

## The Disturbing Psychology of Conspiracy Theories & Parasocial Relationships with @annakitko

(May 22, 2026)

### **FRANK:**

Ladies and gentlemen, I just got back from our nation's capital and I want to tell you what we did there. I was invited to actually go on a semiprivate tour with the Speaker of the House of Representatives. That's Mike Johnson, who is the speaker of the House from Louisiana. There were about 20 to 25 of us who were given the Spiritual Heritage Tour by Mike Johnson, the Speaker himself.

And it was an amazing tour. There's so much I want to share with you. But that's not the topic of today's program. It's going to be the topic of our next podcast, the Midweek Podcast. And if you're listening on the American Family Radio Network, you will not hear that on Tuesday. You're going to have to find the I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist podcast. What I do want to show you, though, is this one clip. And if you're on radio, you can hear what Speaker Johnson is saying.

But it's fun to see it because I filmed this just yesterday. We're filming this on Thursday. So this was yesterday, it was May 20th, Wednesday, May 20th. He gave us this tour for over an hour through the House of Representatives, through the entire Capital. And this is his favorite spot in the Capitol. It's the Billy Graham statue.

And so here's Speaker Johnson explaining what the Billy Graham statue is and his relationship to it. Here it is.

### **[VIDEO]:**

Hey guys, real quick, raise your hand if you've been, you've done capital tours before, right? Everybody probably has. Not like this. So I just wanted to bring you by. This is the crypt. The idea we're trying to get to the House floor. But we were going to go by way of the Speaker's office, because I was showing you a couple of things that most people don't get on the tour.



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I'll show you the actual Speaker's office because there's some really neat historic things in there. We're going to go by the House, the chapel that we use, the leaders' Chapel, which most people have never seen before. We'll go to the balcony so you can get the greatest photo op in all of Washington right there. But I wanted to just stop at one statue anyway. As you know, all states have two statues, and on occasion, they'll switch them out for history. And so over the last several years, we've had a lot of statues change up.

It just so happens in the last three years, I think I've presided over maybe four or five of these ceremonies because the speaker does that. One of them I got to do was Billy Graham. North Carolina finally decided to give a proper recognition to what I think is probably their favorite son. But they brought it in, and it's an extraordinary statue. And the whole family was here for the ceremony. And a couple of hours before we were doing this, we filled Statuary Hall, and a lot of, you know, famous evangelists and Christian artists, recording artists and all were here for this.

But Franklin Graham came into my office two hours before the ceremony started, and he said, I won't do his accent because I can't. I won't do my impression. But he said, speaker, we wanted to bring you something we thought you might want to see before the ceremony. I said, what's that? And he pulls out of this, little briefcase, Billy Graham's study Bible. And he hands it to me. I'm like, you know, it's like the Shroud of Turin or something.

He said, if you wanted to spend a little time with that, we'll be back. You know, we'll see in a couple of hours. So he leaves me with Billy Graham's study Bible. So I was flipping through it. I mean, wow. It's got his handwritten study notes, and next to the passages of scripture. I took a bunch of screenshots. I don't know if it's legal or not, but I did it anyway. Some of my favorite passages. And then I turned it back in. So in the ceremony, I used Billy Graham's Bible to cite the scripture as we dedicated the statue.

And one of my staff members got a really awesome shot where I'm standing. It just so happens I'm sitting just like this, pointing to his Bible, just like that. And it shot up like this. It's my favorite photo of all time. But what a great representative for the state of North Carolina. We thought, we did the ceremony in Statuary Hall, and I had not been doing it long enough. I

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thought he was going to be like, it was set right by the door where he walked through, where, know, thousands of people every day walk through.

It would have been the most prominent statue. And I was like, what a fitting place. And I went on and on about what a great spot for Billy Graham. And then they moved him to the crib. I was going to start World War III over this. And then the North Carolina Statute Commission or whatever says, no, we chose it intentionally. We wanted it to be right here in the most prominent place where people walk through. And so I can't argue with the people who put it there, but that's pretty fine. Which, you want to go this way?

Okay, we're going to go up, and I'm going to take y' all through and show you a couple of things that nobody ever sees.

**FRANK:**

You're going to see much more of the tour that Speaker Johnson gave us in the next podcast. I just wanted to give you a little bit of a teaser of that. Mike Johnson is a brilliant constitutional attorney and a very strong evangelical Christian, and his faith comes through the entire tour he's giving to us, and you're going to be encouraged by it to have a man like that leading the House of Representatives.

More in the next podcast. As I say, I probably took another four or five segments of Mike Johnson giving us the tour, so stay tuned for that. But what I want to do now is reinstate my friend Anna Kitko back on the podcast. Because Anna, as you know, was on the podcast, I don't know, a couple of months ago, and she is the Ratio Christie director at the University of Tennessee.

And we were just out there at UT, along with our mutual friend, Alisa Childers. So here she is, ladies and gentlemen, all the way from Knoxville, Tennessee, the great apologist and counselor, ladies and gentlemen, Anna Kitko. Anna, how are you?

**ANNA:**

Hey, I'm doing fine. It's good to be back. Always a pleasure.

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**FRANK:**

It's great having you on. And today, we're going to tap into your sufficient expertise on a very interesting topic, related to sort of cult of personality.

Why do people believe in conspiracy Theories that have no real evidence behind them. What are para-social interactions or relationships? What are those all about? Why can you talk to some people about certain issues and others you can't because they seem so engrossed in a personality that if you were to say anything against or that disagrees with that personality, they would blow up.

So that's what we want to talk about today. Anna, how did you even get into this arena?

**ANNA:**

Yeah, so I have a background in teaching against coercive control and identifying it. Obviously, I have that therapeutic experience because I'm in an active clinic, and I'm doing this all the time, which means I get introduced to concepts by my clients, and I've noticed, and part of the reason why I want to talk to you about this is because I've noticed clients coming in to talk to me about conspiracy theories therapeutically.

They are so concerned by this that they're willing to pay a therapist to break things down with them and try to understand what's going on in the world. And I found that telling because, as you know, I live under a rock and happy to do so. And so I'm interested to see what the, what the concerns of the people are. And it was like, you know, you're a celebrity, and I'm sure you experience parasocial interactions. And we are talking, and you're like, I'd love to learn more about that sort of thing.

It seems kind of obscure that you'd want to talk about it. And I think it's a missing component that maybe should be a public discussion nowadays, considering it seems to me like the missing component to what's going on in the world, at least that's my take.

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**FRANK:**

Give us a layperson's definition of what a parasocial interaction is.

**ANNA:**

Yeah, so that's fancy terminology for what happens when a brain attaches to another brain and experiences the phenomena of intimacy and the sensation of intimacy, or a really solid attachment of like an understanding.

But it's a one-sided relationship and it happens primarily to celebrities. That's when kind of we first started to see this, where a lot of folks were spending hours and hours and hours disseminating information from a celebrity on a screen, or through music, for example. And human beings were experiencing connection, genuine connection, and really deep emotional concern for these individuals who had no idea who their fans were.

It wasn't a reciprocal relationship, but the people, the fans, were experiencing real sensations of intimacy and desire to defend, and of feelings of understanding and mutuality, even though it wasn't actually there in real life. And what do we do with that phenomenon? How does it affect the nervous system of the individual who's experiencing it? And so with the world of social media, where it seems to me almost every relationship is parasocial on some level, what does that mean?

How do we take that into account? What are the implications of a world in which grown human beings' relationships with other humans are one-sided and still deeply emotive?

**FRANK:**

What happens when people get really attached to a celebrity they don't really know, but they think they know?

**ANNA:**

Yeah, they have this kind of, there's a complex reaction. So when a brain attaches to another brain in a familial way, that can become extremely complex.

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**FRANK:**

Well, what we're going to do after the break is unpack that further because we see a lot of that online right now, ladies and gentlemen. A lot of conspiracy theories without evidence, yet people defend the person giving the conspiracy theory to the death as if they're some sort of personal friend. We're going to talk more about it right after the break with Anna Kitko. I'm Frank Turek. Don't go anywhere.

Ladies and gentlemen, you know people that seem to be so devoted to a personality that they don't really know, they just know them through video or online. They don't know them personally, but they are so devoted to this personality as if they're in some sort of intimate relationship with them. And you can't even break through and point out maybe something that personality has wrong without them blowing up at you as if you're attacking a personal friend, a personal lover, almost.

What is that? Well, my guest today, Anna Kitko, is an expert in this realm of psychology. She's also the Ratio Christi director at the University of Tennessee. We just had a session there about three weeks ago at UT, Anna as always does a great job. She helped answer questions along with Alisa Childers and myself.

And you can see that interaction on our YouTube channel. In fact, we'll put it in the show notes. But Anna, let's go back to parasocial interactions. How do they develop? How do they intensify? What happens to the psychology of a person when they get so involved in this kind of parasocial interaction?

**ANNA:**

So the attachment we're talking about with attachment theory, the sensation of attachment, or like, when I say sensation, like the eruption of emotion and the feelings of anger and betrayal and very normal human phenomena for when you're talking about like a close friend or a family member, that actually occurs in the person who has developed a parasocial relationship.

So even though they do not have a robust knowledge of this celebrity, they do experience a robust emotional response with regard to the celebrity when they feel this family member or

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intimate partner, and when I say intimacy, I just mean emotional intimacy, that the partner is being attacked. You can see this giant emotional response that comes out as though they feel the urge to defend their friend.

Because to their nervous system, that is a friend, that's someone that they feel that they've made this close bond with and they are doing what they genuinely feel and have the sensation of doing and not realizing that, well, actually, what may be developing here is that there's a mismatch between my cognitions. I know that that person is a celebrity and they don't know me personally.

And my emotions and sensation, which is something that can arise naturally in a nervous system and it happens all the time, which is part of why I'm concerned with it. You know, more awareness to a brain makes the brain more able to manage and understand itself and be able to see itself in that vein and to dial kind of those big emotional responses down.

**FRANK:**

When you say a brain, how does that relate to a mind?

Are you talking about more of the chemical reactions that happen in a brain when you have this kind para-social interaction? Are you talking about certain chemicals that are released that create this kind of bond?

**ANNA:**

So I'm trying to avoid the mind-brain problem and how we solve that issue, because we can avoid it and still be accurate with what's the phenomena of experience.

So, what we can agree on, regardless of where anybody falls on the what is consciousness and what is the mind and all that, regardless, we can all say that observations are units of information called memory. And those units of information have three components. You have the cognition, what you're thinking. You have the emotion, which is what you're feeling at the time of the thought, and also the sensation, which is where in your body you experience emotion and cognition, which is part of why you can have gut reactions.

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You're feeling the sensation of your abdomen squeezing in order to do that. So you learn that in observing those three things through life that you can manage those things. You learn what to do. You learn, hey, I really react strongly when I have a gut reaction, or I learned I can't trust my gut. So I'm only going to operate from cognition. You can manage, and change, and adapt, and that's just part of human experience.

With a parasocial interaction, what's occurring is that the sensation and emotion is erupting, but the cognition is staying basically latent. Like, well, I know I'm not a friend with X celebrity, but I feel the friendship, and I feel the urge. And those feelings, when they're robust enough, can drive a person who's not necessarily aware of the phenomena to go, I absolutely have the incentive to write that weird comment or to go off on a family member about a government official that I'm really, really, really attached to because they dared to be critical, because they're really feeling the sensation of betrayal and the need to defend a friend, even though they would say, cognitively, well, I know I'm not their friend, but they're still reacting as though they're their friends.

So they're having a hard time separating what's happening in their body from an authentic cognition, which would be, that's not my friend, it's okay if this person is critical negatively of that person, and I can tolerate negative criticism of someone that I enjoy listening to or being in proximity to.

**FRANK:**

So what happens if you point out to someone that obvious point that while you may admire that person, you only know what they publicly show you, which usually is very positive.

You know, the Instagram personality, everything's great. When you point that out to somebody and say, it seems like you're reacting very emotionally as if you know this person, when you and I both know you don't. How do they react when you say that?

**ANNA:**

Hopefully in a positive way. I try to make it as soft as humanly possible to say something along the lines of shared space.

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Because all human beings experience parasocial interactions and relationships. We all have our favorite person. In fact, the local pastor experiences this a great deal. And somebody like you, who has a great deal of listeners, I would imagine, have a lot of fans who really believe and know you and have listened to a lot of your material. So, we experience this every day. And if we can find that shared space to say, do you know, I would feel really, really ugly if I attacked somebody I knew that you believed highly.

Are you in a headspace right now and a heart space that can handle some independent thought? Can you help me try to process? How do you process this issue, and just be curious with them as opposed to attacking? Oh, you have a parasocial interaction, you're not trustworthy, like that's, that's going to shut down discussion wherein we can just kind of show awareness and curiosity instead. And hopefully that will give us a headspace that's independent.

**FRANK:**

I think the research, Anna, has shown, and correct me if I'm wrong, I think this goes back to Jonathan Haidt's book *Anxious Generation*, that with the onset of social media we are better connected, but we are more lonely because we only have digital relationships. Can you comment on that?

**ANNA:**

Absolutely. I really believe that that's true. I think our society is moving towards almost exclusively parasocial interactions which does heighten anxiety.

I mean over time, when you only have a one-sided relationship like that, you're not getting any feedback, you're only ever receiving information, and you're never being corrected about how you're interpreting that information, which turns a brain into a paranoid brain. And paranoia ups anxiety significantly. It becomes an engine. And the reason why that happens is because you have no correction, and your brain begins running off into speculation about belief without any correction, and then building neurons off of speculation which dials that anxiety up further because your brain is aware that it's speculation, which is an interesting component to paranoia.

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So yes, I think Haidt is onto something. We are feeding into society a baseline that is anxious by definition, and then building anxiety off of anxiety, which I don't think is going to go well long term.

**FRANK:**

And then the anxiety is amplified. Because on social media, the algorithm feeds you the same story that you want to hear. And so it continues to draw people apart.

In fact, Speaker Johnson yesterday was talking about that, how social media is driving the two sides apart. And he was even talking about the two sides in Congress about how far apart they were, in terms of policy. And he said, look, I love everybody, and I try and get along with everybody, but the policy positions are getting so extreme, particularly on the left, although there's some of this going on the right as well.

And some of this is driven, or much of it is probably driven, I would say, by social media, because if that's where you get all your information, you're just going to keep hearing that same echo chamber over and over again. I know Haidt recommends, certainly, children ought not to be on social media. They ought not have an iPhone. What do you recommend to the people you counsel?

**ANNA:**

I do not recommend access to social media for kiddos.

If social media continues to be a thing, it does look like it's going to be. I will face this myself. I have little ones. So far, I think I'm going to do something along the lines of slowly getting them into the space and watching them to see how they manage it so that I can be there to help them. But I don't think I would start that until well into the late teens. So before they exit the house, just because of the development of the brain and what the brain is developing, you want to be well into abstraction and that's way past, that's past the 15-year-old mark for sure.

So that's kind of where I sit. I don't know what the right answer is. We're all on this together. But it does seem to me that introducing paranoia and echo chambers to children is probably not a good idea.

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**FRANK:**

Now, how does this social media, digital world combined with an algorithm that just gives us what we want to hear, feed into the crazy conspiracy theories that we're hearing, particularly around Charlie Kirk's murder, Candace Owens, all that.

How, how do these interplay here?

**ANNA:**

So, one thing I want to point out is that the flip side to parasocial interaction, as far as I can tell, is what drives conspiracy theory. So when you are the person providing the parasocial interaction, you yourself ultimately are designing what could rapidly turn into an echo chamber if you're not very, very careful.

And it's the echo chamber element. It's when your brain is alone and is not receiving ample feedback that has contradictory thoughts, so that you can test those contradictions to see if you're observing the world well, and to remember that you are a brain that is simply observing and can get things wrong. Your brain can forget that and can develop the sensation of confidence on topics that you are not actually knowledgeable of.

And that's because your brain and your consciousness can only hold so many variables at one time. If it learns that the variables it needs to hold at one time happen to be the ones that you're funneling through your podcast because you're having to chew on those things, and you're developing content, and you're getting feedback that says, yes, I'd love more content there, your brain will then habituate, only ever processing those thoughts.

And without something outside of you to interrupt that, to reconsider, or to see from another angle, or to just be wrong for once, your brain will not process wrong anymore. It's what happens if you've read the book, even seen the movie, *Treasure Island* or *Treasure Planet* from when I was a kid. The character, Ben, who's been left on the island by himself, and he's weird, and you go encounter him because he's been there for 20 years with only himself to talk to.

That's what happens to that type of brain. Conspiracy is the natural outcome.

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**FRANK:**

We're going to unpack that further with the great Anna Kitko right after the break and go into some specifics to see if we can get our minds wrapped around this because it obviously is a problem. You've got millions of people believing things that have no evidence, and they get very vehement about promoting it.

Much more after the break. Don't go anywhere.

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**FRANK:**

Why do people sometimes vehemently believe things that really have no substantial evidence behind them, and when you even question them on it, they get very upset. Why is that? Well, that's one of the things we're talking about today with Anna Kitko, who is the Ratio Christi director at University of Tennessee, and also is a counselor and deals a lot with spiritual abuse and people that get involved in paranoia and other psychological instances.

And before the break, Anna, you were trying to illustrate a point, but we kind of ran out of time there. Pick it up with you said, Ben from a character in a movie. Just take it right from there.

**ANNA:**

So, *Treasure Island*, I'm referencing a classic character. Ben has been left on an island by his shipmates, by himself. And you, as the reader, encounter Ben, you hear his story, and you just assume he's dead, and he hasn't died, and you encounter him later on the island.

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I think it's been 20 years, if memory serves. It's been a while since I've read the book. And Ben has only had himself to talk to for 20 years. And so you experience in the book what happens to a brain when it only has itself to talk to. And that's what my concern is with echo chambers. It's my concern with all human brains and why echo chambers aren't good for any of them, is because every single human will experience a descent into what we would call paranoia if there's no other brain to come in and to try to observe the world from a different angle so that they can see how maybe they'd be missing some components, perhaps.

Or have they considered this other observation? Because the brain is a narrative organ, the brain operates by telling itself a story about how the world works to the best of its knowledge, knowing it doesn't have a complete knowledge, and then guessing what's the best way forward to keep you alive. Trauma is what happens when your brain gets it wrong. So it doesn't necessarily have to be a major event.

It can just be a break in your narrative. You experience something that says, I had no idea what to expect. I have no idea what to do with this. That's trauma. And you can imagine it as like a hole in the narrative, a missing page in the book. And your brain's job is to then try to come up with an explanation for why it missed it. Does it know enough about the world to explain what's happening? Which is also why you dream about things that you messed up in your life.

Like, you can be like me in your late 30s and still reviewing some embarrassing moment you had in middle school. Why did I do that? I don't know. And if your brain's trying to figure it out, that's trauma. So if you're by yourself and you're a brain experiencing the world in an incomplete way, because you must because that's how human brains work, and all you have is yourself to talk to, and you experience trauma, the only brain that has anything to say about how to fill that hole of trauma, of how to explain it, is you.

And that means you're limited to only your observations and only what you think is a maybe or possibility. And without another brain or multiple brains coming in and going, wait, wait, wait, there's some other explanations to explain this. All you have is whatever you came up with speculatively to fill that hole. And if there's nobody there to help you or guide you or to ask, hey, have you considered this angle?

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Or maybe could it have been this? You only have that information to believe. And if nobody interrupts that and it happens to be wrong, you're then building neurons off of that speculation with the sensation of confidence. And so you're, well, no, no, no, that has to be the explanation. I can feel confident. Like, no, that's just how neurology works.

Your confidence is a false confidence. And let's just augment it a little bit so that you can move forward accurately. Consider this other angle. Consider this piece of evidence. And it's harder and harder and harder for a brain to do that, the more entrenched it is in its belief and the longer it's gone without interruption.

**FRANK:**

Let me give an example from the Candace Owens situation that might apply here. You can tell me if it does or it doesn't.

People watching Candace for a while, who, obviously she has some skills in communicating. People develop a parasocial interaction with her, and they think that she is their champion. And so she came out and said something a few months ago, related to what happened that day in Utah.

When I said, when we were driving in, we had drone footage that showed that there were thousands of people there, say an hour before we got there. And Charlie showed it to me on his phone and I said, Charlie, I don't like this place. There's too many buildings. Well, later in a Sean Ryan podcast, Brian Harpole, who was the head security guy, said there were no drones there.

We couldn't have drones up. So Candace came on and said, see, somebody's lying here. Because either there were drones or there wasn't. Either Frank's lying or Brian's lying. Now, if you've been engulfed in this so-called conspiracy at this point, you might go, yeah, she's got a point. But of course, if you take a step back and say not every false statement is a lie.

Sometimes a false statement just is based on misinformation. You did not know. And in retrospect, I now remember, because I just went back there a couple of months ago, that there was like a building, a bridge above us. People were standing above us. And it could have been

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just somebody with their phone up there surveying the crowd. It looked like drone footage to me, but it really wasn't.

So that seems to me to be an example of somebody from the outside coming in and saying, wait a minute, hold on, there is a third option here. It's not Brian's lying or Frank's lying. Maybe Frank thought it was drone footage for good reason, but then later realized, oh yeah, there's a high point up there. By the way, Brian Harpole now, who was the main security guy and was in the car when we took Charlie to the hospital, is now suing Candace Owens because she has disparaged him in his career so much that he cannot find employment.

Now, is that an example of somebody who is so into this relationship with someone like Candace Owens, that no matter what she says, they're going to agree with it. And anybody that comes in from the outside says, oh, Candace might be wrong here; there may be a third option, they shut her down, or they shut the person down.

**ANNA:**

What you're describing, I think is probably accurate for a lot of folks who are encountering something like this.

Something that makes us more complex, though. And it matters, and it's worth mentioning just because we've lived through so many exposures of things that we were told by people in authority, in this environment. And I'm talking as a millennial, so we're a little bit, we're a little salty about this. There have been a great deal of things that have occurred in our lifetimes that we were told verbatim were, this is no big deal.

This is not, you know, this is X. This is not something you need to worry about. And then it came out in our lifetimes that actually, no, that conspiracy theory that we were told was a conspiracy theory was true. And, for people like me who study, governments who run massive coercive control campaigns against the public, like MK Ultra, like mass public experimentation against consent, things like the Tuskegee experiments, that's a really important factor to bring in here.

We have—

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**FRANK:**

COVID.

**ANNA:**

COVID. Absolute—

**FRANK:**

The brain rot from COVID. You probably should question your government in that case, right?

**ANNA:**

And somebody who, no matter what we have to say about, you know, these podcasters, and again, forgive me because I live under a rock, but I think everybody can agree that in Candace Owens, we have an extremely high intelligence.

Somebody who has lived through all of those things. As intelligent as these individuals are, it would be wrong to consider that, you know, we've been betrayed so often that there's going to be an undercurrent that's deeply irrational of distrust of anybody's story. That's going to be the beginning. And off of that, if we involve everything we've discussed in this podcast so far with parasocial interactions, the general phenomena of how neurons are laid down in an echo chamber that's going to be driven so high, it'll be, it's almost impossible to measure.

And so we have, in that sense, somebody who may become, easily, a victim of their own intelligence if they're not helped. And so I can see that becoming a problem for these, these big-name podcasters who really are, I mean, they're, they are like, they're trying to have their finger on the pulse of society. And society is by nature already in a state of paranoia.

I mean, just take the Epstein files. I'm still upset by the Epstein files. I still point out how many news cycles are we going to go through where we're going to ignore that and how ridiculous that is. It's just. So, this thing is complex. I don't know exactly what to do with it. I don't know what all the answers are. But I hope, as with all things that come with psychology, awareness is what brings mental stability.

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And so if we can just be aware that these processes are at play, then the very intelligent people who have these major influences can self-check, and they can get an idea of what's going on, maybe enough to say, okay, perhaps I've gotten into an echo chamber too far. Let's start bringing in people to keep that at bay. You know, let's check ourselves, right? Somebody like me, who, you know, is going to maybe enter the podcast space and listen to people.

You know, I'm going to go, I love Malcolm Guite, so I'm going to go listen to Malcolm Guite. Maybe I become a little bit too hobby in my disposition, and nobody can understand me anymore, right? I'm using verbiage that nobody can understand. It's like, Anna, you got to cool it, right? You've got to bring it back. Your job is to help us understand neurology. And you can't get out of poetic analysis of Tolkien, right?

It's an echo chamber. It's something, I need to hear those things, I need to be like, are you getting a little weird? We need that around us to be able to not become that way, because all brains will.

**FRANK:**

And how do we then defend against that in our own minds? As you just said, you've got to sort of venture out of your little echo chamber in order to do that, correct?

**ANNA:**

Yeah, absolutely. So when I say awareness, what I mean by that is that of the variables that you keep in play in your consciousness, these are things like, what are my concerns for today, what are my chores for today, what are my goals for today? Make one of your goals, given that society is so paranoid right now, one of them to be, you know, let me do a quick check on how many voices I have playing into my headspace.

And if you happen to notice that the voices are all parasocial interactions, it's time to reassess. I know it doesn't matter where you are. It's time to involve some real humans just for a moment. And if you can't involve real humans, my recommendation is to turn off the screens, go outside, open your Bible and let the Lord just feed you for a minute. Remind yourself that the world exists, grass is real.

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Try to ignore any chemtrails that you might be concerned with. But you know, take a minute to be out of that headspace and just remind yourself that that's real and bring that up into your consciousness as a factor that you see. Get it right in the front of your face and hold it there for a while, and see how that changes you and your dynamic and your disposition. I suspect it will greatly.

**FRANK:**

Ladies and gentlemen, as Paul says in Romans chapter one, that God's divine nature and invisible qualities are clearly seen from what has been made so that we are without excuse. In other words, if you look around at the creation, just go outside and take a walk. Look at the trees, look at the birds, look at the sky, look at the, look at all of nature around you.

You know there's a creator. Despite what's going on social media, God exists. And, the moral law written on our hearts tells us he's a moral being as well. We sometimes just need to rest and get back to the basics, and that can kind of reset and renew our minds, as Paul also says in Romans 12. Back with Anna Kitko right after the break.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you want to be better at presenting the truth of Christianity and answering questions, you want to be part of CIA, the CrossExamined Instructor Academy, this summer, July 30th through August 1st, right here in Charlotte, North Carolina. You have to apply. Go to [crossexamined.org](http://crossexamined.org), click on events. You'll see CIA. Greg Koukl, Alisa Childers, Natasha Crain, Richard Howe, myself, Allen Parr, several others, Hillary Morgan Ferrer will be your instructors.

We'll not only present to you, you'll present to us. And we will help you with your presentation skills. There's also a non-presenter track in case you don't want to present. Also want to mention I'll be in Knoxville, Tennessee, next week at the Coulson Center national conference. That's the 29th and 30th, and then on June 1st, going to be doing our final The Bible you never knew series.

We're going to be looking at all the types and shadows in the Old Testament. We'll also be talking a little bit about Esther. That's June 1st, 7:30 pm, it will be live-streamed. And then the Last Stand Festival in Denver, Colorado. The 5th and the 6th. I'll be there with Allie Beth

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Stuckey, Seth Gruber, Victor Marx, many others. You want to check that out on our website. A lot coming up. And I want to talk a little bit also about what Anna is doing.

Anna, what is your website? How can people connect with you? I know you're in Knoxville, but, you also have a counseling ministry, and you sometimes get out and speak as well.

**ANNA:**

Sure. The best way to get a hold of me, as far as the counseling stuff is concerned, especially with spiritual abuse, would be through Be Emboldened, which is a global ministry where you get access to spiritual abuse, recovery mentorship.

And I'm one of the mentors. We have an entire team of incredible mentors. So you don't need to talk to me. I'm just one of them. Also, we do have a YouTube channel that's not run by me. It's just recordings of my lectures explaining complex systems like this. I have a team that handles that for me because I am inept when it comes to technical things. I think what you guys do is incredible. So you're more than welcome to visit there. A lot of those lectures are developed specifically to help people with these complex topics.

So have at it. That's just the Anna Kitko YouTube channel. And then finally, you can contact me through Ratio Christi, which is our global apologetics ministry. That's R A T I O C H R I S T I Anna Kitko, and you can shoot me a message there, and I'll get it.

**FRANK:**

Go back to BeEmboldened. Is that a website?

**ANNA:**

Yeah. BeEmboldened.com, so be emboldened dot com. There's also a YouTube channel where we do breakdowns of normal spiritual abuse topics for people who have been through significant coercive control, as well as finding themselves in churches where they discover their leadership has actually been lying to them the entire time.

You know, how do you recover from that? What does it look like to have a nervous system that's been affected by those things? It's extremely distressing in a way that most people can't

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explain to others. And we do the work of putting words and language to that experience, so that you can recover and move on from there.

**ANNA:**

Yeah, you feel violated. And that's so often why people who leave a church or a faith become agnostic or atheist, at least for a period.

They think, oh, I've been duped by these people. I'm not going to be duped again. I'm going to believe in nothing. Of course, what they don't realize they are believing in something. It's just not traditional Christianity or a traditional faith position. I wanted to ask you this, though, Anna, because, as you describe the idea that people get intimate with a digital representation of a person, it made me think of pornography.

How does this kind of parasocial interaction make pornography very addictive?

**ANNA:**

Yeah, wonderful connection. That's exactly right. Because actually, pornography is designed by pornographers who will hire experts in neurology to make the pornography more addictive, more enticing, to develop a greater attachment, so that you almost can't get away.

It's such a positive experience for your brain chemically that your brain will ask to revisit it. And, yeah, that is a parasocial interaction. It's not quite a relationship in that it's rare that the person goes back to a single character in order to engage with the pornography. However, there is a tendency, and you can see this in studies, to have different categories of attachment, which is why there are different types of pornography.

And development of all of these categories is something that is ongoing, and that pornographers are trying to develop to make more money and to take advantage of the way your brain is wired. Your prefrontal cortex will start to actually erode. It's such a high chemical reaction. Terrible. Pornography absolutely is a type of parasocial interaction that is highly addictive.

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**FRANK:**

And this is why some men can't have normal relationships anymore, because they, their brains have been destroyed, at least to a certain extent, by this kind of an affair of the mind. There used to be a book years ago called *An Affair of the Mind*. It was just about a screen rather than a real person. And you have this idea that you really know this person when you don't.

And that's the same thing we've been talking about today with Anna Kitko here. It's called a parasocial interaction. Now we're going to look at some possible solutions to this, Anna. Now, what is the smoke detector principle?

**ANNA:**

This is one of my favorite things. So, remembering that, really, what psychology and the study of psychology is trying to do is bring a self-awareness so that the brain can engage in complexity.

Knowing what it's engaging with and making an informed decision, that's kind of the overall goal. So with the smoke detector principle, that's a way of trying to teach a layperson how the edges of your consciousness work as well as your body's protective systems. Remember, your brain is responsible for keeping you alive. And it has several systems that play, that allow for that knowledge of like predator.

Like, I need to run, I need to freeze, I need to hide, I need to get ready to fight. So those systems, there's a lot of them, and they're very precise. One of the ways that your protection system works is to send out micro pings into the world to say, are you safe? Are you sure? Is there anything that you need to be more aware of? And it works kind of the way a smoke detector works by sending out little test pings into the air to test.

It's like, sniff test, do I smell smoke? And just like smoke detectors, you can get false alarms where you can get a sudden shock or like if you look at the way the light in my clinic, if somebody walked past the door, right, and I jumped suddenly because my brain interpreted, maybe that's somebody who shouldn't be there. But actually, it's just one of the other clinicians. And I go, oh, it's just one of the other clinicians. We're good.

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That false alarm and that feeling of anxiety that I genuinely felt like a feeling that's kind of like that electrical shock that goes through your body and the adrenaline, that's that micro, that false alarm, that smoke alarm ping. You're supposed to experience those things in small increments through the course of your life. Anxiety and the experience of anxiety can be a very natural, very helpful experience.

However, in a paranoid state, you have the experience of anxiety, and that ping happening a lot. I mean, it's happening regularly because your brain is hyper-aware of its lack of awareness. And so the smoke detector principle says, okay, if you would like to test if you're in a paranoid state, go ahead and just look, make an observation about how often that ping is happening over the course of a day.

How often do you go, I have anxiety. I have anxiety. Just, just mark it down, make it, you know, make a tally. Do it over the course of your workday. And sure enough, if you've got a whole bunch of tallies, your brain is in a state of ready to receive paranoia. And if you know that, you can look at that, you can say, all right, that's an awful lot of anxiety for today.

I don't need to listen to that podcast. I need to go outside. I need to do something else. That's what I mean by the smoke detector principle. Start employing that on the regular. You know, set a calendar alarm, say, hey, it's a smoke detector principle day. Let's see how paranoid I am. And then let's adjust. And that's the goal, let's just adjust ourselves so that we stay out of a paranoid state, and we at least aren't feeding it and getting lost in it.

**FRANK:**

So you mentioned going outside, talking with other people, getting away from the source of the paranoia, which often is social media and a digital screen. What other advice would you have for people? And it might not just be the person that's listening right now who's experiencing it, but someone they love. So how do you, how do you help?

**ANNA:**

Yeah, lots of prayer.

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Remember that the one relationship that is never parasocial is the one with the Lord. So we really want to have a prayerful life, for ourselves and for our loved ones. Do not forget, if you've got a loved one that you're like, oh, they really need this. We begin with prayer every time. Past that point, consider having conversations like, hey, are you having fun over there?

Is your experience of the world? Like, how's your quality of life? Because I'm over here praying for you on the regular, and I'm wondering, do you want to talk about this? Do you know about the smoke detector principle? I used it the other day, and, boy, was I paranoid, and it helped a lot for me. Do you know about this? Do you want some help? Right, so it's like informed consent. You're offering.

I'm not here to correct you. I'm here to offer you something I learned that helped me, and I love you to pieces. And we don't have a parasocial interaction. We have a real one. And I'd like to use that leverage to actually help you feel at peace and to walk out into a world where you have a quality of life that you can enjoy.

**FRANK:**

Yeah. What happens when they resist to such an extent that they want to cling to this parasocial relationship and not take any sort of input from the outside that could help dislodge them from it?

**ANNA:**

Yeah, just slap them clear across the face. Just, no—

**FRANK:**

Get a hold of yourself. It's like an airplane skit.

**ANNA:**

You know, I don't know what the best route is with this, but you can say things like, hey, are you observing how profound your emotional response is to me just trying to have a conversation with you.

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Are you happy in there? Because that looks awful. Like, do you really want to be this volatile? Sometimes just observing volatility brings the person down. I don't know if you've noticed that in a fight, when you're having a verbal fight with somebody, and it's like, hey, maybe we should dial this down. We're at like an 11, let's dial it down. Usually, the person will go, I don't want to be seen as the crazy person in this fight.

And it comes down, and you can use that space to say, we're just going to breathe for a second, and we're going to remind ourselves that we love each other and that this is real, and out there is just out there. Like, we get to see each other all the time, and we can relax in that space and see if they'll respond to that.

**FRANK:**

If you shut off your computer and your social media, ladies and gentlemen, you can survive.

Trust me. Anna, it's great having you on as always. Give the website again, please.

**ANNA:**

Yeah, beEmboldened.com and ratiochristi.org and then of course, the Anna Kitko YouTube channel. That's K I T K O.

**FRANK:**

The great Anna Kitko. Thank you, Anna.

**ANNA:**

You're very welcome. Love it.

**FRANK:**

Ladies and gentlemen, don't forget we're going to have a lot from Speaker Johnson in the next podcast.

Check it out. Lord willing, we'll see you here next time. God bless.

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