyone....”

“I’m a much better driver than most people.”

“Raindrops carry the emotions of my dead sister.”

“If I wear my lucky pants my football team will win.”

“smoking related diseases won’t have any effect on me I’m special.”

“I’m a millionaire consultant psychiatrist who is head of the British army.”



5. Findings

External Characteristics of Delusion include:

- Distress
- Pervasiveness
- Impact on behaviour
- Impairment on functioning
- Affect at onset
- Emotional salience
- Rationality
- Plausibility
- Amenability to revision
- Conviction
- Fit with personality/history
- Cultural normalcy
- Intensity
- Preoccupation
- Integration

Some of these characteristics might be measurable by the subject experiencing them and/or a third party observer.

7. More Questions

Different kinds?

Do the different characteristics at onset and during maintenance tell us something about different kinds of delusions?

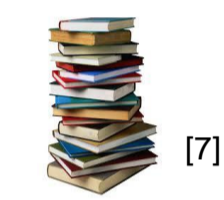
Embodied, Extended, Enactive, Embedded:

What place might there be for a 4E framework?

How might this fit with the medical model and/or the bio-psycho-social model?

What impact might the answers to these questions have on research and treatment?

8. Next Steps:



More analysis of the literature



More empirical Research

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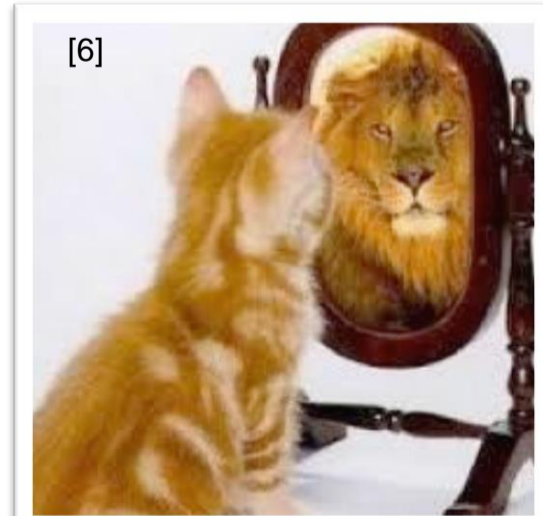
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6. Being slightly (sub-clinically) delusional might be good for your mental health

Images: [1] <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/health/educational-resources/brain-basics/brain-basics.shtml>
 [2] <http://www.hellomagazine.com/cuisine/201211059939/apple-season-varieties-recipes/>
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