



Abstract Nr: 137
Internet ID: 358

Type of Presentation: Symposium

Psychosis as structure: a phenomenological-empirical investigation of double reality and its manner of expression in schizophrenia spectrum disorders

Helene Stephensen¹, Sara Linstow², Annick Urfer Parnas³

¹Mental Health Center Glostrup, BROENDBY, Denmark

²Psychiatric Hospital of Nordsjælland, University of Copenhagen, HILLERØD, Denmark

³Mental Health Center Amager, COPENHAGEN, Denmark

Learning Goal:

This symposium aims to elucidate psychosis in schizophrenia spectrum disorders (SDD) as an altered structure of human experience and existence through the notion of *double reality* (originally Bleuler's notion double bookkeeping), which stands in opposition to the biomedical approach to the illness as a cluster of independent psychotic symptoms.

Abstract Text:

We argue that *double reality* is a crucial yet overlooked feature of the structure of psychosis in schizophrenia. In its most developed form *double reality* refers to a sense of simultaneously existing in two incommensurable dimensions of reality, the shared everyday world, from which the patient feels profoundly alienated, and the world of psychotic experiences. Elyn Saks describes it the following way:

my life truly began to operate as though it were being lived on two trains, their tracks side by side. On one track, the train held the things of the real world [...] On the other track: the increasingly confusing and even frightening inner workings of my mind

Double reality can be grasped as an intrinsic aspect of the core disturbance of SDD, a global alteration of the structures of experience and an interconnected vulnerability of the basic relation to the world. We argue that a better understanding of this phenomenon may help bridge the gap between a person who is psychotic and clinicians or caregivers and help to conduct more adequate therapy.

The symposium will present three different on-going qualitative studies all consisting of semi-structured phenomenologically-oriented interviews with individuals suffering from SDD.

The first study focuses on the lived experience of *double reality* and how it relates to what is considered illness. Many patients seem to display their psychotic experiences in another realm of reality and such experiences cannot be judged false. The second study examines auditory verbal hallucinations (AVH) and their mode of onset – often associated with the experience of a breakthrough to another dimension of reality. The third study consists of interviews with patients close to their discharge and who have been exposed to forced admissions and treatments. It sheds light on ambiguity in relation to treatment.

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**