



Case of James Stern

SCHIZOPHRENIA

James Stern is a 20-year-old, single, Caucasian male who is a full-time student at a nearby university where he also works part-time to offset living expenses. He resides off campus with three roommates, and has been in an off-again, on-again relationship with his girlfriend since high school. He first sought treatment at a local student counseling center for anxiety, depression, and general distress at the urging of his family, but was then referred for longer-term individual psychotherapy due to the increasing severity of symptoms that were described by his therapist as paranoid ideation, ideas of reference, increasing distress, and dysphoric affect.

Mr. Stern confirmed that he had experienced symptoms that “others described as sounding paranoid” since high school, although he also reported that throughout his developmental years, he felt a lack of connection with his family and had few, if any, close friends throughout his primary and secondary school years. While he noted that he was always somewhat suspicious and guarded, he also reported that these feelings became much more intense after he relocated to the current local university from a much smaller college near his hometown. During this same time period, James also reported that he became increasingly reliant on the daily use of marijuana to ease/cope with associated symptoms of anxiety and distress. He was eventually “forced” to eliminate his

usage because of his growing realization that the marijuana magnified feelings of paranoia that resulted in isolating himself in his room for days amidst a growing suspiciousness that his roommates and classmates had been infiltrated by “dark forces” that posed an increasing threat to mankind.

Following his cessation of marijuana use, James continued to struggle with perceptions that his professors were dropping surreptitious clues for him to decipher regarding the “dark forces” he still feared were infiltrating society, and he began to believe that those forces may have already “taken over” at least two of his roommates. At this point, his paranoia and fears about “evil forces” escalated rapidly, and he began to intermittently see “demons” moving among people. His distress elevated to the point that he refused to leave his apartment bedroom, which forced his withdrawal from school and termination of employment. Mr. Stern has been diagnosed with schizophrenia. Since beginning psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy, he has reported moderate to marked reductions in paranoia and distress, although he continues to report intermittent suspiciousness and ongoing uncertainty about his future in multiple domains (e.g., relationship, academic, and career goals).

Clinical vignette provided by Sandra Testa Michelson, PhD.