

PARANORMAL PSYCHOLOGY: PSY₄₁₀

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LARRY MARTINEZ

Portland State University Library

Portland



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Overview

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will evaluate the psychological theories, phenomena, and explanations for paranormal experiences including but not limited to ghosts, possessions, aliens, demons, out of body experiences, and psychic/telekinetic abilities.

In this class, we will explore the psychological research relating to the paranormal, with a particular emphasis on the psychological explanations for such phenomena. This course is designed to examine how psychologists have conducted research with regard to such phenomena and consider the real-world impact of this research. *Importantly, the goal of this class is not to change your mind or make you believe a certain thing (or not believe a certain thing) – the purpose is to educate you about how psychologists interpret paranormal phenomena.*

PARANORMAL PSYCHOLOGY: PSY410

COURSE OBJECTIVES

As the instructor for this course, I have several goals that I hope you will accomplish this semester:

An appreciation of the theoretical, empirical, and applied sides to studying paranormal phenomena from a psychological perspective.

An ability to think critically about and analyze the theories, methods, and findings related to paranormal phenomena.

Cultivate a lasting awareness of the impact of the psychological research that has been conducted on paranormal phenomena in the real world.

COURSE FORMAT & PHILOSOPHY

There are a number of guiding principles central to my teaching philosophy. First, the purpose of this course is to gain a broad depth of knowledge. Therefore, an emphasis will be placed on learning and integrating concepts. Second, this course covers a very broad range of topics and draws from several different sub-disciplines of psychology. Because our emphasis is on how psychology interacts with these phenomena, most of the required materials for the course are focused on that. I provide more basic information (e.g., classifications of different types of aliens) as supplemental material so that everyone can be on the same page. I also provide other information that is psychological in nature but relatively less important as

supplements as well. My hope is that this allows you to prioritize your time in the most efficient way possible.

MATERIALS

We will be using the following textbook for this course:

Groome, D. & Roberts, R. (2017). *Parapsychology: The science of unusual experience* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

An electronic copy of this book is available in full through the Portland State University library's website. I provide links to the book each time there is a chapter due (it's the same link over and over again). However, I find it easier to just download a .pdf of the book and refer back to that (you can make annotations that way as well).

If you do not have access to the textbook through the PSU library, you can purchase the book on [Amazon](#)

Class Materials & Assignments

Introduction Module

Videos and Online Resources

- [Get to Know Dr. Martinez \[Video\]](#)
- [Introduction Lecture \[Video\]](#)
- [Introduction to the Textbook \[Video\]](#)
- [Science of Paranormal Psychology \[Video\]](#)
- [Supplement: “13 University-Sanctioned Paranormal Research Projects” by College Weekend \[Mental Floss article\]](#)

Module 1

[Introduction to Module 1 \[Video\]](#)

Reach Chapters 2 & 11 in Groome & Roberts Textbook
Ch 2 covers ESP/telepathy fairly
comprehensively. Ch 11 covers psychic fraud,

which covers telekinesis somewhat and includes a couple other topics that we'll spend more time on later (e.g., seances). Many of the explanations provided for seances in this chapter are readily applicable to other forms of psychic fraud (like telekinesis), so try to think about the connections that may be there even if they're not spelled out explicitly. We'll cover much of this again when we get to death/afterlife because many psychics claim to use their powers to contact people who have died.

Watch: [Ganzfeld Paradigm Overview \[Video\]](#)

This is a quick video that will show you what the basic Ganzfeld paradigm entails. There are some variations, but this is a nice overview to help you visualize.

[James Randi \[Wikipedia\]](#)

Information about James Randi, one of the most famous psychic debunkers around. Pay particular attention to his dealings with psychics and other paranormal phenomena over the years, but especially his relationship with Uri Geller and Project Alpha. Side note, he's the only person I've come across in studying this that is openly gay. Also, if you've seen the South Park episode where Stan's father (Randy) starts doing magic with the name The Amazingly Randy, that's a reference to

this guy (it's a vulgar bit, so don't look for it if you're put off by South Park humor)

Watch: [Uri Geller Fails on The Tonight Show \[Video\]](#)

Watch: [James Randi Debunks Peter Popoff Faith Healer \[Video\]](#)

Watch: [James Randi Exposes Hydrick \[Video\]](#)

[Psychokinesis Overview \[Wikipedia\]](#)

Believe it or not, one of the best overviews of telekinesis I've found is on Wikipedia. Read the entire thing, but pay particular attention to the psychological explanations, which will come up a couple of other times in the course.

[Joseph Banks Rhine \[Wikipedia\]](#)

Credited as being the father of parapsychological research. Pay attention to his methods. I also like that he and his wife worked together on this (awww!)

[Project Alpha \[Wikipedia\]](#)

One of the most famous concerted efforts to legitimately study paranormal phenomena. You should be able to remember the basic story including the motivation for starting this work, the main participants and what they did, and the ultimate conclusion of this work.

[Stargate Project \[Wikipedia\]](#)

Another extremely famous effort to investigate paranormal phenomena. You should be aware of this, but don't need to read everything. The first

3 introductory paragraphs (before “Background” is good enough unless you’re interested in more (it’s neat))

Read Ch 8 in Groome & Roberts Textbook

This is a great chapter. The beginning provides a good overview of how dreams work (in general) and then covers lucid dreaming and prophetic dreams, which are particularly relevant for this class. This description, together with the notion of spreading activation from the Khan Academy video and the article about the the role of emotions in dreams together paint a nice picture of how dreams can be somewhat prophetic in some cases, though not for the reasons that most people think.

Watch: [Dream Theories Freud, Activation Synthesis Hypothesis | MCAT | Khan Academy \[Video\]](#)

Although the Freudian interpretation is interesting, pay particular attention to the second half of the video, which is important in understanding how dreams can be interpreted as being prophetic and how to try to understand what dreams are trying to tell us

[“The Science Behind Dreaming: New research sheds light on how and why we remember dreams—and what purpose they are likely to serve” by Sander van der Linden on July 26, 2011 \[Scientific American article\]](#)

This article discusses some sleep research, finding that dreams likely help us process emotions

by attaching visual stimuli to them, which can then be forgotten

Module 2

[Introduction to Module 2 \[Video\]](#)

Read Ch 6 in Groome & Roberts Textbook

This chapter is a bit longer than I think it needs to be, so you can skim parts of it if you like. You definitely need to know the Five Basic Stages starting on page 70. Pay attention to the cultural differences and know at least 4 of the potential theories (none of them are great explanations for this in my opinion).

Supplement: [Researchers Say There's Evidence That Consciousness Continues After Clinical Death \[Video\]](#)

Supplement: [I See Dead People: Dreams and Visions of the Dying | Dr. Christopher Kerr | TEDxBuffalo \[Video\]](#)

Supplement: [“Are ‘Near-Death Experiences’ Real? They Cannot Prove the Existence of Heaven or Hell, but They Can Give Us Hope”](#) by John Martin Fischer, February 13, 2020. [The New York Times article]

Supplement: [Woman On ‘Crossing Over’ During Cardiac Arrest: I’m No Longer Afraid of Death | Megyn Kelly TODAY \[Video\]](#)

Read Ch 7 in Groome & Roberts Textbook

This chapter provides a great overview. It goes into far more detail than you’ll need for class, so

if you're trying to save time focus on the psychological explanations and influence of culture in claims like these.

Supplement: [Dr. Jim Tucker: Children Who Remember Previous Lives \[Video\]](#)

This is a fantastic little documentary about reincarnation claims. It doesn't provide any *new* information, but it's greatly entertaining. This video came from the University of Virginia website, [which has a couple more if you're interested](#).

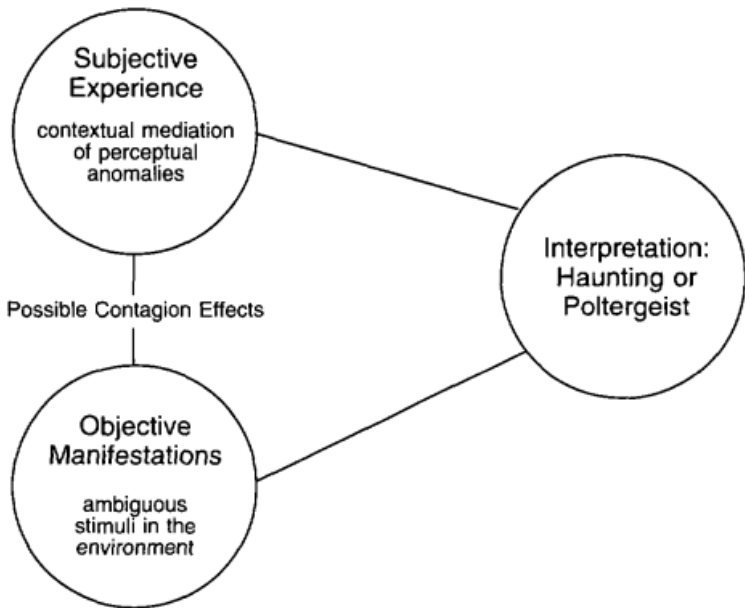
Supplement: [The Egg – A Short Story \[Video\]](#)

This is a short 8 min story about reincarnation. In sum, the premise is that the entire universe was created as an egg for the main character (all of humanity), and once they have lived every human life ever, they will be born as a God.

Read Chs 3 & 4 in Groome & Roberts Textbook

These two chapters go together, covering contact with the dead including mediums, seances, possessions, and exorcisms. In chapter 3, pay particular attention to the psychological explanations for why people believe in contact with the dead. Also be sure that you understand the components of cold reading (there's another reading for this as well). Finally, I find it interesting how the author ties many of these principles to contemporary practices in psychotherapy. For

chapter 4, know both the neuropathological and sociocognitive explanations for possession. Know the difference between central and peripheral possessions and how exorcism can have functional benefits for societies (and of course, terrible, terrible experiences for the afflicted).



This figure depicts one explanation for why people believe they have experienced a paranormal event. Objective Manifestation refers to the actual stimulus that is detected in one's environment (a knocking sound, the sight of something moving, a drop in temperature). Subjective Experience refers to how one experiences that stimulus. Usually, we interpret things the way they occur

(a piece of fruit falls on the floor, it makes a sound, it comes through your ears, and your brain thinks “something fell on the floor”). However, sometimes there’s a discrepancy between what actually happened and our interpretation of it. These are the Contagion Effects. We might mishear something because something altered the sound (the fruit hit something soft before rolling onto the floor and didn’t make a sound), because the sound actually came from something else (the dog walked by and hit the cabinet with her tail, making a sound that sounds like fruit falling), because we may be hearing impaired, or any number of other things. In those situations, it’s not clear exactly what happened. When there’s room for interpretation like that, people more readily accept paranormal explanations. In our example, if you found the fruit on the floor without hearing it fall; or if you thought you heard something fall and everything is in place then you might think you have a poltergeist that moved the fruit or made a knocking sound. We’ll watch a video with a woman who experienced a poltergeist that displays this principle, but here it is in visual form.

[A scientific approach to the paranormal | Carrie Poppy \[TED Video\]](#)

This goes with the graphic in the previous task.

This is a fairly universal principle for this class and is readily applied to many different phenomena.

[“Neuroscience: Why do we See Faces in Everyday Objects?”](#) by David Robson, July 29, 2014 [BBC article]

This is a nice overview of pareidolia, which is applicable in the context of many ghost and alien-related phenomena.

Watch: [Do You Believe? | Brain Games \[Video\]](#)

The ideomotor effect is used to explain many different paranormal phenomena including the Ouija Board (seen here), dowsing rods, methods involving hanging/spinning/swinging weights or crystals, and others.

[Cold Reading: How to Convince Strangers That You Know All About Them, from “The Outer Edge, Classic Investigations of the Paranormal”](#) by Ray Hyman [Article]

This article was written by Dr. Hyman, one of the most influential parapsychologists around. It expands on the information in the chapter nicely. South Park does a treatment of this in Episode 15, Season 6 that is a remarkably clear demonstration, if you’re familiar with that or want to look it up.

Practice Identifying Cold Reading Tactics

For this assignment, you will practice your ability to identify common elements of a cold reading. Watch [this clip](#) and think about which elements he uses. Take some time to jot down your thoughts and feel free to watch it several times to see if you can catch everything. Once you think you’ve

caught everything, you can check [my own synopsis](#) and see if you agree with my interpretation.

Supplement: [Top 5 Ghost Videos, Real Ghost Videos Caught on Tape, Unexplained Nightmare Paranormal Videos \[Video\]](#)

This is a silly video of ghosts caught on camera. The point of this is to highlight how the background music and noises and camera angles help contribute to the suspense/fear one might feel while watching it. Try watching it on mute to see the difference. These tactics are used in movies and TV often.

[Supplement: Eliza the Therapist](#)

The book mentions Doctor, the computer therapist that uses Rogerian therapeutic principles. I couldn't find that one, but I found Eliza, who seems to do the same thing (she's not great).

Supplement: [Poltergeists \[Wikipedia\]](#)

Quick overview of poltergeists if you're not familiar with the concept

Supplement: [“The Physics of “False” Poltergeists”](#) by Roman Vinokur [Academia.com article]

This provides a nice description of how wind can make ghost-y sounds in some situations.

Supplement: [Lenora Piper \[Wikipedia\]](#)

Overview of one of the most famous and widely studied mediums

Supplement: [9 Terrifying Accounts of Intruders Hiding Inside People's Homes \[Video\]](#)

*This video contains images in which people's private spaces (houses, apts) are violated. Some people may not want to watch. There are plenty of videos that depict secret intruders, there's nothing particularly special about this one. Just another example of a phenomenon that people thought might have been a ghost or haunting, but sometimes is a living person hiding somewhere.

Module 3

[Introduction to Module 3 \[Video\]](#)

Read Ch 5 from Groome & Roberts Textbook

This chapter provides a great synopsis. You need to understand the ins and outs of sleep paralysis and other psychological explanations.

[Why we Imagine Aliens the Way we do \[Video\]](#)

Watch and consider the psychological implications of the ways that aliens are typically depicted.

[Fermi Paradox \[Wikipedia\]](#)

The Fermi Paradox is basically the question "if there are so many habitable planets in the universe, why haven't we been contacted yet?" You should pay particular attention to the Drake Equation, the Arecibo message, and be sure to know most of the

potential hypothetical explanations for why we haven't made contact yet.

Supplement: [List of Alleged Extraterrestrial Beings Who Visited Earth and The Ones Who Are Among us in a Physical Body. \[Alien Wiki\]](#)

This is a list of the most popular types of aliens that are typically reported. Skim through this if you're not really familiar with these. Also consider the implications/rationale for many of the descriptions. For instance, Grays are depicted as having large heads, small/weak bodies, and large eyes – all of which are related to stereotypes of intelligence. Aliens that look reptilian are typically evil. Those that look like dragons are aggressive. Those that look like tall White people are benevolent. Consider the applicability of the representativeness heuristic.

Supplement: [“What Would Aliens Look Like? We Asked 7 Experts”](#) by John Brandon, August 6, 2014 [Popular Mechanics article]

This is a thought piece on what form alien bodies are likely to take, based on a couple of different scientific and literary perspectives.

Supplement: [“The Crop Circle Mystery: A Closer Look”](#) by Benjamin Radford, June 10, 2017 [Live Science article]

This is a nice treatment of crop circles. The punchline is that many of them have been human-

made, but some still believe them to have paranormal or extraterrestrial origins

Supplement: [“The Nazca Drawings Revisited: Creation of a Full-Sized Duplicate”](#) by Joe Nickell, 2016 [Skeptical Inquirer article]

The Nazca Lines are another phenomenon that many claim to have been made by aliens – usually because it seems impossible that they could have been made by human hands (especially given how old they are), similar to crop circles. This article is written by someone who recreated one in Kentucky using primitive methods, suggesting that they probably aren’t alien in origin.

Supplement: [Potential Cultural Impact of Extraterrestrial Contact \[Wikipedia\]](#)

You can skip down to “Impact assessment” if you like. This article describes the likely psychological and cultural impact of contact with an intelligent alien life form. Think about how things like physical distance, type of contact, and content of message impact the likely reaction based on psychological principles we’ve covered in this class and you may have learned in other classes. You should also be somewhat familiar with the basics of the Declaration of Principles of Activities Following the Detection of Extraterrestrial Intelligence.” Would you make the same recommendations?

Supplement: [Cargo Cult \[Wikipedia\]](#)

‘Cargo cults’ describe a commonly reported phenomenon in which relatively more primitive cultures are contacted by relatively more technologically advanced cultures. Members of the more primitive culture are so astounded by the ‘magical powers’ of the more advanced culture and want to benefit from those advances as well. However, they don’t understand how or why the technology works. They may build makeshift radios out of coconuts or other materials to try and communicate long distances, but of course they don’t actually work. They might build runways to try and coax planes into landing, bringing valuable cargo (this is where the term comes from). My favorite example of this is Prince Philip Movement, which is linked in the ‘current cults’ section of this article. Some believe that contact with a technologically advanced alien civilization may lead to similar reactions here on Earth, including the rejection of Earth-based principles/valuables/technology in hopes of gaining access to superior alien technology/principles/valuables.

Supplement: [Ancient Astronauts \[Wikipedia\]](#)

This is a great overview of the idea that many of the great human advances (in evolution, in technology, in architecture, etc.) aren’t easily explained by natural causes and thus may have

been given to us by aliens that visited very long ago (and have since left). It's very intuitively appealing, but is another example of the logical fallacy such that 'just because we can't explain it, doesn't mean it necessarily is caused by a paranormal source.' Some achievements have since been explained (e.g., the building of the Great Pyramids in Egypt: <https://www.livescience.com/45285-how-egyptians-moved-pyramid-stones.html>) and some haven't been yet. There is also something to be said about how similar many of the ancient accounts of beings coming from the sky are (in the religious texts and ancient artwork). Indeed, many religious accounts describe gods/angels/beings coming down from the sky. Joseph Campbell (and Erich von Daniken) summarizes many of these in his book, *The Masks of God*, and argues that the fact that there is so much consensus in common religious themes around the world, there must be some underlying psychological motivation that unites those narratives. He makes a similar argument related to the common hero's journey/quest narrative in his book "The Hero with a Thousand Faces," which you may be more familiar with (Luke Skywalker, King Arthur, Beowulf, and most ancient Greek heroes all follow similar paths, for instance).

Module 4

[Introduction to Module 4 \[Video\]](#)

Read Ch 14 in Groome & Roberts Textbook

This is a really great synopsis of many psychological phenomena that can be employed in understanding many of the paranormal experiences we discuss in class. Much of it will be review by this point, so feel free to skim sections that seem repetitive and focus more on new information. In particular, pay attention to the links the author makes between childhood trauma, fantasy proneness, and belief in paranormal experiences.

Read Ch 9 in Groome & Roberts Textbook

This chapter is a great synopsis and is not very kind to the notion that astrology can make valid predictions about the future. One thing that I think is interesting with this is that much of the work was done by Hans Eysenck, one of the most famous psychologists of all time. He was famous for research in personality and intelligence and was one of the first to claim that racial differences in intelligence test scores were due to environmental/cultural influences and not due to inherent differences (e.g., most people thought that Blacks were just mentally inferior to Whites based on biology). He got punched in the face, bomb

threats, and threats against his family for going against this racist narrative. He was also the most cited living psychologist in the world when he died in 1997.

[“Making Sense of the Nonsensical: An Analysis of Jonestown”](#) by Neal Osherow, March 29, 2017 [Website]

This is a great synopsis of what happened with the People’s Temple, giving appropriate attention to the beginnings of the group. In particular, note how Jim Jones was seen as a religious leader with an inspiring vision of a future full of love and racial equality (which was a flashpoint at the time – and remains so now). Looking back, it’s easy to see how things played out and say “I would never buy into something like that, those people are nuts.” However, these groups are very appealing at first and tend to change over time to the oppressive entities they become. The principles related to group cohesion, the power of authority, transformational leadership, minority influence, group polarization, the ‘foot-in-the-door’ phenomenon and many other psychological phenomena are extremely relevant here.

[“6 of the Most Infamous Cults in History”](#) by Thea Glassman, Dec 7, 2018 [Insider website]

This briefly lists some of the most famous and violent cults in modern history. Notice that many of the different cults share the same qualities,

including social isolation of members, strict rules/punishments, and religious/alien-related narratives. I'd encourage further reading on the Branch Davidians and Heaven's Gate, as these are some of the most prototypical cult narratives.

["Lessons from Jonestown: The Mass Suicide of People's Temple Followers 25 Years Ago Teaches Psychologists What Happens When Social Psychology is Placed in the Wrong Hands"](#) By Melissa Dittmann, November 2003, Monitor on Psychology, Vol 34, No. 10 [Article]

This is a basic understanding of how cult leaders can use social psychological principles to control others. However, there's a lot more to this, so I'm providing other readings to supplement this. This is a nice piece to pause and think about our professional ethical responsibilities as psychologists/researchers/teachers/counselors, etc.

Watch: [Siberian Cult Leader Thinks He's Jesus, Vice Guide to Travel Sr, E4 \[Video\]](#)

This is a short documentary of a contemporary cult leader in Siberia. It demonstrates many of the principles we've read about. There are also excellent documentaries about Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, the Rajneesh Movement (this one was local – outside the Dalles, OR; watch Wild, Wild Country on Netflix for this one). The

cult depicted in this video has not turned violent, it seems.

[“Four Elements of Transformational Leadership”](#) by Chron Contributor July 8, 2020 [Houston Chronicle article]

This is a short business article that describes the four basic components of transformational leadership, which is the hallmark of leadership from IO psychology and management scholarship. These tactics are used by all effective leaders – in business, in government, in military, and (dun, dun, dun...) in cults. Again, we have to remember that social psychology is powerful and can be used for good as well as for evil. From this, you should know the four tactics and their definitions and think about how they can play out in a cult context.

Supplement: [I Grew up in a Cult. It Was Heaven — and Hell.](#) | Lilia Tarawa | TEDxChristchurch [Video]

In this video a former cult member describes her experience. It may elicit strong emotions and has some coarse language, so some folks may not want to watch it.

Module 5

[Introduction to Module 5 \[Video\]](#)

[“The Origins of Voodoo: The Misunderstood Religion”](#), April 21, 2015 [Ancient Origins website]

This is a nice introduction to Voodoo, which has been misunderstood and misrepresented in popular culture. Many argue that the parallels between voodoo spirits and Catholic saints made it easy to associate the two philosophies (e.g., the saint of XYZ often has a corresponding ‘loa’ in voodoo).

Supplement: [Marie Laveau: American Vodou Queen](#) by Shantrelle P. Lewis [Encyclopedia Britannica]

This is a quick biography of Marie Laveau, the Voodoo Queen of New Orleans. Also of interest might be this short article on Veve, which are symbols used to conjure powerful voodoo spirits (e.g., Papa Legba)

[“The Natural Origins of Voodoo: How Misconceptions About Photographs Reveals an Implicit Sympathetic Reasoning”](#) by Bruce Hood, July 6, 2013 [Psychology Today article]

Voodoo dolls are more of a popular stereotype related to voodoo than a very common practice, but this short article describes the psychological relationship between representations of people/objects and the people/objects themselves. This is likely due to the representativeness heuristic from social psychology.

Supplement: [The Origins of Witch Trials | A Century](#)

[of Murder with Dr Suzannah Lipscomb \(1/2\) | Timeline \[Video\]](#)

Supplement: [Witches: A Century of Murder Part 2 of 2 \(Witch Trial Documentary\) | Timeline \[Website\]](#)

Witches were prominent in Europe long before the events in Salem, Massachusetts. This 2-part series provides a great, though kind of long, account of the witch trials in England. Other witch trials spun out of the Great Inquisition in Spain and other countries. An entire class could be devoted to just this topic – we are focusing mostly on the causes and implications of the Salem witch trials, which occurred as the European witch trials were winding down already.

This video series has some violent scenes that may make some uncomfortable. Here is a [historical overview of the European witch trials](#)

Supplement: [Malleus Maleficarum \[Wikipedia\]](#)

The Malleus Maleficarum is the book that was used to identify and prosecute witches. It was the most circulated book on the planet besides the Bible. The PSU library actually has a 1492 edition of the Malleus in their rare books collection. Last summer, I took the class to see it and it's totally wild. With the current pandemic, we can't do that this summer, but once things settle down and the library fully reopens you can schedule a time to go see it with the librarian or maybe we can get

together and take a field trip sometime in the future. Under normal circumstances, those types of resources are available to the public and the librarians are happy to facilitate access. For this book, you aren't allowed to touch it because it's so old and rare, but they'll flip the pages for you and give a history of the book.

Watch: [Salem Witch Trials – History Documentary](#)
[\[Video\]](#)

This is an EXCELLENT documentary that focuses on the witch trials that occurred in Salem Village in the 1690s. It provides a good amount of context related to gender norms, religious influences, environmental concerns – all of which contributed to the events that happened. Pay attention to the psychological impact/influences of these circumstances. Also pay attention to WHO gets accused of being a witch initially (and why), who does the accusing (and think about why), and what happens when other types of people start getting accused. Finally, also pay attention to the lasting impact of the witch trials in terms of how we conduct legal investigations now (e.g., what is considered acceptable evidence, one's status as innocent until proven guilty).

[“Monsters: We Are Visited by Monsters Because we are Drawn to See What we Dread to See”](#) by Glenn C. Altschuler, November 22, 2016 [Psychology Today article]

This is a short review of a much longer book, but this gives us a brief understanding of what I think is a really insightful taxonomy/classification system for the monsters/monster stories we've created over time. The basic idea is that monsters are created out of guilt/anxiety. Having stories in which our monsters come for us and are ultimately defeated works as a way for us to wrestle with things that are causing us anxiety. For example, monsters from nature (King Kong, Jaws, Tremors [one of my favs]) may represent guilt over wrecking the environment. Created monsters (evil robots, genetic experiment mistakes, Jurassic Park) may represent anxiety about parenthood or our ability to play god. Monsters from within (zombies, werewolves) represent anxiety with trying to negotiate our desires with our responsibilities. Monsters from the past (mummies, dragons) may represent guilt about abandoning or disrespecting sacred practices (this is also why 'ancient Indian burial grounds' are often depicted as haunted).

Supplement: [Slender Man \[Wikipedia\]](#)

I like the Slender Man story because it's one of the few times where a completely made-up monster (by design) manifested into something real enough to cause actual harm to a person. It's like that old movie MTV made to make fun of boy bands, but then their songs actually did well on the

music charts and they became an actual legitimate boy band. Or how Hanna Harto got a cooking show out of My Drunk Kitchen

[“Flashed Face Distortion Effect Makes Ordinary Portraits Look Hideous”](#) by Michael Zhang, May 22, 2012
[PetaPixel article]

These videos depict a strange illusion our eyes play on us with flashed images of faces. The second is the better of the two.

Supplement: [“The Monster Mind”](#) by Jonathan Myers, Psychologist, 28(7), 560-563, July 2015 [Article]

This article provides an overview of some of the reasons that we report seeing monsters from a cognitive/perception perspective. Another example from evolutionary psychology that I really love is children’s fears of sleeping alone and/or perceiving monsters in the closet, outside, or under the bed. Evolutionary psychology suggests that because we evolved as hunter/gatherers, leaving small children to sleep alone makes them vulnerable to being attacked by predators and children are thus instinctually pre-programmed to 1) not want to go to bed alone and 2) cry out when they are alone and perceive danger (which is especially likely at their age because they don’t have much experience distinguishing dangerous noises from harmless ones). At one point, I could have sworn that I also read that little boys are more

likely to perceive monsters in the closet or outside and little girls are more likely to perceive monsters under the bed because in pre-civilization times female early-humans slept in trees and male-early humans slept on the ground, protecting the females above. So, danger for females came from below but danger for males came from the side. I can't for the life of me find this anywhere now, so it may not be true...

Supplement: [Mermaids: The Body Found \(2011\) \[Video\]](#)

Supplement: [“Don't Bring These Haunted Objects Home”](#) by Lucia Peters, October 2, 2014 [Bustle article]

There are plenty of lists of haunted objects – there's nothing special about this one. Each one has its own more detailed backstory, so I encourage you to look around a bit more if you're interested in this. For instance, in the case of the crying boy painting, it was also found that the string holding the painting typically burned quite quickly, which caused the painting to fall face down on the ground, preventing it from being burned with the rest of the house. That's why the frames didn't burn. What's interesting about many of the haunted objects stories is many of the similar folktales, even though the objects are quite different. For instance, there are a lot of haunted dolls and mistreating the doll motivates the doll to seek revenge. There are stories about haunted

objects that come from sacred places, and removing them invites a curse – but sending them back to where they came from removes the curse. Many people point to these stories as ways of working through guilt.

Supplement: [Curse of the pharaohs \[Wikipedia\]](#)

One of my favorite stories of paranormal phenomena is the mummy's curse. It combines haunted places, haunted objects, the afterlife, and monsters (in some movies). You can skip down to the section called "Opening of King Tutankhamun's Tomb" if you want to focus on the curse and implications itself. Another favorite that's similar is the [Cursed Amethyst](#) [article]. Apparently, several jewels have been stolen from Indian temples, often with legends of curses attached to them. All of these stories align within a taxonomy of monsters (covered in another topic), in this case a collective guilt about desecrating sacred/ancient/religious places, which contributes to fear and attributions of paranormal forces

Watch: [Ghost Stories – The Psychology of fear – Secret Life of Ghosts & Werewolves \[Video\]](#)

In this video, participants report on the types of experiences they have in a haunted space, with commentary from experts

Supplement: [Lunatic Asylum \[Wikipedia\]](#)

Some information about lunatic asylums. This is

relevant to our class because many patients from years ago were thought to be possessed or suffering from some kind of paranormal affliction. Many asylums and prisons have been purposely designed to invoke fear and oppression in the inmates (look up images of the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia if you want to see an example of one of these). Finally, some folks argue that the prevalence of creepy prisons/asylums in scary movies is a way of coping with the collective guilt that we should (as a society) feel about the terrible conditions and procedures that inmates had to endure including electroshock therapy, trephination, lobotomies, induced seizures and comas, and extreme isolation.

[“Evolutionary Psychology Explains Why Haunted Houses Creep Us Out”](#) by Frank T. McAndrew, October 29, 2015
[The Conversation article]

This is a great short article that outlines the evolutionary, cognitive, and sensory features that trigger fear in haunted houses. They can be applied to houses and other spaces as well (e.g., prisons, asylums).

Supplement: [15 Most Mysterious Places in the World](#)
[The Crazy Tourist website]

Here is a list of places commonly believed to have paranormal forces associated with them.

There are many lists out there and each of these places has more information, so this is another area where you can do a lot of your own research. Many paranormal places are linked with other phenomena. For instance, spiritual vortexes are said to exist in Sedona, AZ (and several other places around the world) and these vortexes are said to attract UFOs. Some that I like that aren't on this list are the 'hum' (reported around the world but heard most prominently in Taos, NM) which don't seem to be linked to anything else; and the ringing rocks park in Pennsylvania, which are supposed to have supernatural healing properties.

["Scientifically Haunted House Suggests You're a Sucker"](#) by Brandon Keim, October 30, 2009 [Wired article]

These psychologists tried to leverage what we know about what causes some people to feel creeped out (like infrared and electromagnetic waves). Pay attention to the success rates and explanations they provide.