

The Emergence of Idiosyncratic Religious and Demonic Themes in Art Therapy;
Implications for Treatment

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Abstract

This paper will present three case studies in which religious and demonic themes emerged in the artwork of the clients during specific points in their art therapy treatment. In the first case, a powerful ceramic devil's head evolved as the portrait of a cottage supervisor in residential treatment. The implications of this image will be considered in view of the client's history, verbal associations to the piece, and the history of the "Horned God" as an archetypal image. In the following two cases, verbal associations to the artwork revealed that the clients were involved in what they perceived to be a personal struggle with the devil over control of their thoughts and behavior. As part of this discussion, I will explore environmental factors, personality traits and psychological processes that may predispose an individual to embrace paranormal belief systems which incorporate feelings of external control. Finally, I will offer several clinical considerations and alternatives for treatment in working with clients whose belief systems may be delusional or in contrast to the therapist's perspective.

In 1897, Freud wrote a letter to Fleiss in which he asked, "Do you remember m" always saving that the medieval theory of possession, that held by the ecclesiastical courts, was identical with our theory of a foreign body and the splitting of consciousness? Why were the confessions extracted under torture (i.e., witchcraft trials) so very like what my patients tell me under psychological treatment?" (p. 187)