

What Is the Difference Between Delusion and Denial?

I was sitting in a meeting last night and we were having healthy discussion on the topic, ***“what I wish someone had told me when I was a newcomer that I know now”*** (one of those, “I wish I’d known then what I know now” kinda things). One of the women shared that she wished she had been taught the difference between “*delusion*” and “*denial*.” She struggled with that for a long time. As she was sharing, I found her statement very interesting and had to ask myself if I knew the difference. So, I went to the dictionary as I often do to find the definitions of the two and shared them with the room. The conversation went on and some really great discussion occurred.

After the meeting, I was left wanting more of that conversation as a teachable moment for myself, so I reached out to a handful of people in my A.A. network to see what ***their experience*** (not opinion, but experience) was on the topic. Below represents a collective sampling of the responses I got from a variety of folks (all who have varying levels of time [some 30+ years] in the Fellowship - and who have varying levels of service, both at the group level and below the group level [in the General Service structure all the way down to the Board of Trustees]). I hope you find it as interesting as I did as you begin to ask yourself the title question of this writing. (Heads Up: There are some “outside issues” used herein by one person as they shared their experience.)

Delusion	Denial	Additional Comments
An idiosyncratic belief or impression that is firmly maintained despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality or rational argument, typically a symptom of mental disorder. <i>“the delusion of being watched”</i>	The action of declaring something to be untrue. <i>“she shook her head in denial”</i>	“As is usually the case, sticking with my God shot/gut feeling is usually the right answer. Going to the dictionary is an old AA tradition that you are aware of, which really helped me with some of the language the Founders used in the first 164 pages. Based on these definitions, the clarification I liked was for delusion : “typically a symptom of mental disorder” . Applied to my own experience, I believed the delusion that alcohol was still my medicine; but that switched to denial once I was exposed to the 12 Steps. (There’s a chicken/egg argument here somewhere). The Devil on my shoulder would like to say I was deluded as I talked steps about my alcoholic family members, and the “mental disorder” of alcoholism kept me there for a long time. The Angel on my other shoulder is allowing me to say that it was definitely denial once my Mom intervened on me, but I kept drinking, while “visiting AA” for another 3+ months.”
Delusion is a form of insanity.	Denial is not used in our book (in reference to our illness) and that’s because denial means I know the truth and am not willing to admit it.	“Our book says that I cannot tell the difference between the true and the false. Delusion: The last few years of my drinking I did not once wrestle with the idea that I was an alcoholic. I had been to AA many times and I drank almost every day. To not even consider that I might be an alcoholic is delusional. Delusional also has the aspect of diversion. My attention is diverted towards some completely irrational cause of the problem. For example, some days I am in denial about how fat I am but I never think that the reason why I’m fat is because the world doesn’t treat me right or because God doesn’t love me. I know it’s because I eat too much.”
Insisting things that are not real-really are real.... <i>“All liberals hate America...”</i> that is delusional thinking.”	Insisting things that are real really aren’t.... <i>“there is no proof of racism in the alt right...”</i> . That is denial.	“Now the tricky thing about my definition is each person can see things differently. Where I see proof, you can see conspiracy theories and vice versa.”

Delusion <i>could</i> be classified as a condition of insanity .	Denial is a condition of sanity .	"In a clinical sense, delusion manifests itself as part of a psychological issue, right? <i>'The delusion I could wrest happiness and self-satisfaction out of life if I only managed well'</i> . I say denial "is not" or "act that it is not" - therefore it isn't. That's intentional. It's the belligerent denial that our Book describes (the worst kind). Coronavirus is the flu. Perfect example."
Delusion is a firm belief in an untruth (<i>akin to ignorance</i>) for us alkie.	Denial is just a lie (<i>it's a "rehabby" word</i>)	"Complacency and delusion are the same thing :-) i.e.: A feeling of comfort when surrounded by danger 😊"
Delusion is a misled mind leading to psychosis. <i>I don't know I have a dog.</i>	Denial is the refusal to believe something — like <i>I have a dog under my covers but saying "Noelle is in the living room."</i>	"The BB only uses delusion and illusion — not denial. I truly didn't know I had a drinking problem until 2/6/84 when God showed me "the truth."
Delusion is an alcoholic drinking after they work the steps.	Denial is alcoholic drinking before they work the steps.	
Delusion is <i>"I won't look."</i>	Denial is <i>"It's not occurring."</i>	"My 2nd favorite piece of "Literature" because of A.A. says... Denial: a defense mechanism in which confrontation with a personal problem or with reality is avoided by denying the existence of the problem or reality in denial. Delusion: a persistent false psychotic belief regarding the self or persons or objects outside the self that is maintained despite indisputable evidence to the contrary- Merriam Webster"
In the Dr.'s Opinion pg. xxvi- <i>"Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one."</i> This is delusion which the BB uses in several places.	Denial is used only one time in the BB, not in reference to drinking or alcoholism. Pg. 10 in "Bill's Story" is says " his insistence that the spheres really had their music; but his denial of the preacher's right to tell him how he must listen;" describing his grandfather's skepticism regarding religion.	"One of the deadliest elements of alcoholism is the alcoholic's mental blind spot regarding alcohol. To me, in the midst of my life collapsing around me, it seemed alcohol was the only thing giving me any relief so how could it be the problem? That was the delusion. Had alcohol not stopped giving me that relief, I would have probably died there."