

**MAASTRICHT  
INTERVIEW WITH A PERSON  
WHO EXPERIENCES PARANOIA**

Sandra Escher, MPhil, PhD.  
Peter Bullimore  
Professor dr. Marius Romme

Copyright: October 2004: A.D.M.A.C. Escher, MPhil, PhD. and Prof.Dr.M.A.J. Romme  
e-mail: a.escherskynet.be

'Our mind has the ability to create thoughts and ideas that we don't fully understand, thus stopping us seeing the world around us as we should. This often creates suspicion and fear, commonly known as paranoia. Just because we cannot enter into the paranoid person's world, does not mean they are ill.'

Peter Bullimore, 31 October 2004's Gravenvoeren, Belgium.

**Interview with a person who experiences paranoia**

Name: .....  
Address: .....  
.....  
Telephone number: .....

**Background information**

Date of birth/age: .....  
Gender: M/F  
Marital status: .....  
Number of children: .....  
Housing condition: .....  
Employment status: .....  
Nationality/ethnic origin:.....

**Information concerning the interview**

Name of the interviewer: .....  
Date of the first interview:.....  
Date of the follow-up: .....  
File number: .....

**1. THE NATURE OF THE EXPERIENCES ITSELF**

Paranoia is a common human experience. It only becomes problematic when it effects your social functioning. Professional definitions like in DSM are very general in a professional language. We therefore propose as a definition.

Paranoia is having an idea or ideas about the world around you that cannot be dismissed and disrupts your social functioning.

This Questionnaire has been designed for people who experience paranoia. It is intended to help you gain greater insight into your experience. It is also designed to encourage a dialogue between us about your experience and the way you cope with your paranoia. This will enable us together to work out the best way of dealing with it.

1. I would like you to tell me about your experience of paranoia.

What kind of paranoia do you experience?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

1.2 What/who are involved in your paranoia?

.....  
.....

1.3 Do other people have the same ideas as you? Can you explain why or why not?

.....  
.....

1.4 Is the paranoia always persecutory or does it sometimes take other forms? Can you give an example?

.....  
.....

1.5 Are the paranoia thoughts/feelings your own or are they put there by someone else?

.....  
.....

1.6 Are you able to distinguish between your world and other people's reality? Can you give an example?

.....  
.....

1.7 Some people describe a way their paranoia develops. Do you recognise steps in building up your paranoia like a first step comments/events/ Associations with the feeling of anxiety/racing thoughts; the second step convictions;the third step conspiracy.

.....  
.....

1.8 Do you hear sounds/voices/ visions as well? If yes, we will interview you about these experiences separately.

.....  
.....

**2. CHARACTERISTICS**

Other people have described their experience. Let us go through the list to see if you recognise one or more of them and please describe the content.

How often

2.1 Do you often feel persecuted?

.....

2.2 Does your paranoia represent a conspiracy?

.....

2.3 Do you feel that you are controlled by others?

.....

2.4 Do you ever feel your body has been taken over by someone or something else?

.....

2.5 Do you often feel you are living in a surreal world (Living in another world or in two worlds?)

.....

2.6 Are you able to dismiss your paranoia idea/ideas/feelings?

.....

2.7 Do you often feel pitied or belittled by others?

.....

2.8 Does anxiety makes your paranoia into a problem?

.....

2.9 Does your paranoia disrupt your social functioning?

.....

2.10 Do you identify sometimes with another person?

.....

2.11 Does your paranoia give you sometimes a feeling of grandeur?

.....

2.12 Does your paranoia also protect you?

.....

2.13 Do you think something is missing?

.....

**3 Focus or content of paranoia**

3.1 Paranoia is often focussed on certain areas of life (M15, Police, Religion, authority, drugs, aliens, neighbours). What is or are the Focuses of your paranoia? Can you tell a bit more about it?

.....  
.....

3.2 Do you think that the focus is also related to the beginning of the  
paranoia? Is symbolic? Can you tell a bit more?

.....  
.....  
.....

**4 THE HISTORY**

4.1 Let us return to the time when you first started to experience paranoia.  
How old were you when it first started? Can you describe your  
circumstances? Where were you living, working and who were your friends?  
Which elements of the above table did you then experience (see 2.1)?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4.2 During which further periods in your life did you experience paranoia?  
Can you describe your circumstances for each period? (Is the paranoia more  
Or less continuous or have there been certain periods?)  
What happened before those periods?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

We have put together a list of the kind of circumstances and situations that  
people might experience in their lives. Which of these life events have happened  
to you? At what age did you experience them? Did it make you powerless or very  
anxious? Was it the start of paranoia?

<b>Circumstances</b>	Yes/ no	age	powerless/ anxiety	paranoia
<b>Stressful changes</b>				
Living on your own for the first time				
Moving to a new residence, school/town or village				
Starting studies/ a course				
Failing an exam				
Being unemployed/fired/out of business				
Changes in employment/status/job				
Retirement/inability to work				
Children leaving home				
Financial debt/financial problems				

<b>Illness and death</b>				
Serious physical injury or illness				
Admission to a general hospital or being given an anaesthetic				
Death of a family member or an intimate friend				
Death of a cherished pet				
Serious illness of a loved one				
Admission to a psychiatric hospital				
Being confronted with a suicide or an attempted suicide				
<b>Love and sexuality</b>				
Divorce or breaking up an intimate relationship				
Menstruation/pregnancy/abortion				
Falling in love and have being rejected				
Severe tension in your home or within your relationship				
Confrontation with socially less acceptable forms of sexuality like homosexuality or exhibitionism				
Unexpected changes in your relationship such as your own Unfaithfulness or an unfaithful partner				
<b>Religion, spirituality, mystic or cosmic experiences</b>				
Attending a séance, satanic ritual, spiritual event				
Problems within a religious community/sect				
<b>Others</b>				
Have you ever been bullied and/or beaten up?				
Have you ever been forced to take drugs against your will: legal or illegal?				

## 5. TRIGGERS

5.1 People have told that a trigger might be closely related to circumstances That reminds them of traumatic events. Therefore it is important to pay Detailed attention to what triggers your paranoia. Have you noticed whether your paranoia is a process that can be triggered by Certain **thoughts, feelings, commands, associations, persons seeing certain Objects, smelling certain smells, taking part in particular activities or Arises in certain circumstances?** Let us check this list.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> strangers   | <input type="checkbox"/> special colour car         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> animals   | <input type="checkbox"/> public transport           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> authorities (lawyer/judge/police/bank manager)                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Certain days evenings      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> neighbours  | <input type="checkbox"/> TV issues like horror film |
| <input type="checkbox"/> people shouting   | <input type="checkbox"/> radio referrals            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other forms of aggression   | <input type="checkbox"/> going shopping             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> smell of .....  | <input type="checkbox"/> critical remarks           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> coincidences like seeing the same car of person twice at different spots. |   |
| .....  |   |

.....  
.....

5.2 Have you ever noticed whether paranoia began when you feel certain emotions? Does the paranoia occur when you experience emotions such as:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> anxiousness                  | <input type="checkbox"/> jealousy          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> insecurity                   | <input type="checkbox"/> grief             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fear                         | <input type="checkbox"/> fatigue           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> doubt                        | <input type="checkbox"/> depressed or sad  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> in love                      | <input type="checkbox"/> happy             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> anger or aggression          | <input type="checkbox"/> lonely            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> your own sexual feelings     | <input type="checkbox"/> phobia, what form |
| <input type="checkbox"/> the sexual feelings of other | .....                                      |

5.2 How do you feel when you become paranoid? (For instance sweaty, shaking, Nausea, anxious)?

.....  
.....  
.....

**6 EARLY WARNING SIGNS**

6.1 Some people describe that certain things are an indication that the Paranoia might come. As it is called early warning signs have you noticed that certain things might happen before you start to become paranoia?

.....  
.....

Do you experience?

6.2 racing thoughts? If yes, please describe them.

.....

6.3 seeing things? If yes, please describe them

.....

6.4 increased frequency of the voices or voices become negative? If yes, please describe them

.....

6.5 not making time to eat.

.....

6.6 altered sleeping pattern.

.....

6.7 isolating yourself more



.....  
6.8 drink more alcohol/take drugs (legal or illegal).  
.....

6.9 spend more time around others  
.....

6.10 others  
.....

**7 WHAT DO YOU DO?**

Following the list of early warning signs you mentioned, can you tell how you react to them? Are you aware that you have early warning signs and what do you do?

You do not take any action.  
.....  
.....

Do you do take action  
.for example take time for a meal; take a sleeping pill  
.....  
.....  
.....

Others  
.....  
.....

If you take action, how helpful is what you do?  
.....  
.....

Do you reflect?  
 are the early warning signs a signal that something in your life has Changed that is threatening/ making you feel out of control or powerless?  
 if you hear voices and the voices become more active. Do you give? Attention to what the voices say. For the voices we have a different Section in this interview.  
 Have you been able to learn from your experience? If Yes, what?  
.....  
.....

Have you told others about your early warning signs? If yes, who  
.....  
.....  
.....

**8 HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE ORIGIN?**

As someone who experiences paranoia, you have probably wanted to find an explanation for why you have these thoughts or feelings. You may already have developed your own interpretation of the meaning of these ideas/beliefs. However we might not share the same ideas. Here we are concerned with what **you** might think causes your beliefs/ideas and how you identify it.

- 8.1. The paranoia is created by a living person:
  - 1. Someone who is part of your daily life yes/no
  - 2. your parents or another family member yes/no
  - 3. Someone who is unknown to you yes/no
  - If it is a known person, who? .....
  
- 8.2 The paranoia is created by a deceased person:
  - 4. Who was very well known to you yes/no
  - 5. Who was unknown to you yes/no
  - If it is a known person, who? .....
  
- 8.3 My paranoia thoughts/feelings are:
  - 6. Symptoms of an illness yes/no
  - 7. One or more parts of your personality yes/no  
(From the unconsciousness)
  - 8. To keep me safe yes/no
  
- 8.4 The paranoia thoughts/feelings are:
  - 9. Caused by someone from the past yes/no  
(reincarnation)
  - 10. Put there by aliens yes/no
  - 11. Spirits or devil yes/no
  - 12. A bad spirit or the devil yes/no
  - 13. Caused by a spiritual person or power that you cannot see yes/no  
But is there You feel or hear the presence of it)
  - 14. due to extraordinary perceptions (telepathy, mediumistic) yes/no
  - 15. Result from the pain of others or from something yes/no  
else around you
  - 16. because you are a special or a bad person yes/no

**9 WHAT IMPACT DOES THE PARANOIA HAVE ON YOUR WAY OF LIFE?**

We would like to ask what kind of impact the paranoia have on your way of life.

9.1 Are you happy with some of the paranoia thoughts or feelings? Does it make you feel special? Does it make you feel safe? Can you explain why?  
 .....  
 .....

9.2 Are you unhappy with some of the paranoia thoughts or feelings? Which ones? Can you explain why?  
 .....  
 .....

9.3 How does the paranoia disturb your social functioning? How and in what way?(at home, work, social activities). how do you react?  
 [] isolation? .....

- [ ] stop using public transport/shopping .....
- [ ] stopping social contacts? .....
- [ ] Do you stop trusting people? .....
- [ ] Does it affect your thinking? .....
- [ ] Does it make you aggressive? .....
- [ ] Does it stop you doing things you liked to do?.....
- [ ] Does it affect your eating? .....
- [ ] Does it affect your sleep? .....
- [ ] Do you use drinks and drugs more? .....
- [ ] Do you feel compelled to challenge people? .....

9.4 What effect does the paranoia have on others?

.....  
 .....

9.5 What do they do that is helpful or unhelpful?

.....  
 .....

9.6 Does the paranoia frighten you? Can you give an example?

If the paranoia does not frighten you, can you explain why?

.....  
 .....

9.7 How powerless/powerful does the paranoia make you feel? Can you

Describe it?

.....  
 .....

9.8 Do you experience the paranoia as:

	Now	at the beginning
Predominately positive	yes/no	yes/no
Predominately negative	yes/no	yes/no
Neutral	yes/no	yes/no
Negative as well as positive	yes/no	yes/no

.....  
 .....

**10 RELATIONSHIP**

We would like to ask you what kind of insight you have into your paranoia.

10.1 are you able to rationalise your paranoia in any way? Yes/no  
Please give an example  
.....  
.....

10.2 Does your paranoia make you powerless? If yes, how does it accomplish this? (By other people's presence or meanings)  
.....  
.....

10.3 Are you in control of your paranoia? Has this always been so? Please describe  
.....  
.....

10.4 Are you able to check out your paranoia? Do you do this? Do you do this alone or with someone? Does it help? Please give an example  
.....  
.....

10.5 Do you ever get angry with yourself because of the paranoia? If yes, why?  
.....  
.....

10.6 Are you able to dismiss the paranoia? Why are you not able to do it all the time?  
.....  
.....

10.7 are you able to distract your thoughts away from the focus of the paranoia?  
.....  
.....

10.8 Can you focus on your paranoia and put some more positive meaning to it? If yes, can you give an example?  
.....  
.....

**11. COGNITIVE STRATEGIES**

We have just discussed your relationship with paranoia. I would like to know what exactly you do, when you are paranoid.  
For interviewer: If the answer is yes, please ask how many times and what the effect is. Does it make you feel safe?

11. BEHAVOURIAL STRATEGIES

no.	strategy	yes/no	If yes, does it make you feel safe?
1	Avoidance; e.g. not walking, not shopping; not using public transport		

2	Distraction; E.g. more alcohol, sleep, reading, music, switching attention to external cause.		
3	Challenging; E.g. checking out, setting time limits (stay for one hour).		
4	Comfort and enjoyment; E.g. walking, visiting someone, feeding ducks, taking time out.		

Others

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**COGNITIVE STRATEGIES**

no	strategy	yes/no	if yes, does it make you feel safe
5	Challenging the thoughts and feelings; E.g. why should all these people follow me?		
6	Not to dwell on certain thoughts and feelings; e.g. switching attention to other brain actions		
7	Telling yourself: 'don't be stupid, you know what the consequences are'.		
8	Anticipating; e.g. if you know when paranoia is going to start, accept it and find an alternative.		
9	Travel with someone you trust.		

Others

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**RISKY COPING STRATEGIES**

no	strategy	yes/no	if yes, does it make you feel safe
10	Carrying a knife to defend yourself.		
11	Hit the person who triggers your paranoia making you feel threatened		
12	Challenging people who are stronger or in a crowd.		

Others

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**CONCLUSION COPING STRATEGIES**

Do you use it systematically? If no, why not

.....  
 .....

What is the result (less power or do you gain additional power)?

.....  
 .....

In the past, have you ever tried something that seemed to help?

.....  
.....  
.....

**12. QUESTIONS RELATED TO YOUR CHILDHOOD**

Childhood can be a very different experience for people. Some people like to look back while others prefer to put it behind them as soon as possible. What is your perception of your childhood?

12.1 Was your childhood stressful or pleasant? Can you tell me about it?  
.....  
.....  
.....

12.2 Did you feel safe at school, in the streets and at home? If not, please explain why?  
.....  
.....  
.....

12.3 As a child, have you ever been mistreated? How?  
.....  
.....  
.....

12.4. As a child, did you ever receive strange punishments? For example, being locked in a toilet or being tied up?  
.....  
.....  
.....

12.5. Have you ever, as a child or a teenager, been yelled at or belittled? Did you experience the feeling of not being wanted, or did you feel that you were never able to do anything right?  
.....  
.....  
.....

12.6. Have you ever witnessed the maltreatment of another family member?  
.....  
.....  
.....

12.7. Have you ever been sexually abused by a member of the family?  
.....  
.....  
.....

12.8. Have you ever had sex against your will? A situation where you were unable to resist or escape from?  
.....  
.....  
.....

**13 MEDICAL HISTORY**

13.1 Did you ever get therapy? Did you ever get therapy because of the Paranoia? Which kind of therapist?

year	Hospital/community care	kind of therapist	lengths	indication for treatment

13.2 With which therapist did you talk about the paranoia?  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

13.3 What did the therapist do in relation to your paranoia?  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

**14 SOCIAL NETWORK**

Contact with others is an important part of life. First, I would like to ask you to tell me about the person with whom you have a personal relationship and other persons that are important to you. The order is not important and you are not required to give complete names. Initials or something like my son is sufficient.

RESPONSE FILE SOCIAL NETWORK

NO	NAME	knows about the paranoia yes/no	talks about the paranoia yes/no
01			
02			
03			
04			
05			
06			
07			
08			