

Paranoid Adolescents' Beliefs and Manifest Dream Content

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Paranoia covers a whole spectrum of neurotic and psychotic disorders. The common thread running through all the permutations of the paranoid phenomenon is a system of thinking with seven distinctive characteristics: projective thinking, suspiciousness, hostility, centrality, fear of loss of autonomy, delusions, and grandiosity (Swanson, Bohnert, & Smith, 1970). Such thinking is found in the schizophrenic who concludes that his own thoughts and feelings are caused by other people. It can also be found in varying degrees in the "normal" population. This brief report focuses on the latter group of paranoids.

Individual Psychology views paranoid thinking as a device by which the ego may be protected from humiliation or insignificance. Paranoids gain a sham sense of superiority by giving themselves center stage in grandiose plots of intrigue which they imagine to be directed against them. Furthermore, paranoid thinking allows one to shirk responsibility for one's own character defects and failures by blaming someone else (Adler, 1956). Paranoids desire wealth, status, etc., but wish to attain these goals unconditionally and without responsibility (Adler, 1956).

Manifest dream content can be used as a means of studying the personality of the dreamer (Hall, 1966). Psychopathological disturbances elicit certain corresponding dream patterns (Beck & Clyde, 1961; Foulkes, Larson, Swanson, & Rardin, 1969). Since Freud, dream interpretation has continued to advance as a therapeutic art and diagnostic science and has attained the status of a "sensitive instrument" (Gershman, 1973). Adler (1956, 1964) viewed dreaming as yet another way that the neurotic sought to avoid the responsibilities of reality and solve his problems by an emotional episode consistent with his lifestyle. Adler (1956) felt that the paranoid's desires and the dynamics of his lifestyle could be seen in his delusions and dreams. Of course, it is possible that paranoids are not entirely honest in their dream reports. Paranoids tend to falsify retrospective memory (Kraepelin, 1923). Nevertheless, whether the dream actually took place or whether the paranoid feels impelled to say it did, the fact that he reports a certain type of dream is related to an unconscious lifestyle.

We devised a survey which asked the subjects to check which statements accurately described themselves. They were also instructed to check all types of dream contents, out of those listed, which corresponded to the dreams they remembered having. This survey was administered to 190 sophomore high school girls. Twenty-five (13 percent) of the subjects checked the statement, "I think that many other people try to get me, hurt me, pick on me." The selection of that statement was associated with the selection of three others: (a) "I believe in astrology" ($p < .02$), (b) "I believe in reincarnation" ($p < .01$), and (c) "I am a person who has good luck" ($p < .01$).

The selection of the paranoid statement was also associated with reports of the following dream content: "An angel came to me with a special message from God" ($p < .01$). Interestingly enough, a majority of these dreamers also selected the following statement after the dream: "I believe God caused me to have that dream because He wanted to tell me something."

We interpret the survey data as confirming Adler's view of paranoia. The reported dream content and the dreamer's interpretation of it reflects the paranoid's striving to gain a sham sense of superiority by giving himself a grandiose role in his dreams and delusions. The statements checked by paranoid subjects also indicate the assumption of a special status. Furthermore, astrology, reincarnation, and luck entitle one to fortune and opportunity not merited by one's efforts in this life. Finally, the fatalism of these doctrines tends to absolve the individual from responsibility.

The therapist working with adolescents should consider the use of dream interpretation. It is more accurate within an ongoing therapeutic relationship because the context of the dream can be more minutely constructed (Kelman, 1944; Hall, 1966; Gershberg, 1969). The diagnostic and therapeutic use of dream interpretation with adolescents was reported by Kraft (1969).

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