

## PARANOID PERSONALITY DISORDER

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**podcast link:**

<https://anchor.fm/boscom/episodes/2-43-Psyche--Soul--93-evibtj>

Hello, this is Jose Parappully, Salesian priest and clinical psychologist at Sumedha Centre for Psychospiritual Wellbeing at Jeolikote, Uttarakhand, with another edition of Psyche & Soul.

In this weekends' podcast I shall focus on four salient features of the Paranoid Personality Disorder, namely inordinate suspicion, intrapsychic dynamics, interpersonal relationships, self-defeating work patterns, and present some of the root causes that lead to the disorder, as well as treatment approaches.

Ronald is a midlevel manager at a firm. Though very competent at his job, his colleagues and subordinates find him very guarded reserved. He communicates very little with them and shares little information about himself. He often accuses them of trying to scuttle his promotion possibilities. He feels they are jealous of him. When anyone at office points out any failure on his part, he holds them responsible for those failures and makes counteraccusations. Moreover, His tactlessness and attitudes of superiority, arrogance , and grandiosity antagonize people around him.

He is suspicious of his neighbours and frequently keeps a watch on them and keeps a distance from them. He suspects his wife of infidelity and accuses her of not loving him but other men. He does not like her socializing with any one. When he returns home from any trip outside, he sniffs the air to pick up any trace of men's perfumes and scrutinizes the room for telltale signs of presence of men in the house....

Ronald's brief profile shows him as suffering from paranoid personality disorder.

### DYNAMICS AND CHARACTERISTICS

#### Suspicion

Inordinate suspicion is the most distinctive feature of the paranoid personality disorder. Those who suffer from it are unwarrantedly skeptical, cynical, and mistrusting of the motives of others. They look for hidden meanings and motives in others' behaviour. They tend to interpret even innocuous incidents as signifying hidden or conspiratorial intent. This they do especially with those who do not appreciate them or criticise them

They search for hidden meaning in completely benign matters, and magnify minor difficulties into proofs of duplicity or treachery, especially regarding the fidelity of a spouse or intimate friend. When events fail to confirm their suspicions they are convinced that this is because the others are really clever at being deceitful. It is hard for anyone to change their beliefs.

One positive feature in the paranoid person is that society can benefit from their keen sense of justice and fair play. Psychiatrist John Oldham observes that their suspicious nature leads them to “take on the role of social critic, watchdog, ombudsman and crusader in their private or our public domain.” “They can be champions of the underdog, protectors of the downtrodden, fighters for freedom from oppression...”

### **Intra-Psychic Dynamics**

Lack of self-worth which they camouflage through a bold front makes it very difficult for them to accept their faults and weaknesses. They strive to maintain their self-esteem by attributing their shortcomings to others. Unable to face their feelings of inadequacy and insignificance, they may begin to fabricate an image of superior self-worth.

It is very difficult for them to accept failure or acknowledge a mistake. When they are found to be in error, they blame others for their ineptness. When they become aggressive it is only because others have provoked them.

Projection plays a big part in paranoid personality disorder. Those who suffer from it project their own unwelcome impulses on to other people. Thus the man who suspects his wife of infidelity could very well be projecting on to her his own desire for an affair with another woman.

They use denial to avoid painful aspects of reality. They are also consumed by anger, envy and hostility. Unable to face these, they project them on to others. Since they deny these impulses in themselves they are often unaware of the impact of their behaviour on others. Paranoid persons first attempt to cope with painful feelings and unacceptable impulses through repression. When repression fails, they use denial, reaction formation, and projection as ways to cope.

### **Interpersonal Relationships**

Interpersonally they tend to be provocative in their transactions with others, precipitating exasperation and anger in others by testing their loyalty and by intrusive and searching preoccupations with possible hidden motives. If they are caught up in any kind of power play, they will try every method to vanquish the other. They are tenaciously and firmly resistant to external influence and control.

They are quick to take personal offense interpreting every slight as a personal rejection and exhibit an abrasive irritability. They react angrily at the slightest offense, imagined or real.

They tend to be very careful in their dealings with others, preferring to keep safe distance emotionally. They seldom reveal their feelings to anyone, including their spouse. Their belief is everyone is out to take advantage of them, and so they remain very wary of people who want to get close to them. This leads them to repress their tender and affectionate feelings which makes intimacy a real challenge.

They fear they will be treated unfairly and taken advantage of. They view as unreliable and untrustworthy, and therefore are reserved, guarded and even secretive in their dealings with them.

However, when relationships are non-threatening, devoid of control issues and fear of domination, they thrive on them, counting on each other's loyalty. When these relationships begins to sour, they take it as a personal betrayal and feel very hurt, but know how to take care of themselves.

### **Workplace Dynamics**

They are very independent and seldom take counsel from others in their decision-making. This is a result of their suspicion and lack of trust in others.

Their sensory antennae are constantly scanning the persons and situations around to what is out of place or dangerous. They are especially sensitive to subtlest evasions truth and have an uncanny sense of detecting hidden motivations.

They protect their autonomy and independence with zeal, never allowing anyone to dominate them. They are very sensitive to the power structures in the organization, distrustful of authority, and wary of losing their control. They don't allow themselves to be hoodwinked by anyone. They make sure they are not dominated by anyone.

They are observant and careful, focused on what they do and on what they want to achieve and work hard at success. This coupled with their uncanny ability to read situations can maneuver them through the organizational maze and can turn them into charismatic leaders. However, their abrasiveness and mistrust can undermine their leadership potential.

### **Origins of the Disorder**

From a psychodynamic perspective, the paranoid person has had difficulty in establishing a warm and trusting relationship with his mother, who often was over-controlling and seductive. The feeling of rejection leads to difficulties in developing healthy sense of self, feelings of unworthiness alternating with feelings of grandiose omnipotence. It also leads to fear of intimacy and avoidance of close relationships.

MacKinnon and Michels report it is common for the paranoid persons to believe that they were treated sadistically in early childhood, with repeated experiences of shame and humiliation. Their guardedness and reserve in relationships are due not only due to fear of being taken advantage of, but also to avoid any humiliation. They have an intense longing to be loved and an equally

intense fear of betrayal. “The paranoid person believes that he is not loved, has not been loved, and never will be loved.”

### **Treatment**

Psychotherapy can help those who suffer from paranoid personality disorder to feel better about themselves, and reduce their guardedness in interpersonal relationships by enhancing their sense of self and feelings of security.

Since their guardedness arises also from fear of being taken advantage of, those around them can be extra sensitive in treating them with respect and empathy. It is also important not to get into power struggles with them or take an intimidating stance toward them. This can help them develop trust in those around which helps them reduce their guardedness and cultivate satisfying relationships.

### **Introspection and Prayer**

Can you recognize the traits of the paranoid personality in yourself or in those around you? How do the presence of these traits in you or in those around you affect your relationships and dealings with one another?

Sacred Scripture has examples of paranoid personalities. The most famous of these is King Herod the Great. He was insecure that he felt threatened by news of the birth of an infant who he feared might usurp his throne. His insecurity led him to kill all the boys below two years in Palestine. Do you recognize any contemporary figures similar to Herod?

You could stay a while in the presence of God with all that this story and the characteristics of the paranoid personality presented here. God knows your insecurities and fears and the ways you try to cope with them. What would you like to tell this God today?

Have a healthy, safe and blessed weekend.

Thank you for listening/reading

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