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Paranoia And The Paranormal

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Marian is afraid of monsters. After her mother tucks her in and turns out the light, she sees them in the closet. The fear is overwhelming, and she runs into her mother's room for protection. Her mother hugs her and tells her not to be afraid, that the monsters aren't real. They return to the bedroom together. Her mother shows her that what she thought was a monster was actually just a trick the moonlight played with a crumpled blanket on the closet floor, amplified by the delicate scratch of a twig on a window pane. Marian's mother says, "See, there's nothing there." Marian returns to bed, but not until she has closed the closet door.

All children know Marian's fear. A three year old has not yet learned to tell reality from fantasy; to know the difference between the contents of her imagination and the contents of the external world.

Fear and suspicion are important parts of every child's life. Fear protects children from harm by encouraging them to stay near to their parents. Suspicion prompts them to scan a new environment for potential danger before venturing forth. A child without these feelings would not survive without protection.

Through countless episodes of having our fears alleviated by the protectiveness of loving parents, we learn to temper our trepidations. We gradually internalize the soothing voices of our caretakers, and they become our own, enabling us to comfort ourselves in trying times. Once this happens we rarely think about monsters.

Even so, the residue of childhood fear stays with us. We have all felt that uncomfortable feeling that someone is watching us; that we are not alone. These feelings are unshakable, and no amount of rationalizing makes them go away. During times of stress we may become hyper-aware of noises around us. Every crack and pop catches our attention. From nowhere, we hear our name called. We hear a buzzing or ringing sound that seems to come from everywhere at once.

For most of us, these are fleeting feelings, momentary rushes of fear that are abolished by our ability to rationalize. By the time we reach school age, most of us have learned to cope with our monsters.

For an unfortunate few, however, the monsters return to stay. What begins as an intrusive, unshakable suspicion eventually evolves into unrelenting feelings of persecution. Evidence of a devilish conspiracy peeps menacingly through every crevice. The enemy is everywhere. Life becomes a quest to uncover the sinister plot. To the afflicted person, this quest is called **research**, but to those who have been spared this anguish, it is called **paranoia**.

The existence of paranoia in the field of paranormal and fringe science has been vastly under-rated and often overlooked. To the uneducated, paranoia is often mistaken for science.

They are not the same.

Both science and paranoia have played a major part in the development of man. The reign of terror implemented by Adolph Hitler and the rampant paranoia created by McCarthy are two outstanding examples. Recent happenings, such as the Jim Jones massacre and the David Koresh tragedy show clearly that a charismatic person with a highly intact delusional system can exert a tremendous influence over people. Researchers in the paranormal and UFO community are not immune to this influence, and should tread with great caution when listening to the reports of people who claim

to have had extraordinary experiences.

the presentation

Paranoia is not research, it is not science, it is a malfunction of the ability to reason. The difficulty we face when dealing with the paranoid person and his data is that, unlike the true psychotic, whose delusions ramble incoherently and sound crazy, the true intellectual paranoid tells a story that **makes sense**.

When lay people think of the word paranoid, they think of a crazy person. When paranoia becomes severe, it is clear to all that the person is ill. But the problems of the paranoid are not always readily apparent. In fact, it's often difficult to tell the difference between a paranoid and a dedicated researcher. A paranoid can have a very stable, systematized, tight delusional system.

A high functioning paranoid is not insane in the legal sense of the word, or crazy in the lay sense of the word. There may be no outward signs of paranoia. A good paranoid, even though he has an internal delusional system, may still be able to collect data in a very succinct manner and perform experiments with great skill. He may even be aided by the fact that he's withdrawn from social contact, which gives him a lot more time to collect data to validate his theory.

Like the scientist, the paranoid's belief system is developed logically. The beliefs are well systematized and carefully thought out. The emotional response to the delusions appears appropriate for the material. Because of this, it's easy to get pulled into the delusional system. You find yourself accepting some of the premises that the paranoid posits. His meticulous notes, voluminous documentation, and objectively verifiable bits of evidence, weave themselves into a coherent picture of altered reality.

What is missing is the capacity to entertain alternate explanations for the phenomena, and the rejection of the obvious. Although other explanations may be more cogent and more logical, suggesting these to the paranoid results in their including you in the conspiratorial process, and flying into a rage of indignance.

Scientist Daniel Goleman has said of the paranoid,

"He looks so keenly that he does not quite see; he hears so astutely that he fails to listen. In other words, his deficit is not in his attentional powers, which are often brilliantly attuned. His attention is off because it is guided by lack of interest in the obvious. The surface of things for him is far from the truth of the matter; he seeks to piece through plain facts to the hidden reality. He listens and looks not to gather what is apparent, but what it *signifies*."

emotion

The most fundamental difference between science and paranoia is that *scientific research has always been based on curiosity, while paranoia has always been based on fear*. To be curious about something means that you invest time and energy exploring it, and being fascinated by the discovery of new knowledge. Research is fun.

To the paranoid, research is not fun; it's a life or death endeavor based on suspicion, anger, and self righteous indignation. Unlike the scientist who is fascinated by his discoveries, the paranoid *fears* his discoveries. The more time the scientist spends on his research, the more fascinated and excited he becomes. The more time the paranoid spends on his discoveries, the angrier and more frightened he becomes. As he gathers data about the conspiracy that surrounds him, he anticipates a terrible fate. The paranoid is not trying to gain knowledge. His energy is focused on gathering enough data to protect himself, and to exact revenge against his imagined persecutors.

the obsession

The scientist and the paranoid both do research, and both explore unusual phenomena. But the similarity stops there. The scientist has a genuine interest in what he or she is investigating. She spends many hours reading, researching,

making observations, and gathering data. However, the scientist is able to put her research aside and become absorbed in other things in life, such as family, hobbies, and other interests.

But unlike the scientist, the paranoid's endeavor is the central focus of his life. The paranoid's focus is not an interest, but an obsession. Every waking moment is consumed with collecting data to verify his theory. All other parts of the paranoid's life are secondary to this.

Paranoid people keep volumes of meticulously recorded notes. Last year I treated a young man who believed that the airport was sending planes over his house to observe him. He arrived for his first session with several thousand pages of notes, written in small, cramped letters. He spent hours each day documenting every one of his observations and conversations. He told me that he recorded his thoughts every time he smoked a cigarette, because he believed the inhaled tobacco contained molecules that implanted messages in his brain. At the end of the day, each bit of data was carefully studied to determine how it fit into his theory.

the theory

Although a good researcher and a good paranoid both collect meticulous notes and observations, they approach the task differently. When a true researcher gathers data, he has no preconceived bias, no investment, and no agenda regarding the data. He is merely gathering information. At some point and time, when enough information is gathered, he forms a hypothesis. If data accumulates that doesn't fit the hypothesis, the researcher either discards the hypothesis or reformulates it to fit the new observations.

Unlike the true objective researcher, who has no emotional investment in his theory *per se*, to the paranoid the theory is everything. The paranoid begins to weave the theory *before the data is collected*. Once the theory is in place, it's considered true. From that point, all data that can be assimilated into the theory becomes part of the theory, and all data that doesn't fit the theory is rejected as invalid.

The belief system of the paranoid is unshakable. In 1987, I was treating a man who believed that everyone in his company was trying to kill him by painting his tools with an invisible poison. When his family members tried to show him that this wasn't true by actually licking the tools, he decided that the poison must be genetically engineered to affect only him.

Any data that contradicts the paranoid's theory is rejected with vehemence and anger. A truly paranoid individual displays suspiciousness and hypersensitivity to any criticism, and has a hostile, arrogant attitude towards anyone who disagrees with his interpretation of the data. It's important here for researchers to remember that the *amount of emotional investment that one has in a theory does not correlate with its reality*.

the goal

While the primary goal of the researcher is **discovery**, the primary goal of the paranoid is **validation**. That is, while the researcher is looking to add to the storehouse of human knowledge, the paranoid is looking to be **believed**. In fact, for many paranoids, *the central focus of the paranoid's life is to be believed*.

If a researcher can be convinced that his data can be explained by another method, he becomes more curious and starts to examine his assumptions. When another scientist disagrees with him, he sees it as a source of stimulation and an opportunity to learn. In fact, the basic philosophy of science is to present your findings to your peers, so that they may evaluate and criticize them. This is how knowledge is gained.

If the paranoid is faced with data that doesn't fit his theory, he becomes indignant and angry. Anyone who disagrees with him is the enemy. They are the co-conspirators who are out to discredit or invalidate him. In fact, at some point many paranoids abandon research completely and spend all of their time attacking people who disagree with them. Last year I worked with a lady who insisted that her case was so spectacular that we should make a movie of it. When I declined her offer, she flew into a rage and left my office. For the next two years I got angry, threatening letters from

her.

the symptoms

The characteristics of paranoia are:

1. delusions
2. suspiciousness
3. projective thinking
4. hostility
5. centrality
6. fear of loss of freedom
7. grandiosity
8. time telescoping
9. hypochondria

Delusions. Simply put, paranoids believe something that isn't true. The primary symptom of the paranoid is delusional thinking. The delusions are centered around ideas of persecution and grandiosity. Every paranoid believes that they possess some special quality or have some vitally important information that is the center of interest of some conspiratorial group. Once this delusion is in place, the paranoid spends most of his time gathering evidence to verify it.

Paranoids sometimes incorporate friends and relatives into their delusional system. This is called *shared paranoia*. The term used to describe two people who share a delusional system is *folie à deux*. When an entire family shares the delusion the term used is *folie à famille*. When a larger group is involved, the term used is *folie collective*.

This kind of shared delusional system increases the paranoid's feelings of grandiosity. This is often seen in religious cults. In a cult, the delusional system of the paranoid is accepted by those around him, and becomes self-verifying. As the grandiosity increases, the paranoid convinces the cult members that anyone outside of the cult is the enemy. Soon, the only way to escape the danger is suicide.

Suspiciousness. It is the inability to trust that is the root cause of most paranoia. Epidemiological research on paranoids shows that the majority lack the ability to form the basic bond of trust. Studies reveal that most of them have a history of being physically beaten, many had mentally ill or erratic parents. The fathers of paranoids are distant, rigid and sadistic or weak and ineffective, while the mothers are seductive, over-controlling and rejecting. The soothing voices of parenthood were absent, and the bond of trust was never formed.

Because of this, paranoids suffer a feeling of deep inadequacy. They fear interpersonal and social interaction. These feelings cause them to have a difficult time with intimacy. A true paranoid may even find social intimacies such as shaking hands uncomfortable.

A significant portion of paranoid people have no sexual contact at all. Sex is seen as much too intimate. Adolph Hitler, one of the most famous paranoids in history, was reported to have a deep fear of sexual intercourse. I find it interesting that many people reporting anomalous experiences have sexual problems.

Suspiciousness leads the paranoid to guard his discoveries. Unlike the true researcher, who is willing and eager to share his discoveries with the scientific community, the paranoid keeps his findings secret. While he may share some of his information, certain things cannot be revealed, because they come from secret sources. This is one way to spot paranoid thinking. *True science is based on disclosure, while paranoia is based on secretiveness.*

No matter how hard you try to befriend a paranoid, sooner or later you will be accused of an injustice. Once this happens, you are labeled as an enemy and become part of the conspiracy. For this reason, paranoids have few long term friends.

Projective thinking. Projective thinking is the psychological process of making internal

events external. *The basic problem that the paranoid has is misinterpreting internal anxiety as external harassment.* When the frustrations of everyday life exceed the limit that he can tolerate, the paranoid withdraws from social activity and looks for an external explanation for his problems. The focus is always on the outside world.

Projection protects the paranoid from his anxiety. By projecting the internal turmoil into the world, he absolves himself from responsibility. All of his problems are caused by others. He is disturbed because he is being followed; being watched.

A good example of this is the paranoid's interpretation that every noise on a phone line is evidence that the phone is tapped. It is possible that the government is tapping phones or looking at the mail of people involved in paranormal and UFO research. I just can't figure out what it is that they could possibly be looking for. Personally, I possess a great deal of information about abduction experiences, UFO sightings, contactees, and anomalous phenomena. I would be glad to share this information with anyone at anytime. You don't have to tap my phone or open my mail to get it. Research data is public knowledge.

While I was attending the MUFON conference in Richmond, a young man came up to me and said, "You know, there are CIA operatives all over this place. They really want to know what we know."

This kind of statement demonstrates the fundamental flaw found in the paranoid thinking process. To be spied on requires that you are hiding something of value. Presenting information at a conference open to the public is not a good way to hide something. What is actually being hidden is the paranoid's inability to deal with his own anxiety.

Hostility. The paranoid's impetus for research is the belief that they have been wronged by someone. The paranoid is always looking for enemies. They tend to be over-focused and very intense, while trying to ferret out any perceived danger in the environment. They soon begin to see malicious intent in trivial and unrelated actions by people around them. Nothing is taken at face value. It's the hidden meaning and interpretation that's important. Everyone is a potential enemy.

Paranoids often spend hours writing hate letters to their perceived enemies. They may spend considerable time filing law suits about supposed injustices that their enemies have committed. Sadly, some paranoids can become truly dangerous. It is not unusual for a paranoid to be obsessed with weapons. Some of them have extensive gun collections. Many paranoids are also obsessed with technology, and have an extensive knowledge of surveillance equipment.

Centrality. Every paranoid eventually comes to feel that they are the center of attention of some large group. This belief in being the center of attention is a perfect defense against the paranoid's inner sense of unimportance. He alone has been singled out because of his special talents and abilities.

Paranoids create an imaginary community, populated by people who focus only on them. Researchers of paranoia call this imaginary group the *paranoid pseudocommunity*.

The paranoid believes that the people in the pseudocommunity have organized a complex conspiracy which is designed to plague him. In her later years, Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, believed that fifty thousand people were trying to kill her by projecting evil thoughts. As the disorder progresses, the conspiracy may include both real and imagined persons, and may include extra-terrestrial and paranormal beings. Paranoids in the United States tend to use the CIA, the government, communists, or aliens as their pseudocommunity.

The internal pseudocommunity serves two purposes. First, it gives the paranoid an external explanation for the anxiety that he is feeling (although this anxiety is actually internally generated). He will claim that anyone would be anxious if they were placed under this unrelenting scrutiny. Second, the delusion becomes encapsulated and internalized, so that social interactions can be maintained with people outside the pseudocommunity. The delusional belief system and the imaginary community become a container for the anguish and anxiety that he feels. When this container is closed, it allows the paranoid to function in the real world. The delusional system becomes a deeply buried secret. Many paranoids spend years without divulging their secret beliefs to anyone.

In the early stages of paranoia, the paranoid may merely be suspicious, self-righteousness, angry, and indignant. He may feel that he is persecuted by only a few individuals. But as the disease progresses, the power of the pseudocommunity grows. Eventually, the lid comes off of the container. Soon he begins to find hidden meaning in every conversation. Strangers on the street are talking about him. Newspaper stories, radio, and television programs contain hidden messages directed at him. These delusions are called *ideas of reference*. At this point he begins to go public with his delusion, in hope that he will find allies in fighting the conspirators.

Finally, he may deteriorate into true psychosis. At this point, he may experience visual and auditory hallucinations. He may hear voices that compel him to do things. These are called *command hallucinations*. He may even hear voices coming from inanimate objects like air conditioners, car engines, and showers. Psychologists call these *functional hallucinations*. At this point the paranoid may become dangerous. Many of the mass murders reported in the news recently have been committed by paranoids.

Fear of loss of freedom. Because the paranoid is worried about **loss of freedom**, he is constantly on guard. Every thought and movement is designed to avoid detection. Even his facial expressions are carefully pre-planned and controlled. There is no spontaneity in the paranoid, and warm feelings and empathy are severely constricted. This truly is loss of freedom.

Paranoids project their fear of loss of freedom onto the world. They spend a great deal of their time trying to convince others that they too are soon to be taken over by some inimical force. Whether it's the government, a secret society, or an alien race, the problem is always the same. We are all soon to become slaves to our persecutors. This theme is so common that it has become part of our culture. Many science fiction movies are based on this idea.

Grandiosity. To protect himself from the feelings of being helpless and powerless to stop his life from being monitored, the paranoid develops an inner core of grandiosity. A true paranoid is convinced that he has been singled out by his persecutors because he has some special significance. This feeling of importance is known as a *paranoid illumination*. As the disorder progresses, he often comes to believe that he has a vitally important message to bring to mankind. Many paranoids eventually become convinced that they are a new messiah. There is always some startling truth that will be revealed at any moment. We have been waiting for that moment for several thousand years.

Time telescoping. Researchers have noticed that the paranoid uses time differently than a normal person. Paranoids claim to have excellent memories for detail, and they do. But the material is remembered out of sequence.

This sequencing problem is called *paranoid connectivity*. It stems from a defect in the paranoid's ability to distinguish past, present, and future. The paranoid's memory is like a video editing machine gone mad. Unrelated events become connected in improper temporal order. Instead of information being stored as it actually occurred, the paranoid stores data in an "everything now" holding bin, and puts the memories in his own sequence later. A paragraph he read on Tuesday gets spliced in *after* a conversation that occurred on Thursday. What the grocer said at the check-out stand today neatly dovetails with a television news story that occurs a week later. In the jumbled mind of the paranoid, imagination, dreams, and actual occurrences run together. It is a short leap from REM to reminiscence. In this way, a conglomeration of disconnected events is experienced as a seamless series of related incidents. It is this sense of uncanny coincidence that weaves itself into the fabric of conspiracy. Theodore Millon, a prominent scientist who studies personality, states,

"Little difference exists in their minds between what they have seen and what they have thought. Momentary impressions and hazy memories become fact. Chains of unconnected facts are fitted together. An inexorable course from imagination to supposition to suspicion takes place, and soon a system of invalid and unshakable belief has been created."

Hypochondria. Over half a century ago, Freud wrote about the intimate relationship of paranoia to hypochondria. Hypochondria is the irrational fear of having a deadly disease. Paranoids become over-focused on bodily sensations and symptoms. To the paranoid, every ache and pain becomes evidence of a deadly illness. Every scratch, scar, and bruise is interpreted as evidence that their body has been tampered with. Ronald Siegal, in his excellent book, *Whispers*, tells of a woman who is convinced that her dentist has implanted small radio transmitters in her fillings. Chess player Bobby Fischer had all of his fillings removed before an important match because he believed that the fillings contained

electronic devices.

Paranoids often have extensive medical histories. They may have dozens of diagnostic tests done, and then develop contempt for the doctors who find nothing amiss. They run from doctor to doctor, never satisfied with the results.

the importance

Researchers of unusual phenomena complain that traditional scientists reject their work. Most mainstream scientists avoid the field of the anomalous, saying that they don't want to be linked to the "lunatic fringe."

The realms of the paranormal and unusual have always attracted the open minded and curious. Unfortunately, these realms have also attracted the mentally unbalanced. People who have difficulty telling reality from fantasy are prone to believe the unbelievable. Research in borderland sciences would fare better if those involved became better able to recognize the unbalanced people that are attracted to this field.

Why do the fields of UFO studies and borderland sciences attract paranoids? The idea of extra-terrestrials and super normal beings watching us is the breeding ground for paranoia. The invasion of an omnipotent alien race is the ultimate conspiracy. Superior beings can watch you at all times, whisk you away at will, and wipe out your memory for the event. No one can prove that these things are not actually happening.

Also, it's here that paranoids find a forum to express their delusions. Those interested in unusual phenomena are by nature predisposed to believe the unbelievable. In their zeal, they sometimes suspend critical thinking. These people are willing to listen to paranoids.

Some paranoids in this field have developed a huge following. This bolsters the paranoid's feelings of self righteousness, and perpetuates their delusions. Attendants at UFO conferences generally have little or no training in science or psychiatry. Curious, enthusiastic, and gullible, they are willing to believe anything they hear. They become devoted participants in the delusional system. When research becomes religion, its practitioners indeed become members of the lunatic fringe.

It's vital for the adept and educated researcher to understand the paranoid thinking process, the paranoid personality, what a delusional system is, and how delusions can be transferred from one person to another.

One of the difficulties that many investigators have when exploring stories and experiences from people is *they underestimate an individual's capacity for paranoid and delusional thinking*. The reality is that most of us, to some degree, have some delusions about reality that we very seldom discuss with others. As a psychologist, I have hundreds of people tell me their own private, internal lives, which sometimes include elaborate delusional systems. Outwardly the person appears normal.

The difficulty then is sorting out what is real and what is delusional. Unfortunately, when it comes to talking about unidentified flying objects, aliens, abductions and government conspiracies, we have entered into the realm of **unverifiable hypotheses**. Because all we have as data are eyewitness reports, these things can never be verified or disproved.

It remains for the researcher to wonder whether what he is hearing is a story of an actual experience, or the result of a delusional system. How do you tell what's what? It can never be discounted that someone who is actually being picked up, subjected to abduction experiences and harassed by the government, would not have the same symptoms.

Based on the material that I've shown you, you can see that **indignance, grandiosity, suspicion, and most of all, the steadfast unwillingness to look at alternate explanations**, are indicators of paranoia.

Of course, not every person who is convinced of the reality of UFO's and paranormal phenomena is paranoid. On the contrary, I've spoken with many people that appear to be very much psychologically and emotionally intact. But to be a responsible investigator, one must be able to recognize this syndrome when it exists.

...the ongoing debate about memory is concealing a more fundamental problem: the emergence of conspiracy theory as the nucleus of a consistent pattern of clinical interpretation. Conspiratory mentalities are concrete, potentially lethal social processes which are constructed around a limited repertory of stories (**Mulhern, 1994**).

...mind control spinoffs are clearly a reworkings of an archaic, pre-christian cluster of ideas which link secret organizations with nocturnal rituals, sexual depravity, and human sacrifice (**Mulhern, 1994, p269**).

PARANOIA

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