

**IS THERE  
NO SUCH THING  
AS  
COINCIDENCE?**

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Coincidences occur all the time, and in everyone's lives - some are trivial, and others are attention grabbing.

There are some simple reasons why most people tend to misread and misinterpret coincidences:

- Typically, most people believe that "all effects" must have a "deliberate causality"
- Typically, most people have a poor innate grasp of the principle of "probability"
- Typically, most people have a poor understand of the laws regarding "truly large numbers"

Consequently, most people easily succumb to "subjective validation [1]", which is "the tendency to remember only positive correlations, and to forget the far more numerous [often countless] misses."

However, the true significance of "bizarre coincidences" can be better understood with what is known as the law of "truly large numbers". This law of statistics hypothesises that with a large enough sample size, even the "extremely unlikely" becomes "likely", and therefore any "outrageous" thing can and is "certain" to manifest.

Thus, when enough numbers are involved (e.g. numbers of people, events, units of time, dates, etc), "unusual" occurrences and coincidences become highly probable. With this understanding and perspective, we can now remove the mystery, and place our focus on rationality and not on subjectivity.

Thus it is that a poor understanding of probability and statistics, which is common in our society, causes individuals to be "more awed" than they should be when confronted with "bizarre coincidences"; and hence the easy attraction to a "metaphysical" explanation.

Unfortunately, human memory is not like a computer disk, which accurately records everything experienced - for us, dramatic experiences/coincidences tend to be remembered more than mundane ones; which leads to a phenomenon called "subjective validation", also known as "selective memory". Therefore, it is only natural for us to remember "unusual experiences" and to misinterpret coincidences.

Take, for example, a common coincidence - you are thinking about a person who has not contacted you in quite a while, and then suddenly the phone rings and it is them - this is often seen as a "striking" coincidence with telepathic overtones. However, this event becomes much less striking if you consider how many times (probably countless times) you have thought of people who didn't then immediately call.

Now applying this principle to the "psychic world", we find that many psychics use (some intentionally, and some unintentionally) a common scheme, which is to make dozens of predictions knowing that the more that are made, the better the odds are that one of the predictions will be realized. When a prediction does come true, the psychic then relies on everyone to "conveniently forget" the 99% of predictions that were just plain wrong.

Consequently, this makes the "correct prediction" seem much more convincing than it really is.

Unfortunately, this is a conscious or deliberate form of "subjective validation"; or, in other words, "fraud".

The innate human "coincidence-detection ability" has developed over countless millennia through evolution and natural selection. Thus, being able to detect significant correlations and implications between events would give our ancestors a significant survival advantage; which in turn would be passed down through the subsequent generations. Psychologists now hypothesize that man is, in fact, "hardwired" to look everywhere for patterns and synchronistic connections - a part of the human survival instinct.

Unfortunately, modern man, with his numberless connections and interactions between people, experiences, and events, constantly activates (typically subconsciously) his "coincidence-detection abilities", resulting in him continually needing to suggest explanations and invoke esoteric forces, such as psychic and spirit powers, which are subjective and may be totally invalid.

However, there may be some synchronistic events which may have a "hidden underlying significance", and the search for the linked causality may have merit, if not interest. Nevertheless, the vast majority of coincidences that we experience will simply turn out to be much more probable, if they are analyzed critically and with common sense. Taking this into account, along with our evolved predisposition for "subjective validation", our desire to believe in something esoterically linked to the power of coincidence is now understandable - and correctible.

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### Definition

The following definition of "subjective validation" is taken from the *Skeptic's Dictionary*:

[1] **Subjective validation** - is the process of validating words, initials, statements, or signs as accurate because one is able to find them personally meaningful and significant. Subjective validation explains why many people are seduced by the apparent accuracy of pseudoscientific personality profiles. Subjective validation deludes everyone from the housewife who thinks her happiness depends on her blood type or horoscope, to the FBI agent who thinks criminal profiles are spot on, to the therapist who thinks her Rorschach readings are penetrating portraits of psychological disorders. (*The Skeptic's Dictionary*, © Copyright 1994-2009, Robert T. Carroll)

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