

Schizotypal Personality Disorder

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Do you believe in UFOs and alien abductions? You may be suffering from the Schizotypal Personality Disorder.

Do you believe in the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary and in the resurrection of her son? Then you are merely a religious person. In other words, it is OK to believe in certain "supernatural" phenomena just because such beliefs are socially acceptable and widespread. The Schizotypal Personality Disorder is one of the most culture-bound mental health diagnoses in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). Many of the diagnostic criteria of this "personality disorder" refer to behaviors which some say are utterly normative in certain cultures or sub-cultures.

But possessing an idiosyncratic belief system is not enough. The schizotypal must also be a "strange bird". He or she must dress uniquely, and have uncommon thought and speech patterns. Finally, to "qualify" as a schizotypal, one must act bizarre. Critics argue that such lifestyle choices should not constitute a mental illness. The DSM says that Schizotypals frequently develop ideas of reference. They are erroneously convinced that, behind their back, they are a constant topic of derision, mockery, criticism, or gossip. But this often is the case! Owing to their peculiarities, schizotypals are invariably the butt of jokes, the targets of derision and mockery, and the focus of malicious gossip. In other words, their "ideas of reference" are reality-based, not imaginary and paranoid. If you ask her nearest and dearest to describe the schizotypal, they would say that she dresses oddly, behaves eccentrically, and appears to be weird. These recurrent encounters with social censure and ridicule cause most schizotypals to become suspicious and even paranoid and to develop persecutory ideation. Consequently, schizotypals may be mistrustful and interact only with first-degree relatives. Schizotypals are more immune to criticism than narcissists or schizoids, but they do tend to avoid social settings, convinced that everyone is "out to get them". The schizotypal is certain that the world is a hostile and unpredictable place and, thus, best avoided. Same as paranoids, schizotypals do hold and adopt unusual beliefs, "theories", convictions, "scenarios", superstitions, and conspiracies. I described this facet of the disorder in the Open Site Encyclopedia: "Although generally not prone to delusions, the schizotypal is steeped in the occult and the esoteric to the exclusion of rational thinking and to the detriment of proper daily functioning. Some schizotypals report 'supernatural' experiences, including perceptual distortions - such as "out of body" voyages, remote viewing, clairvoyance, telepathy, or recurrent coincidences. They report these events in a private language which is difficult to fathom due to its excessive use of metaphors, vagueness, circumspection, complexity, or stereotypes. The schizotypal's thinking is similarly convoluted and hermetic."