

Diagnostic Status and Identity: The Right to Privacy

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Recent discussions in philosophy of psychiatry underscore different roles that receiving a diagnosis may play with respect to identity. In some cases, acquiring a diagnosis plays an explanatory role – i.e., it allows one to better understand “what is wrong” with oneself – while in others it plays a revelatory role – i.e., it allows one to rediscover one’s identity. In this talk I further explore the relationship between diagnosis and identity in psychiatry. I first reframe the diagnostic process as one in which the person acquires a new body of information about oneself. I then show that the same pieces of information turn out to be more or less constitutive or harmful depending on a host of contextual factors. I conclude by advocating for a right to privacy with respect to diagnostic status, and I illustrate the implications of this proposal for debates surrounding concealment and disclosure of psychiatric diagnoses.