

Self-Determination and Mental Disorders: Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract : Background: The main focus of this paper is to explore how self-determination interplays in suicidal and addictive context leading one to autonomously choose self-destructive addictive behaviour or suicidal intentions. Methods: Phenomenological descriptions of the experiential structure of self-determination in addiction and suicidal mental life are used. The phenomenological method describes structures of mental life from the first-person-perspective, with a focus on how an experienced object is given in a subject's conscious experience. Results: A sense of self-determination in the context of suicidal and addictive behaviour is possibly impaired. In the context of suicide, it's proposed that suicide is always experienced at least minimally self-determined, as it's the last freely discovered self-efficient behaviour, in terms of radically changing one's desperate mental state. Suicide can never be experienced as fully self-determined because no future retrospective re-evaluation of behaviour is possible. Understanding self-determination in addiction is challenging because addicts perceive themselves and experience situations differently depending on: (I) their level of intoxication; (II) whether the situation is in the moment or in retrospect; and (III) the goals set out in that situation. Furthermore, within phenomenology addiction is described as an embodied custom, which's acquired and established while performing 'psychotropic technique'. The main goal of performing such a technique is to continue 'floating in an indifference state' or being 'comfortably numb'. Conclusions: Based on rich phenomenological descriptions of the studied phenomenon, this paper draws on the premise that to experience self-determination in both suicide and addiction, underlying desperate or negative emotional states are needed. Such underlying desperate or negative mental life experiences are required for one to pre-reflectively evaluate suicide or addictive behaviours as positive, relieving or effective in terms of changing one's emotional states. Such pre-reflective positive evaluations serve as the base for the continuation of behaviour and later are identified reflectively.

Keywords : addiction, phenomenology, self-determination, self-effectivity, suicide

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