

His-and-her paranoia

The hallmark of paranoia is delusion, and according to the standard manual for psychiatric diagnosis, delusions take one of two forms. There are delusions of persecution, in which, for example, the paranoid person imagines being followed by the CIA or targeted by the Mafia; and there is delusional jealousy, in which the paranoid gets the unshakable idea that his spouse is being unfaithful. But according to new research, this description of paranoia is applicable to males only, and as a result it probably leads to misdiagnosis of delusional women who do not show the "classical" symptoms.

Writing in the December *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY*, psychiatrist Marie Rudden says that paranoid women and men suffer from different kinds of delusions. Specifically, she says, women's delusions are typically erotic, centering on the notion of being adored and pursued by a man. Rudden and colleagues at New York Hospital-Cornell University Medical Center in White Plains studied 44 men and 44 women who were being treated for delusions, and they found that one in three women imagined being erotically pursued by a man; fewer than one in ten men had delusions of erotic pursuit by women. In contrast, women almost never had delusions of homosexual pursuit; one in seven males did. And although men and women both centered their delusions on males, women's delusions were apt to involve acquaintances; men's, strangers. This difference is of particular clinical interest, the researchers note. "Because a claim of erotic interest by an acquaintance is less startling than one about persecution by the Secret Service," they suggest, "it may be less likely to be explored further as potential evidence of serious psychopathology."

Coping with illusions

Psychologists have long been intrigued with the human ability to recover after what would seem to be unbearable personal tragedy — the death of a child or serious illness, for example. Remarkably, some people end up happier after a tragedy than before. How does the mind manage such adjustment? According to Shelley E. Taylor, a psychologist at the University of California at Los Angeles, the answer is illusions. Taylor interviewed 78 women with serious breast cancer, and she found that most of them noted only positive changes in their lives. They managed this by comparing themselves to another woman — real or imagined — who was even worse off. And using this comparison, they convinced themselves — contrary to medical evidence — that they had a relatively good chance of recovery. Everyone is better off than someone, Taylor notes, as long as they make the right comparison. Contrary to dogma, she says, illusions may in some cases be more important to mental health than being in touch with reality.

Patients' 'right to be wrong'

The Massachusetts Supreme Court has ruled that mental patients, unless legally incompetent, have the right to refuse psychiatric medication. The ruling is the latest development in a case that began in 1975, when patients at Boston State Hospital sued the state, arguing that mandatory drug treatment violated their constitutional rights. The patients won, but the decision was appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, which last year sent it back to the state to determine the rights of mental patients (SN: 6/26/82, p. 420).

In the unanimous decision, the state court said that antipsychotic drugs — including Thorazine, Mellaril and Haldol — are "chemical restraints"; like other restraints, they can be used for emergencies, but continued use would require formal proceedings to determine that the patient was incompetent. Unless incompetent, patients have the "right to be wrong" about how they are treated, the court ruled.

Oil shale funds and a coal gas review

The U.S. Synthetic Fuels Corp. (SFC) has issued a letter of intent offering up to \$2.7 billion in price supports to the Union Oil Co. for its Colorado oil shale project. Because of the offered price guarantee, initially set at \$60 per barrel, Union plans to expand its oil shale processing plant near Parachute Creek, Colo., to a production level of 50,000 barrels of shale oil per day by 1994. Union recently finished building the project's first phase and is set to begin producing 10,000 barrels of shale oil per day (SN: 12/3/83, p. 362).

Another letter of intent, offering price and loan guarantees totalling \$45 million, went to the Seep River project in Uintah County, Utah. There, Geokinetics, Inc., is planning to produce 1,000 barrels of crude shale oil per day using an experimental process in which oil is extracted from rubble shale still underground. The Cathedral Bluffs shale oil project in Colorado's Rio Blanco County received assurances of \$2.19 billion in loan and price guarantees earlier this year. Edward E. Noble, SFC chairman, indicated that enough funds may be left over for at least one additional oil shale project when further decisions are made next April.

Noble also announced that the SFC will reconsider its recent decision not to provide price supports for the Great Plains Coal Gasification project in North Dakota (SN: 11/19/83, p. 329). Late in November, the project's five private sponsors notified the Department of Energy (DOE) that they were considering ending their participation in the \$2.1 billion project, now 90 percent complete, unless they received some form of financial aid. If the sponsors withdraw, DOE would take possession of the plant and then decide whether to finish building the facility or to close it down.

Lavelle guilty of perjury

A federal jury on Dec. 1 convicted Rita M. Lavelle, a former Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) official, of perjury and of obstructing a congressional investigation into the handling of EPA's hazardous waste cleanup program. In sworn testimony before a congressional committee last year, Lavelle had denied knowing before June 17, 1982, that her former employer, Aerojet-General Corp., was one of many companies identified as dumping toxic wastes at a California dumpsite. However, witnesses at the trial testified that she had actually learned of Aerojet's involvement a month earlier. Lavelle's contention that she did not manipulate the toxic-site cleanup program for political purposes was also rejected (SN: 5/7/83, p. 299).

The Reagan administration fired Lavelle on Feb. 7 because of mounting concerns that she may have committed conflict-of-interest violations (SN: 2/26/83, p. 132). Last summer, she was acquitted of a separate charge of contempt of Congress for failing to appear before a House subcommittee (SN: 5/28/83, p. 343). Now Lavelle faces a possible maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a \$19,000 fine.

Although a Justice Department investigation revealed that other EPA officials also committed "improprieties," no one else has been charged, and no further charges are expected.

Crew error likely accounts for stray jet

An International Civil Aviation Organization inquiry into the shooting down of a Korean Air Lines passenger jet when it strayed into Soviet territory (SN: 9/24/83, p. 196) has concluded that human errors in operating navigation equipment were the most likely contributors to the plane's flight path deviation. Either the crew programmed the wrong starting point coordinates into a computer or the automatic pilot kept operating on a constant heading instead of being connected to the navigation system, says the report.