

## DREAMS OF MALE HOMOSEXUALS AND THE ATTITUDE OF SOCIETY<sup>1</sup>

EGON C. FREY, M.D.

*New York, N. Y.*

This paper reports dreams of two male homosexuals which shed light upon the psychodynamics and the predicament of this deviant type of man. Following Adler, I see in these dreams an attempt of the dreamer to cope with problems which confront him. And he does so in a way that is characteristic of his particular style of life. The interpreting psychologist can therefore look in two directions: (*a*) for the style of life, for strivings that may have caused the dreamer's emotional disturbance, perhaps even contributed to his becoming a homosexual; (*b*) for those problems which, at the time of the dreams, were preoccupying the dreamer.

It is the author's observation that aside from individual differences of life style and present problems, there is one common reality factor which torments every homosexual, even though he may, due to over-compensation, deny it, i.e., the social discrimination against the homosexual by the normal majority. This is brought out in a striking manner by one of the dreams described below (Albert's dream about Haifa), and leads to the considerations of the third part of this paper.

### THE CASE OF ALBERT

This young man did not seek help to get rid of his homosexuality. On the contrary, he exalted the advantages he derived from it, such as contact with cultured and artistically gifted persons. He also pointed out the troubles which he was spared: a nagging wife, ill-behaved brats, or being trapped into paternity suits. What he complained of were periods of deep depression bordering on panic, sudden outbursts of anger, and a philosophy of life which made everything seem completely futile.

Analysis revealed that Albert was suffering from a classical inferiority complex, based upon a true organ inferiority and its consequences. He had a congenital heart disease with a murmur that

---

<sup>1</sup>Paper read in abridged form at the Eighth International Congress of Individual Psychology, Vienna, August-September, 1960.

every doctor could hear. His mother was told so by her physician, and she restrained the little boy from all kinds of games and activities which attracted him, with the words: "Don't! You have a weak heart." This was all the more painful because his brother was permitted to do all these things. But Albert had a strong, rebellious mind. He did a lot of these forbidden things, and later even indulged in sports. He also broke away from home and went to New York. Still, his mother had made him hyperconscious of his heart.

This awareness was reinforced by an incident that may well have biased him further against the female sex. When he was eight, an eleven-year-old girl wanted to take him to the woods to "show him some tricks." He knew what they were because she had shown them to his brother. He said: "I can't do that. I have a weak heart." Upon that, the girl got angry and remarked: "Oh, is that so? Then you will die at the age of thirty-two."

At the age of thirty-one, Albert's heart went into real failure. Even his legs became swollen. A heart specialist prescribed digitalis but, fortunately, also suggested psychotherapy, and Albert became my patient. We soon discovered that not only his depressed state of mind was caused by the fear of an early death, but also his cynical outlook and his negligence in all serious studies. Subconsciously he tried to deprive of their value all those studies and activities whose fruit can only be reaped in a later age. Life, he argued, is only worthwhile as long as one has the physical attractiveness of youth. Science is full of deceit and finally leads to such monstrous inventions as the atomic bomb.

No wonder that his dreams were full of fear of death. What puzzled me was the violence of such death, e.g., boiling oil poured upon him by some people, not to be expected in a person who thought he would die of heart failure.

Then one night he dreamt he was in Haifa and saw wounded horses. He shouted: "Kill them, they suffer." Then he was suddenly in a YMCA pool and saw nude boys lying around who had been killed. I must stress that Albert is not of Jewish extraction. He is a gentile, of New England, and an enemy of racial hatred. I asked him what Haifa meant to him. A.: "Zionism; the State of Israel." Q.: "What do you think of the chances of that state?" A.: "I think they are lost; they are surrounded by the hostile Arabs. The more they achieve, the more envious the Arabs will get, and they will finally destroy them." Q.: "So, you also expect horrors and tortures?" He

nodded. Q.: "So that you would prefer a mercy killing such as one gives to wounded horses?" He, after a pause: "I see; yes, that's it. But what has that to do with the YMCA?" Q.: "Didn't you tell me that your friends very often meet in gyms?" Thereupon a flash of insight came upon Albert and he answered: "Could it be that I may secretly fear that 'they' will exterminate us?" And he admitted that at times the thought had occurred to him.

The interpretation of this dream had a great therapeutic influence upon Albert; his state of mind improved by leaps and bounds. He devoted himself to useful activities, he made attempts at improving his poor spelling and at developing his gift as a cartoonist. He also accepted his therapist's system of values.

Here is a dream characteristic of this period. Albert was riding through a jungle on an elephant who had lifted his forelegs, so that Albert felt way up. The jungle became smaller and smaller until it was a miniature garden which his uncle had planted in the bedroom of his son. (This cousin, by the way, is also a homosexual.) When I asked Albert whether the elephant could mean the Republican Party, he denied this. Instead, he recalled a joke he had heard on the day preceding the dream: An Englishman had his penis bitten off by a wild beast in Africa. The surgeon replaced it by a piece of a trunk of an elephant. Later, when this Englishman was asked how he was getting along, he replied: "Very well, except when peanuts are offered at a party." This gave a definite meaning to the dream: Albert was now able to rise above his sexual life and looked down upon the chaotic jungle and bedroom existence of those who, up to then, had been his pals.

#### THE CASE OF GERALD

The patient whose dreams I am going to report now is of a different kind. Gerald is a young man of higher than average intellectual ability and — I am bold enough to say this of a homosexual — moral standards. A proof of his great self-discipline is the fact that during the whole period of our work he succeeded in maintaining complete sexual abstinence. He has been employed by the same company in a responsible position for ten years. His avocation is piano playing to which he devotes his entire free time. He still hopes to become a concert pianist some day. Thus he certainly is a serious-minded, valuable individual, not just one who has "escaped into a useless or parasitic way of life."

Although he was on good terms with many girls, he completely lacked the physical desire for a member of the female sex. However, he badly wanted to acquire such desire, for he feared that his family, of whom he was very fond, might become estranged from him, should they find out about his sexual deviation. This is why he came to see me.

Here is one of his dreams. At an auction, he sees himself bidding for a house. He is about to acquire it, when he notices that the former owner is a homosexual, one whom he very much dislikes to boot. This man had once been his boss, and Gerald left him after a violent argument. At this point, Gerald woke up in panic. Bidding for a house means, of course, his attempt to become normal and to have his own home and family life. But within him lurks the secret fear that his homosexual past may tell on him one day and destroy such happiness.

Gerald, during an interval of two years, had a recurring dream in which one of his male family members was condemned to die in the electric chair, with the only difference that it was first his oldest brother, then his second older brother, and finally his father. Each time Gerald, in the dream, was in deep despair and tried hard to save the threatened family member.

This is the family constellation in Gerald's childhood: His father and his two brothers were typical, aggressive males, whereas he, the youngest, was frail and hypersensitive. Moreover, his mother told him repeatedly that she had wanted a girl instead of him. She made him help in the kitchen, wherein he showed particular skill. As a child, Gerald felt deeply hurt when he was called a sissy, and tried desperately to fall in line with the regular boys. Only he did not succeed because he had no liking for the rougher games of boys.

When telling me about his recurrent dream, he commented bitterly: "It seems I shall now have exterminated the whole male staff of my family." In a way, he did. This is partly the meaning of the dream. For only when all these three family members had died, whose aggressive masculinity had so much impressed and oppressed him, would the path have been free for him to real manhood. And then his mother would also have welcomed him as a boy. However, one should not see in this component the only essential feature; the rational and ethical impulses of a person should also be considered when one interprets a dream. The despair and deep sympathy which

Gerald felt and actively demonstrated were genuine and not an alibi for his secret hostility against the male members of his family. E.g., when he dreamt the dream about his oldest brother, that brother was really in trouble. He had a house full of sick children and great financial worries. And Gerald helped him. But we must admit that with all genuine sympathy, his homosexuality had also some gain from that situation. For, looking at his brother's misery, he must have secretly thought: "Well, this is at least a burden I have been spared."

Another group of Gerald's dreams reveals two peculiar tendencies: first, the change of reality into its contrary, as one turns a glove inside out, and which calls to mind the classic term for homosexuality, "inversion;" second, degradation of the female sex, a tendency which Adler found to be present in homosexuals (1, p. 133). Here follow two examples.

In the first dream, Gerald's music teacher arranged a concert in which four of his best pupils had to perform in public. A Negro girl was to play before Gerald. She made nasty remarks to the teacher, and they argued violently. She threatened to walk out on the stage and to begin playing without bowing to the audience. Although the teacher protested, she did so. Then the teacher motioned to Gerald and they removed the girl against her will from the stage. She struggled and shouted.

My patient was greatly distressed about this dream because, in reality, this girl was a very pleasant person and on excellent terms with him. However, there was another girl, white and very ill-tempered, who might have behaved in such an obstreperous fashion. Why, in the dream, did he merge these two girls into one? Coming to the fore, there was a visible degrading tendency toward the female sex. He degraded the Negro girl by giving her the bad qualities of the white girl, and he betrayed also a certain suspicion that women cannot be trusted and may do bad things quite unexpectedly. He also degraded the white girl by making her a Negro which, by her standards, not by the patient's, lowered her, since she had a certain race prejudice.

In the second dream, Gerald is back in school, and a certain teacher hurts him deeply by completely ignoring him when he raises his hand to answer her question. She also refuses to let him participate in the plays which she arranges in class. In reality, it was just this teacher who favored him highly and gave him the best parts in the

play. Thus there is a tendency in him to eliminate from his life every woman who protected him, an inverting tendency. But there is also another element. This teacher was not popular with the faculty because of her too progressive attitudes, and being her favorite was anything but an asset in the eyes of the other boys. Thus Gerald felt that he would rather also be rejected by her in order to be like the rest of the boys.

There came a time when Gerald felt much more at ease than before, and the people in his office remarked that he no longer showed a certain hesitant attitude. "The veil of shyness is lifting," he said to me. At that time he dreamed he saw some people huddled together under a canopy while it was raining hard. Among them he recognized a man whom he had known formerly as very lazy, unimaginative, and lacking ambition. This man, his face twisted in anguish, told him that his wife expected another baby and that he was out of work.

This dream showed that Gerald's improvement was not what we would have welcomed. In the dream the life of normal people was not viewed with envy and longing, but rather as burdened with all kinds of misery so that Gerald might feel better in his own, homosexual skin. Also his choosing an unimaginative and lazy representative of heterosexuality added to his feeling of superiority. He felt fine on awakening.

Perhaps I should have left it at that. But my professional ambition, my striving for his "normalization," as well as Gerald's conscious cooperation induced us to try further the arduous ascent toward heterosexuality. And here I must admit that we have failed. Gerald did not overcome the barrier which separated him from intimacy with the other sex. And when, after several humiliating experiences, his musical performances were deteriorating, he became deeply convinced that he was destroying what he considered the "higher man in himself." He discontinued treatment, taking leave from me in a very beautiful and moving letter.

#### THE ATTITUDE OF SOCIETY

Every psychotherapist who is honest with himself will admit that such failures of therapeutic endeavors are not uncommon. But if this is so, if so many homosexuals are doomed to stay what they are, something should be done to alleviate their plight.

Here I must stress that the patients with whom this paper deals are so-called androphiles, i.e., have only adult love partners, were

never seduced as boys by men, nor would ever seduce a boy, a crime which society cannot tolerate. Such valuable individuals as Gerald should not be thrown together with actual criminals and antisocial individuals.

In the case of androphiles we ought to probe deeper into our own subconscious motivation when we condemn their "preternatural" sex practices. In line with Adlerian thinking we would then see that such condemnation is an expression of our own superiority striving at the expense of a branded group of men. Their persecution has really the same roots as anti-Semitism and color bias. And, in fact, again and again, homosexuals are suspected of crimes of which most of them are completely incapable. I believe that society does greater wrongs to androphiles than they do to society. Albert's dream about Haifa lays bare how the homosexual reacts to society's attitude toward him.

Adler who was the first to describe the relationship between society and neurosis included the homosexuals among the neurotics. He found in every homosexual who sought his treatment all the characteristics of neurotics: exaggerated ambition, a fearful attitude toward life, and discouragement (1, p. 131).

There is no reason to doubt Adler's findings. However, individuals who seek treatment represent a selection. They are people who, driven by anxiety, are looking for help. An observer who encounters homosexuality as a mass phenomenon may perhaps view it from another angle. He may see a variety of individuals thrown together only by the common fate of being made outlaws, particularly if, like the author, he tries to contact so-called "healthy" homosexuals, i.e., those who do not seek treatment. He may find among them some very masculine and courageous individuals who bear their tragic fate with a stamina missed in many a heterosexual. In these cases the sexual deviation may not have been caused by timidity as in the neurotic homosexuals but by some inherited pre-disposition. Kallmann's study on homosexuality in identical twins (2) seems to deserve serious consideration. In other cases it looks as if persecution were the only cause of emotional disturbance. Only a change of the law could confirm or refute this assertion.

Adversaries of such a change of law point out that many homosexuals are brought to treatment only by such pressure, e.g., upon the insistence of their parole officer. However, the prognosis of such cases is by no means good. Adler, too, stated that punishment is of

no avail. On the contrary, it increases the inferiority feelings of the homosexual and makes his treatment more difficult (1, p. 139). A recent paper by Monroe and Enelow expressly states in its concluding paragraph that when such homosexuals are forced into treatment by external pressure, it is never successful (3).

Discussing homosexuality, Adler stated, "It is not true that a man's sex life is his private concern" (1, p. 135), as is so often claimed. For it deals with the procreation of mankind and therefore the whole human society has a justified interest in it. This is certainly true. But the interests of mankind may be served in a very different way in different ages. When a certain nomadic tribe was given by its prophet ten commandments of lasting ethical value, it was also told to multiply like the sand on the sea. Since that tribe was threatened by epidemics and hostile neighbors, such a command was a matter of self-preservation. And every sexual deviation which interfered with such unlimited multiplication had to be abhorred. But today, when epidemics and infant mortality have been brought under control, when on an overpopulated planet scientists warn of scarcity of food, and enlightened heterosexuals seriously consider restriction of offspring, individuals can no longer be considered harmful to society because their sex life has found an outlet which does not lead to the begetting of children.

If such individuals are otherwise able and willing to carry out useful social functions, they should be encouraged to do so, and not be terrorized. Individual Psychology sees in the development of social interest the best guaranty for mental health. Accordingly, we cannot exclude a considerable group of our fellow-men from partaking of such interest. Only a saint can be devoted to a society that persecutes him.

#### SUMMARY

Interpretation of characteristic dreams of homosexuals reveals their often hidden anxiety caused by social discrimination. Such dreams also confirm certain findings by Adler: the tendency of the homosexual to degrade the other sex, the harmful influence of discouraging childhood experiences and of an effeminate environment. Progress or ineffectiveness of therapy can also be seen in dreams.

Even the most serious effort of therapist and patient is at times incapable of changing the devious sex life. A plea is therefore made, and supported by arguments, to differentiate between the socially



harmless "androphile" homosexual and real criminals. By changing the legislation which makes him an outlaw, one could help the androphile to become a useful member of his community.

#### REFERENCES

1. ADLER, A. *Praxis und Theorie der Individualpsychologie*. 2nd ed. Munich: Bergmann, 1924.<sup>2</sup>
2. KALLMANN, F. Comparative twin study on the genetic aspect of male homosexuality. *J. nerv. ment. Dis.*, 1952, 115, 283-298.
3. MONROE, R. R., & ENELOW, M. L. The therapeutic motivation in male homosexuals. *Amer. J. Psychother.*, 1960, 14, 474-490.

---

<sup>2</sup>The second German edition is given here because the English translation of this work, apparently made from the first German edition, does not contain a number of the passages referred to in the present paper.