

Insight Deficits in Substance Use Disorders Through the Lens of Double Bookkeeping



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Background

Eugen Bleuler introduced the concept of double bookkeeping in schizophrenia to describe the tendency for people who experience delusions to simultaneously be convinced of the delusional content and yet act as if the delusion(s) was untrue/irrelevant or be unbothered by the discrepancies that exist.

Parnas et al. (2021) highlight that “lack of insight is perhaps the domain of experience where double bookkeeping is most clearly manifest.”

Phenomenology of addiction is an understudied area in psychiatry. Specifically, there is a dearth of exploration on impairment in insight among people with substance use disorders from a phenomenological lens (Schütz et al., 2018).

Objectives

We explore the novel application of double bookkeeping to substance use disorders, including its conceptual implications. We open the question of whether there exists an analogous double reality in individuals with addiction.

Methods

We conducted a conceptual analysis of this question from the perspectives of phenomenology and philosophy of psychiatry. Literature on double bookkeeping was reviewed and applied to the case of addiction, including from historical and contemporary sources.

Historical	Contemporary
Eugen Bleuler	Josef Parnas
Karl Jaspers	Louis Sass
Eugène Minkowski	Michel Cermolacce

Results

While double bookkeeping has primarily been explored in schizophrenia, this concept may hold promise in elucidating insight deficits in individuals with substance use disorders.

We propose two forms of addiction double bookkeeping.

(1) Partial compartmentalization: Individuals who demonstrate awareness of the deleterious consequences of drug use but continue to engage in addictive behaviours.

(2) Total compartmentalization: Individuals who act as if the negative consequences of addiction do not exist in their world or apply to themselves, reflecting a more generalized and deeper lack of awareness into their own actions.

“Delusion proper implies a transformation in our total awareness of reality. ... Reality [for the patient] does not always carry the same meaning as that of normal reality.”
Karl Jaspers, 1913

Results (continued)

(1) Partial Compartmentalization	(2) Total Compartmentalization
Double account in terms of reason for actions. The individual with addiction is aware of the deleterious effects of their drug use, but the awareness does not exert influence on the actual behaviours. In other words, the awareness is behaviourally inert.	Double account of behaviours and experiences. The individual’s behaviours are apparently not indicative of addiction and at the same time, the individual encounters and must respond to the negative consequences of drug use.
There is seemingly a separate implicit set of reasons for actions that drives the individual’s substance use.	The individual demonstrates a more general lack of insight into the nature of their actions.

Ontological Transformation

Eugène Minkowski (1948) elaborated that delusional ideas are an attempt to express the patient’s experiences of transformation in the basic structures of their experiential world, including lived time, lived space, and intersubjectivity.

Analogous to classic schizophrenic double bookkeeping, addiction reality can exist side by side with our shared social reality even when these realities seem mutually exclusive.

A basic alteration in the person’s sense of self is involved in the individual holding both the addiction world and the shared social world in tandem.

Drawing from enactivism and the notion of “bad habits,” we propose that individuals with substance use disorders become increasingly determined by an addiction sub-universe where the addiction regional identity takes dominant control. This transformation results in an addiction quasi-solipsistic sub-universe that may be shared among people with addiction.

Conclusions

The ontological transformation involved in double bookkeeping supplies a fuller view of insight deficits.

Insight deficits in addiction involve disturbed selfhood by way of “bad habits” such that the sub-universe of addiction takes over to form a shared quasi-solipsistic world of addiction which maintains and increases the individual’s substance use. We propose two forms of addiction double bookkeeping but leave open the question of how partial relates to total compartmentalization.

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 Minkowski, E. (1948). Phénoménologie et analyse existentielle en psychopathologie. *L'évolution Psychiatrique*, 13(4): 137-185.
 Parnas, J., Urfer-Parnas, A., & Stephensen, H. (2021). Double bookkeeping and schizophrenia spectrum: Divided unified phenomenological consciousness. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, 271, 1513-1523.
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