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Diagnosing Delusions in the Age of Fake News and "Alternative Facts"

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Delusions

"Delusions are fixed beliefs that are not amenable to change in light of conflicting evidence. Their content may include a variety of themes (e.g., persecutory, referential, somatic, religious, grandiose). *Persecutory delusions* (i.e., belief that one is going to be harmed, harassed, and so forth by an individual, organization, or other group) are most common."

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"The distinction between a delusion and a strongly held idea is sometimes difficult to determine and depends in part on the degree of conviction with which the belief is held despite clear or reasonable contradictory evidence regarding its veracity. Assessing delusions in individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds can be difficult."

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Definitions:

- **FACT:** something that is known to have happened or to exist, especially something for which proof exists, or about which there is information
- **KNOWN:** used to refer to something or someone that is familiar to or understood by people
- **PROOF:** a fact or piece of information that shows that something exists or is true
- **TRUE:** not false

Source: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/>

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Definitions:

- **Fake News:** false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke

No definition for "Alternative Facts."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3xsgWHdyN4>

Source: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/>

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Definitions:

- **Misinformation:** wrong information, or the fact that people are misinformed
- **Disinformation:** false information spread in order to deceive people

Source: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/>

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The Social Construction of Reality

- W.I. Thomas: "When people define situations as real they become real in their consequences." (Thomas, 2018)
- "Man's self-production is always, and of necessity, a social enterprise. Men *together* produce the human environment, with the totality of its socio-cultural and psychological formations" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967)
- Movement from evidence-based reason toward subjective "alternative facts" (Bryanov, 2021)

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"...different versions of the truth..."

"When I grew up, there was *the* news, right?" Megan Gerhardt said when we spoke. "Pick a channel, like ABC, NBC—it was basically the same news. Sure it wasn't objective necessarily, but it wasn't like you just chose your news channel and then that dictated the way that your news was shared with you. This is a whole generation who has grown up understanding that there's a lot of different versions of the truth or of news or of information and you can't just sort of blindly believe whatever you read."

Megan Gerhardt, PhD, quote in (Bump, 2023)

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AI and "Deep Fakes"

Deepfakes: "a hybrid form of deep learning and fake material, include swapping the face of one human with that of a targeted person in a picture or video and making content to mislead people into believing the targeted person has said words that were said by another person" (Shahzad, 2022)

The erosion of a clear line between factual truths and lies can lead to cynicism, but it can also lead to the elevation of opinions to the status of truths, as people are likely to find it increasingly difficult to distinguish between the two (Gordon, 2018).

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Democratization of Opinion

- Long-term decrease in trust of institutions (Walker, 2020)
- "Equality" of opinions (Nichols, 2017)
- Changed definition of "research"
- American Anti-Intellectualism (Hofstadter,)

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Culture-Related Diagnostic Issues

- An individual's cultural and religious background must be taken into account in evaluating the possible presence of delusional disorder; in fact, some traditional beliefs unfamiliar to Western cultures may be wrongly labeled as delusional, so their context must be carefully assessed (Nisbett 2003). The nature and content of delusions also vary among different cultural groups.

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Cultural Considerations in the Assessment of Psychotic Symptoms

Diagnostic accuracy and the quality of treatment planning may be enhanced by interview approaches, scales, and tools that have been adapted or validated for the person's culture and by using a cultural formulation interview

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Symptoms Of Delusional Disorder:

<p>01</p> <p>Feeling abused and exploited.</p>	<p>02</p> <p>Comprehending threatening meanings into harmless remarks or events.</p>	<p>03</p> <p>Doubting the loyalty or trustworthiness of friends.</p>
<p>04</p> <p>Having grudges for a prolonged period of time.</p>	<p>05</p> <p>Answering readily to perceived slights.</p>	<p>06</p> <p>Seeing, hearing, or feeling things that are absent in reality.</p>

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Delusional Disorder (F22)

The presence of one (or more) delusions with a duration of 1 month or longer.

- Criterion A for schizophrenia has never been met.
- **Note:** Hallucinations, if present, are not prominent and are related to the delusional theme (e.g., the sensation of being infested with insects associated with delusions of infestation).
- Apart from the impact of the delusion(s) or its ramifications, functioning is not markedly impaired, and behavior is not obviously bizarre or odd.
- If manic or major depressive episodes have occurred, these have been brief relative to the duration of the delusional periods.
- The disturbance is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance or another medical condition and is not better explained by another mental disorder, such as body dysmorphic disorder or obsessive-compulsive disorder.

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Discussion Questions

- Is the determination of "delusions" a Micro or Macro issue? Both?
- Considering the content of this presentation, should the DSM 5-TR be revised? If so, how?
- Does the Brown Assessment of Beliefs Scale adequately detect and measure the existence of delusions? Explain.
- What can you do as a social worker to address the subjective nature of diagnosing delusions?

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