

PSYCHOLOGY REVIVALS

Borderline

**A psychological study
of paranoia and
delusional thinking**

Peter Chadwick



Borderline

Originally published in 1992, *Borderline* presents a unique study of the disturbed mind. Professional psychologist Peter Chadwick draws upon his own personal experience of madness to provide a valuable exploration of the psychology of paranoia and schizophrenia.

The book goes beyond a narrowly focused analytical approach to examine schizophrenia from as many perspectives as possible. Using participant observation, introspection, case study and experimental methods, Chadwick shows how paranoid and delusional thinking are only exaggerations of processes to be found in normal cognition. Impressed by the similarities between the thinking of mystics and psychotics, he argues that some forms of madness are closely related to profound mystical experience and intuition, but that these are expressed in a distorted form in the psychotic mind. He explores the many positive characteristics and capabilities of paranoid patients, providing a sympathetic account which balances the heavily negative constructions usually put on paranoia in the research literature.

Borderline provides many novel insights into madness and raises important questions as to how psychosis and psychotics are to be evaluated. It will be essential reading for all practising professionals and students in clinical psychology and psychiatry, and for everyone involved in the treatment, understanding and management of schizophrenia.

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A psychological study of paranoia
and delusional thinking

Peter K. Chadwick

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(Ancient Chinese Fable)

Buying a pair of shoes

A man in the state of Cheng decided to buy some new shoes. He measured his feet but left the measure on his seat, and went to the market without it. There he found a shoemaker.

‘Why, I forgot to bring the measurement!’ he cried. He hurried home to fetch it.

By the time he got back to the market, the fair was over, so he failed to buy his shoes.

‘Why didn’t you try the shoes on?’ asked one of his neighbours.

‘I trust the ruler more’ was his reply.

Hon Fei Tzu
(*circa* 250 B.C.)

*This book is dedicated to
Carl Jung and Wolfgang Pauli
who probed and probed to glimpse The Borderline.*

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PREFACE

In their attempts to understand schizophrenia, psychiatrists and clinical psychologists are rather like impotent men writing about the joys of sexual intercourse using verbal reports and physiological recordings as their data. Distanced from the phenomenon, their reports often seem contrived and alien. The research presented in this book differs from this state of affairs because I personally have experienced borderline psychotic, and at times even outright psychotic, functioning but returned to tell the tale. It is possible, given my highly relevant research interests at the time, that I unconsciously engineered my own crisis (described in Chapter 4) so as to be able to write about it later – as Strindberg apparently used to do (Storr 1972: 209–10; Sprinchorn 1968); however if I did this (which I very much doubt) I in no way found what I expected. The edges of sanity and the territory beyond it turned out to be of a character quite beyond my wildest dreams or nightmares.

This research has, therefore, been very much a therapeutic exercise for me. I have used an approach also advocated by Frankl (1959, 1963) to the management of and recovery from extreme crises: I have tried to see meaning in it and tried to relate it to my spiritual life. This book is partly the result of that effort.

To begin: I shall preface the body of this work by comments first on its form and then on its content.

The book is perhaps rather strange. This is because I am, in the spirit of Stack-Sullivanian participant observation and observant participation, exploring a strange realm: the mystical and psychotic mind. I seek to claim epistemological validity for mystical, and for islands of the psychotic experience, to show their parallels and interrelationships and to suggest how these states are achieved or suffered. In doing so I am not only writing *about* them, in a scientific spirit, but am relating experiences within them, including my own. Hence we have not only knowledge by description of these domains but knowledge by acquaintance.

I shall adopt a ‘funnel approach’ in the presentation of this research. At the beginning the very broad molar speculations which led to the

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investigation are reported, and the style is very general and light. As the text continues the inferences and predictions gradually become more detailed and fine-grained and the text more intense; therefore, Chapters 1 to 9 deal with the hunches derived largely from case studies and my previous research while, in the experimental study (Chapters 10 and 11), very specific issues are focused upon experimentally as the impressions presented earlier are gradually hewn into an experimentally testable shape. There are, however, differences between the two parts: in Chapters 1 to 9 I am largely dealing with the 'why' of delusional thinking; in Chapters 10 and 11 with the 'how'.

Throughout the book I shall attempt to relate real life behaviours to experimental and psychometric measures to bring the psychotic's identity alive. The essence and character of the psychotic subject is so easily lost or obscured in the, usually, rather dry pages of the experimental psychopathology literature – a fact which cannot help researchers and practitioners in this field to relate their conceptual knowledge to the flesh-and-blood people they deal with daily. In this book I hope the discrepancy between the representation of the subject in the literature and the reality of the actual person in everyday life will be reduced.

The book is perhaps more personally and 'warmly' written than would traditionally be expected in an academic work, because I have deliberately shunned the 'author's formula' of presenting research in a very terse, obscure and cold manner – a manner often used as a means of enhancing its apparent scientific respectability. Although I have sometimes written in this manner prior to about 1980 – as the readers will see from my 1979 diary quotes in Chapter 4 – I eventually decided: no more. There is, I feel, too much 'alienation from self' (Federn), 'lack of actuality' (Husserl) and 'loss of the sense of the real' (Pierre Janet) in social science writing and this can surely be of no real value to the endeavour. This book is therefore designed for easy reading. I hope the readers approve of this and that it enhances their enjoyment and understanding.

As a final comment on the form of this work (although it has content relevance), it is necessary to emphasize that I have tried to keep my inferences as close to the empirical evidence as is reasonable, given the nature of the phenomena under study. These remarks are very relevant if the readers wish to understand the general tone or flavour of my attitude to much (if not all) psychoanalytic thinking in this book. In my own on-going self-analysis, which began in 1967/68, I often used psychoanalytic concepts and methods (despite the fact that in my official psychological research my approach was experimental and cognitive). Over the last twenty years of experience with the psychodynamic approach I became sensitive to what I now call, rather jaundicedly, 'the psychoanalytic con'. This is the implicit communication to the effect that if one does not accept or seek seemingly deep and far-fetched interpretations one is vulnerable to a charge of shallowness and superficiality, perhaps even timidity, in one's thinking.

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This many intelligent thinking men and women cannot bear, and thus they accept and revere ostensibly more 'profound' interpretations to avoid the charge. In my research for this book I therefore have deliberately tempted my potential accusers. Having indulged in psychodynamic acrobatics and convolutions to a considerable extent over the years I eventually became disillusioned with the parochialism, the low predictive validity and the massive imbalance that usually obtained when interpretations were weighed against actual evidence. Therefore, in the case study reports my interpretations are well constrained and deliberately do not reach to 'depths' which, although easy to reach, would go far beyond the information given.

The content of the book is heavily influenced by the ideas of Hermann Lenz (on mysticism, 'supersanity' and delusion), Hans Eysenck (on arousal and psychoticism), Gordon Claridge (on arousal, psychosis and creativity), Wolfgang Pauli (on physics and psychology) and Colin Martindale (on arousal and creativity), all of whose work provided the foundations on which I tried to build. Apart from acknowledging the importance of genetic influences and physiological and neurochemical processes in schizophrenia I also present an understanding at the cognitive and social psychological level. I raise, for example, a social psychological perspective on delusional thinking in the form of 'social class programming' (Chapter 2). This enables us to see the context within which the personality and the form of the crisis of a paranoid schizophrenic developed. It also reveals an additional approach to the understanding of personality, so necessary according to Brody (1972), to that provided by Eysenckian arousal levels (Eysenck 1967) or Grayian reward-punishment sensitivities (Gray 1970, 1972, 1973) which attach personality dimensions to a biological substrate but which are less productive of predictions of social behaviours.

The endeavour to relate the mystical and the psychotic is, of course, not entirely original. Previous writers (Laing 1969; Lenz 1979) have emphasized that psychotics are not denied the transcendent experiences, during their crises, that are also experienced by normal people. In this respect, the most original material on this issue here is in Chapter 9 where I describe in some detail the parallels and the differences between mystical and psychotic thought. The theme is also more dominant and is developed to a greater degree in this book than in previous research.

It is well known that low social class and schizophrenia are linked and that life changes can precipitate psychotic states, but there is no consensus on just how (Davison and Neale 1986). Chapter 5, therefore, contains a reasonably fine-grained description of one special case: the specific stresses one encounters when moving from a middle-class intellectual environment to a working-class non-intellectual one and the kinds of confusions and invalidations to which this can lead.

Contrary to much previous research, I attempt to present the psychotic in as positive a light as I think fair and reasonable. Although this long

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seemed to me a possibility, I was struck by a particular incident in 1980 which made me feel that it was all the more important. I was talking to a previously psychotic black man of little education about my own battles with my previous research. In this I had become disillusioned to the point of distraction with the possibility of creating real practical suggestions to facilitate observation and theory building in science. My disillusionment was due to me using analytical experimental methods which only revealed biases and illusions on a very small scale and in tasks which were totally out of context. Far from this leaving him speechless, he immediately retorted with brilliant analogies: 'You're trying to climb rain Peter, or sweep sun off the pavement.' My previous predicament could not have been better put – and this was from a man who once firmly believed that he had been communicating with 'the water people', by whom he meant people who lived under the sea.

In addition to emphasizing and assessing the talents and limitations of the psychotic I shall present the psychotic experience not only as an experience which reveals an inner self or an inner realm thus to be assimilated and 'worked through' in the interests of personal growth, but a partly external realm beyond the personal and private which the mind in the psychotic state may have accessed.

In seeking the positive side of the psychotic and the psychotic experience I am, however, sometimes seeking a rather weak signal buried in noise. In order to achieve this aim I have had to adopt a risky criterion in signal detection terms with the consequent risk of making false alarms. Time and future research will, I predict, sift this material yet reveal genuine nuggets of lasting value.

It has not been my purpose in writing this book to present a preliminary textbook on paranoia and delusional thinking. My approach and the content of this work is therefore not as systematic or as descriptive as such an enterprise would require. My emphasis is on ideas and processes rather than on description and diagnostic categories. I am also examining delusional thinking, in the first instance, as a Unity rather than as subclassified into so-called 'primary' or 'out of the blue' delusions and 'secondary' delusions which traditionally (but, except in the very simple cases of partial deafness, I think wrongly) are taken to be post hoc explanations by the patient of prior perceptual or attentional disturbances. I believe the label 'primary' to be a confession of ignorance as to the patient's prior history and state at the time of delusion crystallization. Students of psychiatry are well versed in examples repeated ad nauseam in standard texts where, after salt cellars or biscuits are whizzed across café tables, so-called 'primary delusions' of spectacular form suddenly 'appear' in the person's mind 'explaining' his or her whole life and/or future mission or fate. I very much doubt that these oft-repeated examples really accurately describe what actually was going on in these cases in all its richness; delusional thinking is just not like that. The

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fact that the mathematician Poincaré may have had a brilliant idea while putting his foot on the steps of an omnibus in no way justifies our calling this a 'primary creative act' as if it were somehow qualitatively different from all other creative acts. The distinction between primary and secondary delusions is, I believe, of no theoretical or practical relevance and will not be discussed further.

The paranoid/non-paranoid distinction, however, is (at least judging from previous research) much more significant and serious and in the experimental phase of the enquiry will be used to try to uncover genuine causal differences. Alas, there were far too few volunteers for the case studies for me to delve into this distinction in any detail or with any degree of confidence there – although, of course, it was ever present in my mind.

In summary: in Chapters 1 to 9 I examine the history, phenomenology, kinematics and dynamics of delusional thinking using a case study approach, while in Chapter 10 I use experimental and psychometric methods to try to prise out some of the mechanisms and processes that might predispose a person to develop delusional thoughts. The earlier material – as well as striving for a coherent picture, in its own terms, of delusional thinking – also is the soil out of which the hypotheses for the experimental enquiry grew. It uses a family-resemblance-seeking and top-down approach. In Chapters 10 and 11 the hypotheses are tested, the results evaluated and generalizations are sought within a basically bottom-up approach.

I should like, finally, to express my appreciation to Dr John Wilding for his advice and encouragement and also for his patience during this long study (which began as a second doctorate thesis) and to Professor Brian Foss for his faith at the outset that the angle at which I was coming at this topic was likely to be a profitable one. I have also benefited immensely from the reactions of the many students whom I have taught personality and abnormal psychology, at various levels, over the last eight years. I am grateful for valuable conversations on this topic with Dr Gordon Claridge, Professor Norman Dixon, Rev. Richard Harries, Rev. John Johnson, Professor Roger Drake, Dr Mary Pickersgill, Rosalind Phillips, Dr Robert West, Dennis Shutte and my wife, Jill Chadwick. Professor Hermann Lenz of the University of Vienna kindly read Chapters 1 to 9 and Professor Brian Josephson FRS of the Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge, also read large tracts. Both made many valuable suggestions for which I am indebted.

I shall also be eternally grateful to Sylvia Greenwood for typing this work and for many discussions on its contents.

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*P. K. Chadwick
London*

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INTRODUCTION

Thinking in science, sex and madness

FROM ROCKS TO PSYCHOTICS

Psychology is my second career, but my interest in it has – via a long and winding path – in part developed from my first. When I tell the readers that my previous research area was in structural geology and rock mechanics (e.g. Chadwick 1971, 1976a), while this research is, of course, on paranoia and delusional thinking, they will no doubt be astonished that there could be any connection at all between the two. To explicate the full history of how my previous research identity metamorphosed into my present one would take too long but some brief comments may be useful as they highlight the early hunches on which this investigation was partly based.

My work on rock deformation was not only of a theoretical and experimental nature but was also observational. During my field research I realized that there were many biases and illusions in perception and thought that could distort a geologist's reports and lead to false inferences and interpretations. This insight led me to develop a research domain, which I referred to as 'geological psychology' – the psychological study of geological work. After early investigations on judgement and attentional biases (Chadwick 1971, 1972, 1975a, b), and on visual illusions in geology and related disciplines (Chadwick 1976b, 1977a, b, 1981, 1982), I began work on the interrelationships between memory and aesthetic judgement (Chadwick and Hughes 1980), the education of interpretation and thinking (Chadwick 1978a, b) and then, critically, on distortional influences on thought itself. One early road from this research connected with mainstream geology (Chadwick 1976a, 1977c) and one, eventually, to perception psychology (Chadwick 1983) but the work on thought was the road that led me into the territory of my current research. One particular problem in cognitive psychology captivated me: 'confirmation bias' (Wason 1960; Wason and Johnson-Laird 1968; Mynatt *et al.* 1977; Tweney *et al.* 1981). This is the bias to select and accept data that *confirm* one's ideas and hypotheses at the expense of data that refute them, obviously a very common and pervasive phenomenon! It seemed to me that confirmation bias and high creativity