Abstract

Title
Reification and psychiatric practice: An exercise in virtuosity

Background
Despite the ongoing scientification of psychiatry, a tension between objective and subjective aspects remains in contemporary practice.

Goal
This essay examines diagnostic psychiatric practice from various perspectives and underlines the importance of practical aspects of the profession by introducing the concept of virtuosity.

Methods
This essay uses elective literature research to provide a historical-theoretical background, to highlight the concept of diagnosis in various contexts, and finally to reflect on the frameworks of professional practice.

Results
One way to navigate two seemingly contradictory approaches is through virtuosity. Virtuosity is based on four principles: (1) Clinical judgment is a synthesis of subjective interpretation and empirically based regulative ideas; (2) Social processes that bring someone to the medical domain are part of that judgment; (3) Clinical judgment is the basis for “useful” diagnoses; (4) The fact that diagnoses are useful in the medical domain does not automatically make them useful outside that context.

Conclusion
The question of what kind of "things" constitute diagnoses often arises at the wrong ontological level. Virtuosity refers to the psychiatrist’s art of being aware of assumptions about subjective, empirically unverifiable phenomena and processes, and the skill to translate these into a practical use of diagnoses.