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THE PSYCHOPATH COMPARED TO SELECTED OFFENDERS

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By viewing the psychopath as a whole—his mental attitudes, physical condition, and his social and cultural environment—one may form an opinion about whether there is a psychopathic syndrome or a psychopathic type of offender.

Reading material written by authorities in this field will give a better understanding of the psychopath. However, even a casual review of literature on this subject reveals that there is considerable disagreement about whether there is a psychopathic syndrome. In discussing the types of offenders, remember that there is no single or particular form of criminal behavior. *All* criminal behavior is *human* behavior. Thus, the best way to look at the problem of "how to recognize the different types of criminals" is to study the individual in interaction with his environment.

The Psychopathic Offender

Perhaps one of the most often used, but least understood terms in the criminal justice field is *psychopath*. Although psychopath is used frequently in literature, few writers agree on just what one is. Some writers would include all criminals in this category; others are more specific in defining the psychopathic offender. These differences in opinions have served to "muddy-up the water" and have prevented an understanding of the psychopath.

The psychopath has been described by a great variety of words and one finds repeated generalizations. For example: the psychopath lacks ethical sense, he cannot learn from experience, he shows emotional instability, he is not concerned with the welfare of others, and he is determined to satisfy his own needs and desires. Banay summarizes the psychopathic behavior by saying that it is strongly antisocial (hostile to society).¹ The McCords refer to the psychopath as being asocial (unable to conform to social demands).² Most writers tend to agree with McCord that:

"The psychopath is an asocial, aggressive, highly impulsive person, who feels little or no guilt and is unable to form lasting bonds of affection with other human beings."³

The Neurotic Offender

Probably the type of offender having the most fixed behavior characteristics is the neurotic. Often he is characterized by feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, and insecurity. But most significant is his intense anxiety, chronic tension, and chronic dissatisfaction. He is constantly in a state of conflict, generally internal. The neurotic suffers from a hidden emotional or mental conflict between two codes of conduct: his desire to meet adult standards and his desire to return to more satisfying infantile behavior. He repeats the same act, compulsively, without knowing why. His "irresistible impulses" bring him into conflict with the law.⁴ And, it is interesting to note, the neurotic's behavior may be socially acceptable for long periods of time only to have his repressed desires break through in unacceptable behavior, usually sex related.

The neurotic is compulsive. He has a "place for everything and everything in its place." His method of operating never changes. He doesn't usually commit spectacular crimes, but he is persistent as an offender.⁵ The sanity of his actions is his way of trying to ward off anxiety. Ruth Cavan describes neurotic crime as:

- the outcome of a conflict between a strong desire and a social conscience, although the social conscience may dictate action at the infantile level,

- an act of compromise and not a direct expression of the desires, or
- an act that provides no material gain or at least such gain is not the objective of the act.⁶

The neurotic then is inadequate, insecure, inferior, and compulsive. How does he differ from the psychopath? The McCords say that the neurotic is the opposite of the psychopath. In terms of emotional sensitivity, the neurotic is "thin-skinned", and the psychopath is "thick-skinned".⁷ More specifically, the neurotic is intensely anxious, the psychopath has no anxiety; the neurotic frequently feels guilt, the psychopath feels no guilt; the neurotic expresses love (even though for himself), the psychopath does not love; the neurotic generally contains his anger, the psychopath is aggressive and at times explosive; and the neurotic has a set *modus operandi*, the psychopath is impulsive.

The Acting-Out Neurotic Offender

The acting-out neurotic possesses many of the traits of the average neurotic: inferiority, inadequacy, insecurity, compulsiveness, chronic state of anxiety, and inner tension. Like the average neurotic, he may function effectively for periods of time in society. But, unlike the average neurotic, he reacts with aggression and not repression. This is the trait that marks him as an acting-out neurotic.

The so-called sex psychopaths, who are reported by the mass media, are actually acting-out neurotics. Their behavior stems from compulsion and hysteria and can be appeased only through action.⁸ The psychopath is frequently a sex deviant, but he seldom becomes obsessed by a particular object. He is pansexual and will try anything once but not through compulsion. Unlike the acting-out neurotic sex offender, he does not concentrate on one type of gratification. He is too impulsive.

The psychopath often has been confused with the acting-out neurotic because, at first glance, their symptoms are similar. They both show the behavior symptoms of ag-

gressiveness and asociality. The primary differences are:

- The acting-out neurotic has strong guilt feelings and is plagued by intense anxiety; the psychopath does not.⁹
- The acting-out neurotic has a set pattern of action, whereas the psychopath acts impulsively.

Although many writers refer to acting-out neurotics as psychopaths, they are distinctly different types.

The Psychotic Offender

If a "hippie" were to be compared to any type of offender, it would probably be to the psychotic. Like the "hippie," the psychotic is a dropout from society. He has "a serious loss of contact with reality"¹⁰ and creates his own world. He not only lies, but he believes his lies.

The McCords say that the psychotic's thinking is filled with self-reference and that hallucinations surround him.¹¹ Parsons agrees with the McCords and adds that the psychotic has no insight into his condition. Parsons also writes that some psychoses have an organic cause but the majority originate in the mind or in emotional conflict. He refers to schizophrenia (split personality) as being the best example of criminal psychosis. It is characterized by "a splitting of the personality, emotional apathy, inability to carry out purposes, a gradual mental deterioration, and outbursts of temper that may result in violent crime." He adds that because the psychotic's acts are impulsive and usually result from his own delusions and hallucinations and because his judgement is so markedly impaired, all types of antisocial conduct may result.¹²

The psychotic displays a noted divergence from normal behavior.¹³ In his criminal conduct, he often commits only one bizarre crime before being taken into custody. His action usually is motivated by the fantasy in which he lives—his own world—and the abnormal manner in which some psychotic crimes are committed have an internal symbolism.¹⁴

The psychotic, regardless of type, differs from the psychopath. Where the psychotic

withdraws from reality, the psychopath attacks. The psychotic creates his own world of fantasy and hallucinations; the psychopath does not. The psychotic may feel intense guilt, the psychopath never does.¹⁵ Most notably, the psychotic lies and believes his lies, but the psychopath, though extremely skilled in the art of lying, never believes a word of what he says. Neither does the psychopath need to create his own world of fantasy, for his impulsive desires are satisfied in the real world.

The Dissocial Offender

Where the psychotic drops out from reality, the dissocial offender joins his own subculture. Perhaps the best examples of the dissocial offender are the moonshiner and the prostitute. His moral code or value system is a function of his environment. His dissocial reaction to society involves a distorted value system that characterized his criminal behavior.

The dissocial offender generally is capable of strong loyalties. He typically does not show significantly abnormal personality traits aside from clinging to the values and codes of his own criminal group. However, the dissocial offender is not immune to mental disorders. The stress of his criminal conduct frequently results in symptoms of personality disorders such as those described for the neurotic and the psychotic.¹⁶ Dissocial offenders do have a value system—"honor among thieves." They feel good about their behavior, which they perceive as normal within their subculture. However, behavior that is normal to their subculture is abnormal to society as a whole. But since the dissocial offender must function in total society, he must be perceived by society as deviant. The dissocial offender is similar to the psychopath in that both can be aggressive and feel no guilt for their acts. However, they do differ: the dissocial offender adheres to a criminal code of conduct, the psychopath is a loner, the dissocial offender plans his activities while the psychopath is impulsive, the dissocial offender is dissocial, the psychopath is asocial, and the dissocial offender may love significant others, while the psychopath does not love. The most important difference, however, is the ability of the dissocial offen-

der to adopt a value system, even though it is against society.

The Situational Offender

The situational offender is a first offender. Generally, the crimes committed by the situational offender are serious ones such as murder, arson, assault, robbery, auto theft, and kidnapping. The situational offender may have stolen a car as a result of peer pressure or he may have violated the Mann Act unwittingly by transporting a female across a state line for immoral purposes. *He has been caught in a situational web.*¹⁷

A good example of the situational offender frequently occurs in murder. The victim is his wife, child, best friend, or his wife's lover. He may kill in the heat of passion or as the only way out of what he perceives to be an unbearable situation. His action is a response to one moment of hate or despair. He has solved his immediate problem; for he has eliminated it.

It appears obvious that the situational offender is not a psychopath. His action is one offense, not a pattern of behavior. Unlike the psychopath, the situational offender can feel guilt and love. In the moment of committing the offense, the situational offender is impulsive, aggressive, and acts in an anti-social way like a psychopath; but such actions are unusual to him. He is not a temporary psychopath, for him the time was right for his one offense and we can reasonably assume that he will not commit another offense.

Summary

Each criminal is a unique human being possessed of particular talents, skills, capabilities, and limitations. As a member of a social group, many influences play upon his personality. All the social and economic influences of his life play a part in forming his personality and his fundamental attitudes. The actions of every offender express his antisocial attitudes, his failure to be concerned with the welfare of his fellow citizens.¹⁸ An understanding of these different types of offenders is important for there is no one

type of criminal; that is, there is no one type of neurosis or psychosis or personality that inevitably leads to crime.

The psychopath has a definite, unique, personality syndrome and must receive specialized treatment. The techniques that work with the psychotic or the neurotic do not work equally well with the psychopath.¹⁹

The problem of what to do with this psychopath remains to be solved. Different treatment for the psychopath seems to be the most reasonable solution to the problem. There is an identifiable psychopathic syndrome and it requires specialized treatment.



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FOOTNOTES

¹Ralph S. Banay, *We Call Them Criminals* (Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1957), p. 164.

²William McCord and Joan McCord, *Psychopathy and Delinquency* (Grune and Stratton, 1956), p. 6.

³*Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴Ruth S. Cavan, *Criminology* (Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1952), p. 239.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁷McCord and McCord, p. 40.

⁸Benjamin Karpman, *The Sexual Offender and His Offenses: Etiology, Pathology, Psychodynamics and Treatment* (Julian Press, 1957), p. 40.

⁹McCord and McCord, p. 42.

¹⁰Robert White, *The Abnormal Personality* (Ronald Press, 1948), p. 490.

¹¹McCord and McCord, p. 39.

¹²Phillip A. Parsons, *Crime and the Criminal* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), pp. 97-101.

¹³Robert G. Caldwell, *Criminology* (Ronald Press, 1956), p. 215.

¹⁴Cavan, p. 252.

¹⁵McCord and McCord, p. 39.

¹⁶James C. Coleman, *Abnormal Psychology and Normal Life* (Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964), p. 369.

¹⁷Harry E. Barnes and Negley K. Teeters, *New Horizons in Criminology* (Prentice-Hall, 1959), p. 53.

¹⁸Mabel A. Elliott and Francis E. Merrill, *Social Disorganization* (Harper and Brothers, 1934), p. 149.

¹⁹McCord and McCord, p. 43.

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