

Original Paper

Otherness and Schizophrenia

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Otherness is a concept that is used to explain that we can only know what it is like unless you have had it yourself. However I think it is possible to explain it so far as it is an exaggeration of problems of fear, emotional pain, depression and anxiety everyone experiences in ordinary life.

Schizophrenia comprises a number of elements which all react and reinforce each other in many different ways. In my case this has involved paranoid delusions, hearing voices, fear, terror, anxiety, low mood and delusions of grandeur. The whole experience has been very complicated, detailed and very various and all this is outlined in this article.

However the individual consequences emotional and psychological are not the end to explaining its otherness as to really understand the experience of schizophrenia we need to grasp what thoughts go through the schizophrenic mind.

The fear and pain caused by the illness are the result of what the mind is thinking when it is paranoid and we have to grasp the magnitude and power of these thoughts on the wellbeing of the person to understand the suffering it can inflict.

Some of this is comprehensible once it is described and others are only going to be known if you have been through a similar experience yourself. Both are described here and it is contended that the difficulties in understanding its otherness can be to a large extent overcome.

However if we are to truly understand mental illness we need some insight into the fear and pain it causes and hopefully providing a narrative of day to day living with the symptoms this should come through in this account and this should register for anyone reading it.

Schizophrenia is not just about paranoia and delusions and their affects but also relates to how it impacts on every day functioning and again some description of that should make us realise how disabling the illness is. Life with schizophrenia impairs our ability to look after ourselves and this needs to be explained to understand the impact of the illness.

Once we have properly explained its otherness and have got inside the schizophrenic mind we can begin to sympathise and can become compassionate towards it. This is vital for overcoming the stigma of the illness and should improve the social life for people suffering from the condition.

At milder levels of anxiety and fear the experience of the illness will be understandable to most people and some empathy.

It is at the higher levels of terror that make knowing it and empathising much more difficult although we can still sympathise with the suffering so far.

With voices to understand it you have to imagine when someone hurts your feeling it is emotionally painful but imagine the pain going on and on.

Most people with emotional pain rely on their partners for tender loving care but imagine that you are on your own with life when your emotions have been shut down through fear and this is not available. Unlike ordinary life there is no one to rely on so you are on your own as the symptoms are so overwhelming.

One particularly painful thing with schizophrenia is that you can get paranoid with friends and family and again this causes much emotional pain and means you cannot trust anyone with your problems. That thoughts cut off any life line you may have had and makes you feel any loved ones are out to hurt you. Again this emotional abuse happens but with schizophrenia it is again very severe in relation to everything else going on.

Again you are on your own with the fear and as everyone knows being on your own in life and a lot of people will know this the loneliness is very tough. These feelings of sadness add to the emotional problems faced by people with schizophrenia.

Being criticised by voices too I something we don't like but we are used to being criticised by other people in everyday life. What you have to imagine is that such criticism goes on and on and standing up it is not the safe as ordinary living where we do not need to care what other people opinions of us are.

Too much of this can make us demoralised, depressed and make us feel worthless. But that is not the end of the matter. The criticism from voices can be insipid, vicious and insightful and this is not the same as being criticised from other people in the society.

The next thing to imagine is that these voices can go on and on for years and years and this gain is one the unimaginable things with schizophrenia and is in need of some explanation.

From an emotional point of view the voices we here could be those of friends and relatives which give them added power. Hearing criticism from a loved one is gain usual but when the criticism comes from a loved one which is more prolonged again make it hurt more particular if the criticism has some truth in it. In negative reinforcement.

This is equivalent to emotional abuse and begin delusional about it too means seeking help and emotional support from all the usual sources of friends, family and partners is not variable and you are defenceless in the face of it.

Often the symptoms of schizophrenia never let up and this is something less that is different again. Experiencing anxiety is normal for many people in life and can be eased by taking up meditation or

relaxation exercises but with schizophrenia it goes on and on and techniques for calming down doesn't get rid of the paranoid thought.

Another variation of life when we have schizophrenia is that it can make you feel depressed. Again depression is a very common with many people but with schizophrenia again there is not let up as it is continual over the years it gets worse and worse.

Also with schizophrenia the low mood is much deeper and more painfully intense. In my case thinking I had killed all those people caused some excruciating pain that was completely overwhelming in addition to the schizophrenic terrors.

Anxiety and depression are often interrelated but with schizophrenia both are much more worse and in combination makes each facet even worse. Individually each is difficult to imagine but together this is much more the case.

It is not that we are Schizophrenia most people have the impression that it is unimaginable which is not true.

They do imagine it to be something like waking up in a marge don which is about right in terms of its severity but that impression of walking alone through the valley of shadow death but that is a bout general.

For me I thought I was responsible to 9/11. It is bad enough to imagine what killing one person was like but that was much worse as it amount to genocide.

From a fear point of view it was not just that the neighbours were spying on me I thought the whole world was out to get me..

Two thoughts kept occurring that even with the good things I caused I might still be assassinated like Kennedy or Trotsky. Living in the fact of fear everyday and needed to hide away in case an assassin identified me.

The other problem was that instead of being killed outright (and death is frightening) I might be tortured to death.

Both the fear of being shot and tortured physically are possible ways of creating some knowledge and understanding of what goes on to the point we can be compassionate

Other things of a similar magnitude were happening in addition to 9/11 in that I thought I was responsible for causing cancer and the economic recession

Imagine the suffering someone with cancer goes through and imagine that multiplied millions of times across the world the punishment would be literally unimaginable> having lost a loved one through this would be bad enough but imagine that happening around the world?

That would just make the thoughts about 9/11 even worse as the death toll would be more astronomical and it literally doesn't bare thinking about. Causing economic recessions is one thing but killing all these people feels like biological warfare.

In my case the experiences of paranoia are mixed in with delusions of grandeur...to produce interesting interactions. In spite of thinking about 911 I thought I had invented computers and ended the cold war and that gave me some hope I might survive.

It can also put you into shock but with delusions of grandeur it is possible to bring yourself back. The problems hit you when you get flashbacks and memories of 9/11 and the rest it puts you back in shock. In the end I just resigned myself to stop this part of my struggle.

Another trigger that really brought things home to me was seeing shops closing down with the recession I believed I had caused as this really brought things home to me and again I had to try and keep a lid on the panic.

Interestingly with my delusions of grandeur I believed I could replace one set of events I was causing with something beneficial and so some shops were reopening with other retailers instead. That allowed me to get out of the house and enjoy things again.

Maybe too the recession could be ended too? Again I could use the delusions of grandeur to think about this and the voices become accepting of certain thoughts like investment might come into the country from abroad as Britain had been going up and down the list of wealthiest nations.

Again this allowed for some feelings of security and I could calm down and enjoy life again. At these times the feelings of boredom did not return as my mind was still focused on the delusion but I was relaxed enough to live it up again before the next phase of being delusional.

Most of the time it goes over your head and comes back to you as a constant state of anxiety but when it really hits you like a religious revelation it can put you into shock or freeze you so you cannot move. This is so frightening you can pass out with the fear so you need to keep a lid on it...

It needs a coping strategy and this sort of fear means you cannot cope with it simply by doing breathing exercises or using aromatherapy oil.

Often in the morning after you have dreamed about it is the first thing on your mind so there is no possibility of any rest from the night sleep.

That feeling of anxiety means you lack motivational strength to get out of bed.

I find being under the comfort blanket soothing and would rather stay there and be asleep than having anxiety all day. I don't have the physical strength to get out of bed.

Ordinary everyday living and functioning becomes a challenge...but if you don't look after yourself by washing and cleaning things would only get worse emotionally and I have to coerce myself to do this.

It takes a lot of strength to get the motivation to live life normally ...exercise...

All the same.

One strategy for being in check is to take your tablets early but that combines the symptoms with the side effects so you have to be careful with that and sleep is often not an exacerbation because it gives you night terrors.

My body doesn't tolerate the drug I am on and this can be combined with the feelings of anxiety means I have to try to put up with this

Up to a point nightmares can be experienced by anyone and often with schizophrenia there isn't much differences depending again on how bad they get

There is often no escape from the anxiety but the difficulty is that it keeps coming back through memory, flashbacks and realisations of being responsible for 9/11

The emotional pain from the voices is hard to understand but it also another akin do torture and in my case I was tearing at my ears until they were bleeding try to stop the pain..

Thinking I could have caused 9/11 I began to wonder what else could happen especially to friends and family so I had to minimise contact as much as I could as this in moral terms was worse than the genocide: trying to imagine hurting a loved one.

That reduced emotional support for not feeling bad about the incident and had a knock on effect for my self esteem.

It reduced contact to only being with my mother which I couldn't see my nieces and nephews which was very painful and depressing.

The idea that I was causing world events with my thoughts meant trying to stop thinking about them completely but that proved very difficult even when trying to do.

One answer to schizophrenia is to distract yourself but with the gravity and imperative to stop causing harmful events with my mind meant I was so caught up with my thinking I wasn't aware of my surroundings and potential activities that this simply didn't work.

Then a strange thing happened in that the delusion was making me focus on trying to find ways to stop thinking that this in itself began to act as a kind of distraction though making the mind engage with itself meant some awareness still of the symptoms but that hope it might solve and work reduced things down to the level of anxiety.

Delusions of grandeurs can act like a mood swing from highs to fear but also mean you cannot cope with spells of boredom until the schizophrenia kinks in.

Too many such mood swings and you will snap. This makes antidepressants very important.

Trying other things to enjoy in life doesn't compare to the delusional highs and here I have turned to alcohol which helps calm and cheer up the paranoid lows.

Delusions of grandeur ease the nightmares.

Nightmare are another problem with the fear and nightmare doesn't accurately describe its severity as for example I had a dream where I felt like I was really there: I thought I was going to be crucified

Often with schizophrenia people think the neighbours are spying on them but I get the same surveillance from the voices as well so there is no hiding away from them. That observation means continual anxiety as my thoughts might betray my culpability for 9/11.

This sort of thing is severe enough to need a Valium but these are often not prescribed and using aroma therapy oils are effective with anxiety but isn't effective when this starts to get more fearful even when it is not terrorising

You must stop yourself from flipping out and keep a firm grip on reality and any insight could help here. You have to tell yourself these feelings are going to pass but that doesn't necessarily you won't collapse anyway so this thought doesn't necessarily help

Feeling like you might pass out is dangerous if you are out and about but staying indoors all the time just magnifies the effect of the voices. I have to go places where someone could ring an ambulance and if it happens in the house I wouldn't be able to answer the phone so would rely on the next time my mother is due to visit.

Conversely having a safe place can help if you can make that place where you are living but too much trauma can prevent this and turn the associations of safety into a traumatic prison cell. The confines mean doing breathing exercises are not necessary going to help.

That means having to go out again as the exercise makes you breath properly and this can be added to being around nature which can heighten the feelings of relaxation but there is a difficulty in trying to do this too but you cannot be out all the time so the original problem remains.

It is known from normal experience that breathing into a paper bag can be effective for panic attacks but once again the experience of schizophrenia is so overwhelming this doesn't work either and will not necessary stop you from passing out.

One problem from this is there a difficult choice between being frozen in fear at home or passing out when out and about. Either way there are problems as you cannot help either way even if you were in hospital.

What is needed is some positive reinforcement so you can tell yourself you have just got to hang in there as the fear will eventually pass. You have got to believe you can do this and have faith in it and this can help you coexist with the fear.

The problem then becomes you know the terror will reoccur at some point and although you have got through it many times there is no guarantee you will get through it. This as you can imagine is a constant worry and there is nothing you can do about it.

All the same the other paranoid delusions in between crisis periods tend to take over you thinking and refocus it on 9/11. All the same there are moments of realisation that it is this thought that it prompting the worst experiences and this again can be very frightening.

The extremities of the condition can be illustrated in other ways and there are a number of graphic ways which might be vaguely intelligible once we realise the scale of what is involved. Again there are a number of examples which have been central to my experience of schizophrenia.

One is that I keep thinking my culpability for 9/11 is being broadcast nation wide on the television and we are all aware about the scale of the media being watched by the whole society. We can get some idea of society as a whole and this was integral to the paranoia I was experiencing.

Another problem when I see closed shops and charity shops I keep thinking I am responsible for the unemployment. That was a very visual instance of the poverty I was responsible for and the pain this

has caused for many people. Again we can gain some understanding of the statistics and can measure some idea of the seriousness and importance of the whole problem.

All this created a severe guilt trip and began to put off going out altogether but was so frightening I had to rely on my survival instincts to get through it which again is a reaction that will be comprehensible for many people.

Another aspect is that whole scale of this was so terrifying you couldn't believe it was really happening and went over my head again which again is an understanding for many people.

This produced something else in the realm of common experience that you had to pretend the whole thing wasn't really happening and that such an experience still had to be dealt with. Though as in schizophrenia and the usual reactions are easier said than done.

The common reaction to fear for many people is to run away inwardly and to try to escape from what is happening. The whole thing I system overload which is readily understood and can be explained through writing on the nature of the subconscious.

Again this is an extremity that is not easily dealt though as most people know there is a healing process for this through graded exposure which can bring yourself back. That experience can be difficult with schizophrenia as it is so frightening.

In the end the whole thing is so severe it needs a valium but these are often not prescribed though here again many people who do get Valium will know what it feels like. Talking to this group of people will be very enlightening.

Conclusion

To understand the illness we must realise that what patients with schizophrenia are going through as an exaggeration of everyday life experiences made much worse. WE can empathise much better with people so we know more about what they are going through.

That recognition allows us to deepen our feelings of compassion for service users and should help us to be more receptive of the condition. This too could aid the soothing begun developed by compassion focused therapists and help us soothe the symptoms

From here we can discuss things better and allow us to connect better with sufferers and to release what they are thinking and experiencing. This maybe useful for cognitive approaches as we can connect with the patient on a deeper level.

Finally it is important for therapists to know what it is like to have a mental illness in general terms so they can understand the suffering better and develop some increased sympathy for the people they are dealing with in their jobs.