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Interestingly, and in spite of the fact that a scientific literature base for exploding head syndrome has been recently forming, other nonscientific explanations have been proposed. For example, exploding head syndrome phenomena appear to have been worked into various conspiracy theories. More specifically, some individuals may interpret that the fright and auditory hallucinations so characteristic of exploding head syndrome are not natural events, but are the result of targeted harassment by nefarious government agents. A belief in so-called “gang stalking,” which is the term used by alleged victims of psychological attacks/harassment (Kershaw, 2008), appears to be growing, as evidenced by thousands of websites, videos, and organized events centered on these alleged phenomena (CBS, 2014).

There seems to be a great deal of variety in the putative forms of attack and harassment attributed to the perpetrators of gang stalking (i.e., both physical and psychological). However, a major concern within the community of alleged “targeted individuals” is *electronic* harassment (CBS, 2014). This is believed to involve the use of directed energy weapons (e.g., microwave radiation generators) that can be used to inflict various forms of torture on the minds and bodies of targeted individuals (*Foundation Stop Electronic Weapons Stop Gang Stalking* [STOPEG], 2015).

This belief in directed energy weapons may be the primary link between gang-stalking conspiracies and symptoms of exploding head syndrome. Namely, one purported use of directed energy weapons is to prevent or disrupt sleep, sometimes through the use of a singular sound, of short duration, at night (Foundation STOPEG, 2015). Additionally, microwave radiation is thought to be projected through walls and directly at the body (especially the head) of the targeted

individual. This radiation is believed to produce auditory effects that are unexpected and frightening to the sleeper, resulting in sudden awakenings with a racing heart and acute confusion (Foundation STOPEG, 2015) as well as sensations that can feel like electric shocks (Oliver, 2010). Along with the paroxysms of sound, directed energy weapons are thought to cause the victim to see lights and experience myoclonic jerks (e.g., Oliver, 2010).

Although many individuals have relatively isolated “pockets” of unusual beliefs in the presence of otherwise intact reality-testing (e.g., beliefs in psychic abilities or Bigfoot), the gang stalking community has been characterized by some psychiatrists as perhaps reinforcing the delusions of others and, in effect, intensifying these beliefs through social media and other means (Kershaw, 2008). Some have speculated that individuals involved with this community could, in fact, be psychotic throughout their waking life in addition to experiencing regular hypnagogic/hypnopompic hallucinations (Kershaw, 2008). Regardless, the phenomenology of exploding head syndrome appears consistent with the complaints of some of these “targeted individuals,” who report otherwise inexplicable loud noises at night during sleep transitions. On a perhaps related note, one online survey ($N = 108$) found a significant and positive association between anomalous beliefs and symptoms of exploding head syndrome (Sherwood, 1999). Anomalous beliefs in this survey included a range of experiences, including beliefs in extrasensory perception (ESP), psychokinesis, out-of-body events, and extraterrestrial experiences (Sherwood, 1999). Significant associations occurred between symptoms of exploding head syndrome and incidents of both childhood and adulthood anomalous beliefs, current levels of anomalous beliefs, as well as childhood fantasy proneness, which has been associated with reports of paranormal experiences. It is possible that such childhood (and adulthood) anomalous experiences and beliefs may lead to misinterpretations of exploding head syndrome symptoms (Sherwood, 1999). The possibility also exists that the frightening experiences in exploding head syndrome may lead some individuals to gravitate toward anomalous beliefs as a means of understanding these otherwise inexplicable phenomena.

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