DR MARY’S MONKEY:
HOW THE UNSOLVED MURDER OF A DOCTOR,
A SECRET LABORATORY IN NEW ORLEANS
AND CANCER-CAUSING MONKEY VIRUSES
ARE LINKED TO LEE HARVEY OSWALD, THE
JFK ASSASSINATION AND EMERGING GLOBAL
EPIDEMICS.

By Edward, T. Haslam (2007)
Waterville. TrineDay.

And:

HOW WE KNOW WHAT ISN’T SO:
THE FALLIBILITY OF HUMAN REASON IN
EVERYDAY LIFE.

By Thomas Gilovich (1997)

Reviewed by Dr Mike Sutton¹

An article based upon this book review can be found on the Best Thinking web site. Here: http://www.bestthinking.com/articles/science/social_sciences/sociology/on-pseudoscholarship

Foreword

Academic journals do not ordinarily review non-academic books. In reviewing what is essentially the shaky foundations for a number of conspiracy theories, I have found it necessary to draw not only upon my own personal critique of Dr Mary’s Monkey but also the conclusions of other writers who seek to view its contents from a rational and objective viewpoint.

Some who engage in pseudo scholarship make fortunes from publishing it. By comparison, scholarly myth and conspiracy busting is lengthy and unrewarding work. I know something about this personally because last year I smashed a long standing academic myth about the impact of bad data on policymaking (Sutton, 2010).

Reviewers of pseudo scholarship who do not wish to spend their lives thoroughly researching different published conspiracy theories and other counter knowledge have

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little or no choice but to support their own reviews with fully referenced and pertinent critical conclusions drawn from the reliable research of others. This is why I have included alongside this review of Dr Mary’s Monkey a review of Gilovich’s (2007) classic work on how to distinguish truth from counterknowledge. This integrated approach is not the usual style for an academic book review. But Haslam’s is not a scholarly academic book. So why, you might ask, should the IJC review it at all?

On 11 December 2010, Edward Haslam wrote and asked me whether or not the IJC would be interested in reviewing his book. Having read the title I was intrigued to know why the author of such a book would want his work examined by critical criminologists. Furthermore, I wondered whether there were lessons to be had for both the academic community and the wider public in undertaking such an unusual exercise.

I decided to review it because, at the very least, I think that those who teach criminology need to point their undergraduate students in the direction of published scholarly work that shows them exactly how to identify pseudo scholarship, which they might otherwise believe to be true.

Before delving into the detail of Dr Mary’s Monkey, I begin with a very personal anecdote in support my proposition that the study of pseudo-scholarship counterknowledge is a worthy topic for criminologists:

In the two year period when I was between 18 and 20, two people I had been to school with committed suicide. Two others that I worked with died in a motorcycle accident and one stabbed a shopkeeper to death. When I lived in Kent a woman was murdered in the street, at night at the end of my road. Then when I moved to Nottinghamshire a man was murdered at the end of my road – once again in the street and at night.

I once lived in a 200 year old house where, according to village folklore several previous owners had committed suicide. One owner who survived the house had exactly the same name as me.

I once lived next door to a man who was a dead ringer for the Yorkshire Ripper and who was actually questioned as a suspect in the killings.

I was for two years a student nurse and witnessed first hand a great many deaths.

There is an Australian criminologist with the same surname as I and another called Michael Sutton who writes crime fiction.

One colleague that I worked with in the Home Office died in service in a tragic sledging accident, another in a car crash, two of cancer and one of heart disease. One had a fatal heart attack within months of retirement.

A police Superintendent who implemented my Market Reduction Approach in Kent died young, suddenly and unexpectedly of heart failure.
There may be others that I have forgotten about or do not know about - because I never went digging.

No one has ever looked to make connections between me and the coincidences about my name and the many deaths that have occurred around me. To add to these occurrences and coincidences, the very same day on which I published a hypothesis that – according to Marcus Felson’s Rational Choice theory – computer and video gaming and Internet use might be the reason for the otherwise unfathomable 15 year crime drop (see: http://www.bestthinking.com/thinkers/science/social_sciences/sociology/mike-sutton?tab=blog) a masked gang attempted to attack me on the way home; something that has never happened to me before. I had, mysteriously, in my hand the very latest copy of Felson’s Crime and Everyday Life. Did “They” want to silence me?

There are several other mysterious or else embarrassing things about some of my past research - some involving national and international intelligence (others involving acts of Parliament) - that I could tell you about. But I won’t. Because I signed the Official Secrets Act. How mysterious is all that?

It is possible (but I hope not) that one day someone associated with me - perhaps one of my many hundreds of past and future students or a senior police officer that I have worked with - will commit a very serious crime. Would that implicate me? Would that raise more questions than answers about the mysterious criminologist Dr Mike Sutton?

I expect that if I, or someone else, spent years trying, connections could be made between many of the people who have died around me. These connections could then be used to construct some kind of pattern that asks questions and speculates whether they might have died for some nefarious or mysterious purpose. All those deaths might have been caused by “Them”; whoever “They” are.

What’s going on here? What has all this unconnected personal rambling and random nonsense got to do with criminology?

Essentially, this review is about how we know what is not so. In an uncertain world there is one thing we can be certain about: all people die. After reading this review your bus, train, car, taxi or chauffer driven limousine might crash into a wall on your way home. Just because your spouse or wealthy and famous in-laws might benefit from your death does not mean that they orchestrated the accident.

Sometimes we die of natural causes, sometimes in accidents, sometimes people commit suicide, other times they are murdered. To be repetitive: people commit murders, get sick, have accidents and some simply decide to end it all. Amongst all this purposive and naturally occurring action, coincidences happen – that’s why we have a word for it. Some people seek to make connections between events to make sense of the world. Some try to make sense of randomness, coincidence, tragedy and evil.
The problem with all this is that some people spend years creating patterns from links - by joining together data (joining the dots) and then ask questions about how such links could possibly occur by coincidence. And there is a burgeoning market for this stuff – much of it about serious crime. The publisher of Dr Mary’s Monkey sent me, along with the book, a list of their “Titles Currently Available from Trine Day” which contains over 25 books with titles that look like conspiracy theory literature to me.

Cook (2009: 6) seeks to explain why it is that some people construct works of counterknowledge by making links to construct irrational patterns:

“Despite the fact that the theories themselves can be convoluted, most conspiracy adherents believe the world is a simpler place than it really is. It’s easier to believe in an evil cabal of assassins than a deranged “lone gunman.” … “Understanding a world filled with coincidence, random happenstance, and human error presents a greater challenge than one in which everything is linked and there’s an underlying reason for what is really going on.”

On any given topic, those who seek objectively to weigh relevant data and pay as much, if not more, attention to anything that challenges their pet hypothesis we call scholars. Those who peculiarly fail to collect, or deliberately by-pass, the relevant data that would spoil a pet hypothesis or link-pattern, we call pseudo scholars. By way of example, Lombroso was a criminological pseudo scholar.

There have been in the past and there are today people who write and teach pseudoscience about crime. I know of some personally. And this is why it is important that criminology should pay more attention to understanding how to recognize claptrap and how to debunk it.

To be good scholars we have to know what pseudo scholarship is.

Some criminologists that I know simply and uncritically teach pseudo scholarship as though it is truth. Some pseudo-scholars are conspiracy theorists; others simply make tenuous links from questionable sources in order to ask spurious questions in order to get conspiracies going.

Dr Mary’s Monkey

The essential core of the story we are told in this book – at least as I understand it - is, to say the least, very involved. “Please take a deep breath before reading any further. It is that ex-airline pilot James Ferrie, a dead witness of a failed 1967 legal case by discredited attorney Jim Garrison to prosecute the businessman Clay Shaw for conspiring to assassinate President Kennedy, was working in an ‘underground laboratory’ in his New Orleans apartment with respected orthodox university cancer researcher, Dr Mary Sherman. They were working, amongst other things, for the CIA to develop a means to assassinate Fidel Castro by way of cancer. Sherman was murdered in her own home three years earlier in July 1964 and the crime never solved. Garrison claimed in an interview in Playboy Magazine, no less, that Dr Mary Sherman had worked in Ferrie’s secret cancer lab but offered no evidence to corroborate the claim.
Haslam’s claims in Dr Mary’s Monkey hinge on there ever having been an association of any kind between Ferrie and Dr Mary Sherman. His latest edition of Dr Mary’s Monkey produces a new witness to claim that there really was an association. The witness is Judyth Baker, who claims that she was recruited by Dr Mary Sherman into a Mafia and the CIA backed “Kill Castro with cancer plot”. The underlying potential conspiracy is that Dr Mary Sherman was linked to JFK’s killer (or “patsy” for the crime) Oswald through Dr Alton Ochshner (former President of the American Cancer Society) and the alleged CIA and Mafia operative and paid cancer hobbyist Ferrie. And so perhaps Dr Mary Sherman was murdered to silence her - just in case. The book is called Dr Mary’s Monkey because she experimented on them and that leads Haslam (p.223) to ask but not answer: “Was Mary Sherman using a linear particle accelerator to kill or weaken monkey viruses as part of a desperate attempt to develop an anti-cancer vaccine? Was she testing the results of those experiments in Ferrie’s underground medical laboratory? Perhaps this is how good science goes bad?” Haslam alludes through snaky speculation that Dr Mary Sharman and Ferrie may have been the cause of the AIDS epidemic.

Finally, as if that is not enough for one book, Haslam’s new so-called “witness”, Judyth Baker, - we are told - claims to have had an affair with President Kennedy’s assassin (or “patsy”) Lee Harvey Oswald.

Cook (2009: 82) amusingly writes of Haslam’s convoluted tale: “Oswald supposedly told Baker that he would do whatever he could to undermine the plot to kill JFK and save the president. After the JFK assassination, Ferrie warned Baker that if she said anything about what she knew she would be killed. Baker remains alive, so perhaps the coast is finally clear. Or maybe she’s a nut.”

The foreword to Haslam’s book is written by Jim Marrs, who is the author of the conspiracy books: ‘Rule by Secrecy: The Hidden History That Connects the Tri lateral Commission, the Freemasons, and the Great Pyramids’ and ‘Crossfire, the plot that killed Kennedy’ and ‘The Terror Conspiracy (about his belief that the attacks of 11 September 2001 were likely to be an inside job) and several others on UFO’s. The myth buster Aaronovitch (2010: 196) mockingly writes of Marrs: “Here is a man who must think very deeply before taking a decision about whether to cross the road.”

Marrs’s contribution to supporting the veracity of Haslam’s own speculative work is that in this latest edition of his book Haslam brings a living “witness” to support his belief that Dr Mary Sherman worked with Ferrie in an “underground” laboratory in Ferrie’s apartment in New Orleans to develop a cancer causing virus to assassinate Fidel Castro.

The living witness is Judyth Baker. Baker’s credibility has been seriously questioned by others looking to fact check the JFK assassination. Some of these can be found in a so called “expert” Internet forum discussion at http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?showtopic=10653.

If you click on the above http link and then scroll down your computer screen you will see that a person purporting to be Edward Haslam himself (if indeed it is him and not one of “Them”) appears online – if only to say he is too busy to answer his informed critics in the forum. It is worth a read for that reason alone.
I think that Dr Mary’s Monkey provides a valuable bad data source for scholars of pseudo-scholarship. The book reveals how a lone author stringing together intangible and often highly personal anecdotal information, often of unverified accuracy, constructs the foundations for a dubious conspiracy theory.

Dr Mary’s Monkey is essential reading for anyone interested in how intelligent and seemingly respectable authors embrace evidence that supports their aims, while paying far less attention to that which does not.

Cook (2009) believes that conspiracy theories say as much about those who assemble and disseminate them and the people who believe in them as they do about the people involved. Gilovich (1991) tells us that the strength and resiliency of certain beliefs cry out for explanation and that we must not only be concerned that a thing is not true, but with why people believe in that particular falsehood. (a) How are questionable and erroneous beliefs formed? And (b) how are they maintained?

**How We Know What Isn’t So: The Fallibility of Human Reason in Everyday Life.**

Thomas Gilovich has written a timeless classic text that reveals various types of erroneous thinking and then goes many steps further to thoroughly explain exactly why it happens. His book uses fully referenced orthodox research evidence to explain why we have a tendency to see what we expect to see, to do as we are told, to try to believe what others believe – even when we think it is irrational to do so. And he ends with positive suggestions for improving our fallibilities in all of these respects.

The critical thinking facilities of criminologists may make important inroads into knowledge about non-academic crime counterknowledge. Indeed, Gilovich (p.193) has conducted and cites research suggesting that social scientists are better equipped than chemists, physicists or biologists for debunking fallacies:

“An awareness of how and when to question and a recognition of what it takes to truly know something are among the most important elements of what constitutes an educated person. Social scientists, I believe may be in the best position to instill them.”

Dr Mary’s Monkey does contribute to valuable knowledge by way of its author’s own unique place in the huge market for spurious unanswered questions, conspiracy, counterknowledge, and voodoo history. There is important criminological knowledge to be gained by studying how Haslam weaves a compelling account for the credulous consumer of spurious information, which can be used to construct their own conspiracy theory. Such knowledge about the marketing of, and market for, pseudo scholarship is essential if we are to learn more and teach others how to know the difference between good scholarship and pseudo scholarship.

Criminology should provide its students and the wider public with effective and practicable ways to identify the difference between real and pseudo scholarship and between real conspiracies such as Watergate and, what is in my opinion, the sort of time-stealing, selective bias, monkey business that comprises the bulk of Dr Mary’s Monkey.
Talking of ‘monkeys’, evolutionary theory teaches us that we humans evolved from a common species of ape. Charles Darwin was famous for writing down any evidence he found that questioned his theory because he knew that he tended to forget it – while having no trouble remembering that which supported it. Darwin dealt with any “problems for the theory” extremely openly and thoroughly, which is partly why he is recognized as one of the greatest scientists and scholars of all time.

On the subject of evolution, I wish to leave the final words of this review to the highly respected psychologist Gilovich (1991: 10):

“The tendency to impute order to ambiguous stimuli is simply built into the cognitive machinery we use to interpret the world. It may have been bred into us through evolution because of its general adaptiveness: We can capitalize on ordered phenomena in ways that we cannot on those that are random. The predisposition to detect patterns and make connections is what leads to discovery and advance. The problem, however, is that the tendency is so strong and automatic that we sometimes detect coherence even when it does not exist.”

… “Many times however, we treat the products of this tendency not as hypothesis, but as established facts. The predisposition to impose order can be so automatic and so unchecked that we often end up believing in the existence of phenomena that just aren’t there.”

References


