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Psychotic, mystical and the question of self

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Learning Goal:

We would like to present research findings and reflection on the potential, which phenomenological research of psychotic and mystical experiences offers for psychotherapy and recovery of psychotic disorders.

Abstract Text:

Every strong differing experience, as was famously captured by Karl Jaspers in his *limit situation*, is transforming person's whole view of the world and of one's self. Psychotic and mystical experiences are surely such worldview- and self-transforming experiences. There is a long history of interest in both of them and in the interrelations between them with many important works in the field. However, there is a relative paucity of thorough phenomenological explorations of experiential horizons opened by psychotic and mystical experiences and in what ways they might be compared shedding some mutually illuminating perspectives on each other. Our research work (Škodlar & Ciglenečki, 2013; 2015) focuses on precisely this intriguing intersection between the two experiential worlds. We have in detail interviewed ten patients with psychotic disorder, who reported mystical-like experience at some point in their lives. We have qualitatively, phenomenologically studied the interviews, trying to elucidate the nature of both experiences, i.e. psychotic and mystical-like, experienced by our informants. Our findings are compatible with findings of other researchers (e.g. Parnas & Henriksen, 2016), i.e. that both experiences share phenomenological affinities like epiphanic or self-revelatory nature of experience with revolutionary or life-transforming characteristics. On the other side, there are also clear differences, which gravitate around the question of the self, being radically hypertrophied in psychotic and radically dissolved in mystical experiences. The question of the self will be addressed from the longitudinal perspective of the psychoanalytic-developmental theories as well as from the cross-sectional perspective of phenomenological-contemplative theories. Through them, we would like to give our view on the problem of the self, insightfully expressed by Engler (2003) as "you need to be somebody in order to be nobody" with the scope to present the potential of both, psychotic and mystical experiences, for psychotherapy and recovery.



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OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**