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PSYCHOPATHIC PERSONALITY

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Pathologic lying consists in falsification entirely disproportionate to any discernible objective by an individual, who at the time cannot definitely be declared insane, feeble-minded or epileptic. It differs from normal lying only in degree. It seldom, if ever, involves a single event, but rather shows itself over a period of years or even for life. It is a trait rather than an episode. Extensive and very complicated fabrications may be evolved.

Lying tends to develop in proportion as society becomes complex. The ill result is that it stunts the generous, esthetic and social sentiments and leads to dissociation. In many instances it is the result of the instinct of self-exhibition to win commendation.

For those concerned with litigation the understanding of this peculiar type of behavior has special importance. The great difficulty in dealing with pathologic lying, especially in court, is because the testimony apparently is true. Particularly in some cases, viz., where a child makes serious charges seemingly without other reason, the presumption seems to favor the testimony being true.

As far as motives are concerned it is clear that in many instances advantages to be gained by lying are not clearly formulated in the individual's mind: there is a mere following of impulse. In other cases the motives are well concealed and only traced by devious pathways. Sometimes the relation of overt lying to a desired end is not difficult to see, but the utter disregard of any obvious advantage to be gained may cause doubt as to whether the subject is aware that he is lying. This variety of human conduct because of its incongruity is difficult to comprehend as it does not follow the ordinary conceived standards of misconduct.

Pathological lying nearly always occurs on a defective mental background as indicated by development or heredity. However, in exceptional cases these are absent. It is not necessarily associated with an intelligence defect. It may occur in those subject to true attacks of epilepsy, hysteria and traumatic neurosis. We find that the condition occurs after some disturbing experience usually involving the sex life and is due to the resultant mental conflict. The

pathological liar is nearly always female.

The types of lying belonging to this class are mostly simple, impulsive, e. g., making up of stories centered about the person's self and experiences. These are usually readily detectable. There may be elaborate fabrications which have no apparent object. It may be that these represent dreams of what is desired as experience. Then there are types of lying important from the legal viewpoint involving false accusations, which are without motive and grudge and even false self-accusation. They may also be against members of the family or benefactors. The condition is mostly associated with other delinquencies.

Many pathological liars are well educated, plausible, of prepossessing appearance and decidedly cunning. They fabricate stories to obtain what they desire; their chief offense is usually that of having obtained money by false pretenses. Their histories reveal an incapacity to tell the truth from childhood—as children they lie to themselves and others continually until they are no longer capable of determining clearly between actual experiences and inventions. In adult life they make up things half consciously or quite unconsciously. They confuse the prod-

ucts of their fancies with realities. False memories disturb the representation faculty because the whole attention is given to deceptive creations of fancy in such a way that they become realities. They have an assured appearance and present swindles so ingeniously and naturally, with such innocent expression and with such unfeigned enthusiasm that they succeed over and over in convincing others. Whereas, a conscious liar, who coolly and clearly measures his words in constant fear of controverting himself or being trapped, meets with instinctive mistrust.

In the consciousness of the common or normal liar two trains of thought flow beside each other, the thought of the truth and the thought of the lie, and they trip each other up. In the mind of the pathologic liar all is unified and so he can carry out the greatest swindles artistically and with inner conviction. With final detection he may collapse and seem as awakening from a dream, seemingly as astonished and dismayed as his victims.

These people cannot adjust themselves to life's problems. They resort to fantastic memory. They are inexhaustible talkers, given to romancing and transforming simple daily events into extraordinary

experiences, in order to make themselves interesting. Their lying is a mixture of imagination, boastfulness, deception, delusion and dissimulation. The possibility that the truth may come out does not abash them in the least. Remonstrance against lies make no impression; for their lies to them are real experiences. They glory in them and recount their fabrications with an infinity of detail.

They are often regarded as mentally normal because they talk well. It is on account of their fairly high level of intelligence that their offenses consist mostly of swindling. They are exercising a talent and not like the ordinary swindler following a trade. They will lie and cheat, even when there is no purpose of gain and when there is a certainty of detection. They persist in their perverted conduct even in the absence of intelligent motive.

Besides their lack of industry and chronic mendacity there is a conspicuous absence of all compassion. The misery they cause is nothing to them. Their most marked characteristic is a lack of power to recognize ethical distinctions, a lack of consciousness of

the sense of right and duty. Through this moral deprivation there is a serious lack of balance between the thinking and acting capacity. Without this power there is no check to the lower passions except by the intellectual consideration of utility and expediency, and egotism is unbridled.

Because of their intense egotism, there is entire lack of gratitude. They are even abusive to those who have benefited them, but may be sycophantic if they expect advantages. Regular life is monotonous and they are not made for industry. They trade upon the credulity and ignorance of good people. In all probability there is no definite region in the brain corresponding to moral sentiment, such as there may be for primary emotions and instinctive impulses. For example, a head trauma does not cause loss of moral sentiment alone.

A laboratory test — the Ausage test, a mode of measuring an individual's precision in testimony and report — reveals clearly the proclivities of the morbid liar. He exhibits himself as a wholly unreliable reporter. He will accept every suggestion or will volunteer inventions of his own.