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The Impostor: Contribution to Ego Psychology of a Type of Psychopath*

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DR. DEUTSCH'S fascinating case study concerns itself with a variant of psychopathic personality known as the "impostor." Her lengthy record of therapeutic contact with such an individual gives us an unusual longitudinal study of this disorder. Indeed, analysis of such types usually is terminated at the point of the first reality confrontation. The emphasis upon the role of ego identity may be compared with Novey's contribution in this volume. Moreover, the ultimate character type may be contrasted with Michael's construct of character disorder, also included among these readings.

Dr. Deutsch's skill in depicting this peculiar flavor of human personality (she was the first to define the "as-if" individual) is apparent throughout the article. The odd nature of the tie to reality in this disturbance is thoroughly examined. The concatenation of psychic forces involved in both extreme narcissism and its opposite, i.e., the need for others, makes for an "orientation toward reality," but reality is viewed as a stage for the performer, with humanity as the admiring audience. The truly parasitic nature of the individual thus lies exposed; there is no real object libido since all ties to the outer world are intended only to extract gifts from it. These persons are seen as forever in pursuit of an identity which does justice to their narcissistic concept of themselves. The new identity serves, at the same time, as a denial of what must lie underneath—a passive, frightened, essentially hollow character structure. The pretending and posturing may be conceived of as a defense against anxiety and guilt which breaks down only when the individual is confronted with his own "true identity." Dr. Deutsch speaks of this variation of ego structure as the "nonego ego," an agency which seeks to force an unrealistic ego-ideal upon the outer world through identification with someone else's ego. The impostor usually appears to have some talent, on occasion unusual intellect, but he can satisfy his grandiose fantasies only through acting out.—EDITOR

For psychoanalytic research in the field of psychopathy, the year 1925 constitutes a historical milestone, as it was then that Aichhorn published his book, *Wayward Youth*,¹ and Abraham his paper, "The History of a

* Published in *Psychoanalyt. Quart.*, 24 [No. 4]:483-505, 1955.

¹ Aichhorn, A. *Verwahrloste Jugend*, Vienna, Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1925. (Translation: *Wayward Youth*, New York, Viking Press, 1935.)

Swindler.”² Whereas Aichhorn drew his knowledge from many years of observation and from the therapy of numerous cases, Abraham based his psychoanalytic findings on the study of one psychopath of a certain type. Abraham’s paper has remained one of the classics of psychoanalytic literature. Following his example, I consider it especially valuable to single out from the many varieties of psychopathic personality one particular type and to attempt to understand him. The type I have chosen is the impostor. I will restrict myself to the undramatic kind of impostor and leave the others—more fascinating ones—to a later publication.

About twenty years ago, the head of a large agency for the treatment of juvenile delinquents persuaded me to interest myself in a fourteen-year-old boy and, if possible, to lead him into analysis. The boy came from an exceedingly respectable family. His father, a business magnate, was a well-known philanthropist to whom the agency was indebted for major financial assistance. A typical American business man, he was entirely committed to the financial aspects of life. His sincerity and altruism gave him a dignity which everyone respected. He never pretended to be something he was not, and his business acumen was accompanied by a great sense of social responsibility. Son of a poor Lutheran clergyman, the manners and morals of his pious father were engrained in his character.

This father’s hard work, perseverance, and—judging from his reputation—financial genius had made him one of the richest men in the community. He loved to stress the fact that he was a “self-made man,” and it was his great ambition to leave his flourishing business to his sons for further expansion. At home he was a tyrant who made everyone tremble and subject to his command. His wife was a simple woman from a poor family, not very beautiful nor gifted with any sort of talent. He had simply married an obedient bed companion and housewife, let her share his material goods and, in part, his social prominence, and supported various members of her family.

Jimmy, the patient, was born late in the marriage. At his birth, his older brother was eleven, the next ten years old. The mother, always anxious, but warmhearted and tender, devoted herself completely to her youngest child. She indulged him endlessly, her chief interest being to please him. All his wishes were fulfilled and his every expression of displeasure was a command to provide new pleasures. In such an atmosphere, narcissism and passivity were bound to flourish. These were the foundations, the powerful predisposing factors for the boy’s further development. The growing brothers abetted the mother’s coddling, and for them the little boy was a darling toy to whom everything was given without expecting anything in return.

² Abraham, K. Die Geschichte eines Hochstaplers in Lichte psychoanalytischer Erkenntnis, *Imago*, 11:355-370, 1925. (Translation by Strachey, A. *Psychoanalyt. Quart.*, 4:570-587, 1935.)

The father did not concern himself with the boy during the first three or four years of his life. In those days, Jimmy escaped the paternal tyranny, and the older brothers' battle against the despot took place outside the little boy's sphere of living. As the two older boys entered adolescence, this battle became more intense and ended in full rebellion. The younger brother, an introverted, artistically inclined boy, exchanged home for boarding school; the older, mechanically gifted, soon became independent and left the family.

The father was not a man to accept defeat. He simply renounced the older sons and, with his boundless energy, turned to his youngest, thus transferring the boy from his mother's care into his own. He partially retired from business but continued the pursuit of his financial and philanthropic activities from home. Jimmy, then four years old, spent the major part of the day with his father and heard his conversations with visitors who were all in a subordinate position to his father and in many cases financially dependent on him. The father became to him a giant, and the boy reacted to his father's efforts to make him active and aggressive and to arouse intellectual interests in him with some anxiety, yet with positive signs of compliance. A strong unity developed, and the process of the boy's identification with his father, which the latter had mobilized, was in full flower.

When Jimmy was seven, his father became the victim of a serious chronic illness resulting in five years of invalidism, during which time he lived at home in a wing removed from the central part of the house. Whether this illness was pulmonary tuberculosis or lung abscess never became clear. The boy saw very little of his father and the most vivid memory of this sickness was his father's malodorous sputum. According to Jimmy's report, his father remained alive only to spit and to smell bad.

Around this time a change took place in Jimmy. He developed a condition which appears to have been a genuine depression. He stopped playing, ate little, and took no interest in anything. Then—in a striking way—he became very aggressive, tyrannized his mother, and attempted to dominate his brothers. His first truancy was to run away to a nearby woods and refuse to come home. He created for himself a world of fantasy and described in a pseudological fashion his heroic deeds and the unusual events in which he had played a prominent role. These pseudologies, typical for his age, may well have been the precursors of Jimmy's future actions. While his mother—"for the sake of peace" and not to disturb the sick father—continued giving in to him in everything, his brothers now ridiculed him and relegated him to the role of a "little nobody."

In the course of the next few years, Jimmy had some difficulties in school. Though he was intelligent and learned quickly, he found it hard to accept discipline, made no real friends, was malicious and aggressive without developing any worthwhile activity—"a sissy," as he characterized himself. Since the father's name carried weight in the community, Jimmy felt

with partial justification that nothing could happen to him, his father's son. He was not yet guilty of asocial acts, not even childish stealing.

When he was twelve years old, his once beloved father died. Jimmy did not feel any grief. His reaction was manifested in increased narcissistic demands, the devaluation of all authority, and in a kind of aggressive triumph: "I am free; I can do whatever I want." Soon afterward, his asocial acts began to occur.

Before we discuss his pathology, let us say a few words about this boy's relationship to his father, which suffered such a sudden break. In this alliance with his father, which began in his fifth year, the spoiled, passive little boy became in part the father's appendage. Identification with the powerful father created a situation in which the ego was simultaneously weakened and strengthened. When he had been in competition with the father, he was forced to feel small and weak; however, when he accepted as a criterion of his own value his father's verdict: "You are my wonderful boy," and his plans for the future: "You will be my successor," Jimmy's self-conception and ego image resembled his marvelous father, and his narcissism—originally cultivated by his mother—received new powers from his relationship with his father. In his seventh or eighth year Jimmy lost this "wonderful" father (not yet by death, but by devaluation), and his *own* conception of himself as a "wonderful boy" suffered a heavy blow.

The events of later years give more understanding of what took place in this period which was so fateful for him. As mentioned before, I first saw Jimmy when he was fourteen years old.

First Phase of Treatment

I was determined to resist accepting Jimmy for treatment. I had never had any experience in treating juvenile delinquents, associating such cases with Aichhorn and his school, which I considered outside my sphere. I yielded, however, to the pressure of the boy's mother, whom I knew and respected, and to the pleas of the heads of the social agency. Because of the uncertainty of my approach and in contrast to my usual habit, I made notes of Jimmy's behavior. They contain the results of four to six interviews. At the time they seemed somewhat sterile to me, and yet, regarding them in the light of later insights, they are extraordinarily illuminating. The interviews took place in 1935.

Jimmy was a typical young psychopath. He was increasingly unable to submit to the discipline of school. There was a repetitive pattern in his pathological acting out. At first he ingratiated himself by doing quite well; after a time he became insolent and rebellious toward his superiors, seduced his friends to break discipline, tried to impress them by the extravagance of his financial expenditures, and started quarrels and fights only to escape in a cowardly fashion under the ridicule of his companions. He forged

checks with his mother's or older brother's signature and disrupted the school and the neighborhood by his misdeeds. Every attempt to bring about his adaptation by changing schools ended in truancy. Toward me he behaved very arrogantly. With an obvious lack of respect, he stated that he had not come of his own accord. He claimed nothing was wrong with him; that it was "the others" who would benefit by treatment.

He admitted he had again run away from school, and that this had been bad for him, and insisted that his trouble started when he began to "grow very fast." He wanted to remain a little boy; when he was little he was his father's pet. His father used to say, "Just wait until you are grown up; we (father and he) will show the world."

Jimmy complained that the boys laughed at him, but "You know," he said, "I can defend myself." Sometimes he was sincere and admitted that essentially he was helpless and weak: "You know, they never took me seriously at home. For my big brothers I was sort of a puppet, a joke. I was always a kid whose ideas did not count and whose performance was laughable."

School was like home. He had difficulties because not to learn meant showing them, "I can do what I want and do not have to obey." He forgot everything he learned, so "Why learn," he asked, "if I forget it?" He told me that his father had cursed his brothers: "I will show them," he had said, "they will end up in the gutter without my help." But to his father, Jimmy was different; father based all his hopes on him. When he was a little boy he felt that nothing could happen to him because his father was very powerful. Everything was subject to his father, and together they were allies against all hostile influences. His father's sickness changed all this. The big promise, "We will show them," could not be redeemed. The brothers were now stronger than he. They ridiculed him, and he was waiting to be grown up; then he would show them!

In school it was always the same story. The teachers and especially the headmasters were "no good." They pretended to be something they were not. Of course he did not wish to obey them. He knew at least as much as they did, but they refused to acknowledge it. The boys were no good. Some might have been but they were led on by the others. And all this was instigated from "above," because "they" knew that he would not let himself be put upon.

In this short period of observation, I learned that Jimmy was infuriated by not being acknowledged as someone special; some of his complaints had an uncanny, paranoid character. During our meetings, Jimmy played the undaunted hero, but with no trace of any emotion. One got an impression of great affective emptiness in him. All his asocial acts were his means of showing that he was something special. Stealing, debts were ways of obtaining money for the purpose, one might say, of buying narcissistic gratifications. He rebelled against all authority and devalued it. The moment he

perceived that the methods he employed no longer sustained his prestige, his displeasure quickly mounted and drove him away.

With me he was overbearing, arrogant, cocksure. One day he came with the question: "Are you a Freudian?" He then proceeded, most unintelligently, to lecture me about analysis with catchwords he had picked up, or remarks based on titles he had seen. For instance: "That thing about civilization is particularly idiotic," or "The old man (meaning Freud) isn't even a doctor." When I tried to point out to him that, after all, he did not know anything and that I believed he talked so big because he was afraid, he stopped coming; as usual, a truant.

He presented such a typical picture of a juvenile delinquent that I felt concern about his future, wondering whether he would eventually become a criminal. His lack of affect, inability to form human relationships, and paranoid ideas led me to consider the possibility of an incipient schizophrenia.

Second Phase of Treatment

I did not see Jimmy for eight years, but remained in contact with several people close to him. Some of the news about him was reassuring. He nevertheless confronted those around him with one problem after another. These were truancies in a more adult sense. He accepted positions which he did not keep, responsibilities he failed to meet. He made promises and broke them, with serious consequences to himself and to others. He accepted financial commitments, but neglected them so that they ended in failure. He provoked situations ominous not only for himself but also for those whom he had lured into these situations with false promises—which to him, however, were real. Up to the time he came of age, his misdeeds were regarded as youthful indiscretions by the executors of the family estate. At twenty-one, he assumed that he was now financially independent and had already made financial commitments in the most extravagant ventures, when, to his fury, he was placed under legal guardianship.

With his customary bravado, Jimmy volunteered for military service during the war. He reported for duty on his new, shiny motorcycle. Soon he was the center of admiration among his comrades. Neither he nor they had any doubt that he would become one of the heroes of the war. He had, after all, volunteered to protect his fatherland, and his grandiose spending, his hints at connections with military authorities left no doubt that he was someone quite special. In this atmosphere he thrived until one day the news came that a commanding officer, noted for his severity, was to attend inspection. Jimmy had sufficient orientation in reality to realize that one cannot fool military authorities. The "hero" turned into a truant. But in military life, that was not so easy. One does not desert, as one does in civilian life under the auspices of an approving family. On the contrary, one is punished

for such actions, and Jimmy could never tolerate punishment. He had an attack of anxiety—which was genuine—and a delusional state—which was not. He was declared to be sick, taken to a hospital, and from there was sent home.

The anxiety had been real, and his fear frightened him. His dream of being a hero was shattered. It is quite possible that under more favorable circumstances, Jimmy, like so many other heroes of wars and revolutions, might have made his pathology serve a glorious career. Now he remembered that years ago a woman had predicted just this kind of fear, and he came straight to me for help.

He was in so-called analysis, although it was actually more a supportive therapy, for eight years. The success of this treatment, while limited, was nevertheless important for him. During that period I witnessed many episodes in his pathological acting out and gained some insight into its nature. What kept him in treatment, however, was his anxiety which had increased since the war episode. It was evident that the defensive function of his acting out had been sufficiently threatened by reality that it was no longer adequate to hold internal dangers in check.

During the eight years which had elapsed since my first contact with Jimmy, he had been put through high school and prep school by the combined efforts of tutors, teachers, advisors, the head of the child guidance clinic, and his financial managers. They had even succeeded in having him admitted to a college where he stayed half a year. His intelligence and ability to grasp things quickly had, of course, been a help, but further than this he could not go. His narcissism did not permit him to be one of many; his self-love could be nourished only by feeling that he was unique. This desire for uniqueness did not, however, make him a lonely, schizoid personality. He was oriented toward reality, which to him was a stage on which he was destined to play the leading role with the rest of humanity as an admiring audience. There were for him no human relationships, no emotional ties which did not have narcissistic gratification as their goal. His contact with reality was maintained, but it was not object libido which formed the bridge to it. He was always active, and he surrounded himself with people; he sent out "pseudopodia," but only to retract them laden with gifts from the outside world.

After Jimmy left college, it was necessary to find him a job, to settle him in some field of work. All attempts at this, of course, failed. As in his school days, he could not tolerate authority and had no capacity for sustained effort. Success had to be immediate; he had to play the leading role from the start. He decided to become a gentleman farmer. A farm was purchased for him and he worked zealously on the plans for the farm. The preliminary work was done, the livestock was in the barn, and Jimmy even behaved as a socially responsible person. He created several positions at the farm for his former cronies; the fact that they knew as little about

farming as he did was to him beside the point. His adaptation to reality had come to its end, and the enterprise was doomed to failure. Jimmy, however, acquired an elegant country outfit, saw to it that his clothing was saturated with barnyard smells, dyed his hair and eyebrows blond, and appeared among a group of former acquaintances in a New York restaurant as a "country gentleman." His farm project was soon involved in various difficulties, and his protégés deserted him; he was in debt and financial ruin seemed imminent when his guardians came to his rescue and he was saved by his fortune.

In another episode, Jimmy was a great writer. Here his pseudocontact with others was even more intense. He presided over a kind of literary salon where intellectuals gathered about his fireplace, with Jimmy in the center. Short stories were his specialty for, of course, he lacked the capacity for prolonged, patient creativity. He knew how to make life so very pleasant for his literary admirers that they remained within his circle. He had even drawn several well-known writers into his orbit. He already visualized himself as a greater writer and brought a sample of his productivity for me to read. When I seemed somewhat critical (his writing was pretentious and quite without originality), he was furious and told me that I simply did not understand modern literature.

He soon gave up his literary career to become a movie producer. He made connections with men in the industry and spent considerable sums of money, but the result was always the same. At one time he became an inventor and even succeeded in inventing a few small things. It was fascinating to watch the great ado over these little inventions and how he used them to appear a genius to himself and to others. He had calling cards printed with the identification "inventor" on them and set up a laboratory to work out his discoveries. This time, he chose as his collaborator an experienced physicist, and, within a short period, succeeded in making this man believe that Jimmy was a genius. With uncanny skill, he created an atmosphere in which the physicist was convinced that his own achievements were inspired by Jimmy, the genius. His pretense that he was a genius was often so persuasive that others were taken in for a short time. Jimmy's self-esteem was so inflated by these reactions from his environment that occasionally he was able to achieve things which to some degree justified the admiration which he himself had generated.

In the course of his treatment, I succeeded in getting Jimmy through college. His success in temporarily impressing his teachers as an outstanding student of philosophy was almost a farce. Actually he knew little beyond the titles and the blurbs on the jackets of the books, but on this basis he was able to engage for hours in polemics, and it was some time before he was found out. In these activities Jimmy did not impress us as a real impostor. His transformations from a pseudo-impostor into a real one were only transitory. For instance, he made certain connections by using the name of

the abovementioned collaborator; another time, he altered his name in such a way that it was almost identical with the name of a celebrity in a particular field. He was not an extravagant impostor; his pretenses were always close to reality but were nevertheless a sham.

For the purposes of comparison, it may serve to summarize briefly the stories of impostors who are closely related to the type described. They differ only in the stability of their chosen roles. A fascinating example is the well-known case of Ferdinand Demara, which was much discussed several years ago.³ After running away from home, Demara became, in turn, a teacher of psychology, a monk, a soldier, a sailor, a deputy sheriff, a psychiatrist, and a surgeon—always under another man's name. With almost incredible cleverness and skill, he obtained each time the credentials of an expert and made use of knowledge acquired ad hoc so brilliantly that he was able to perpetrate his hoaxes with complete success. It was always by accident, never through mistakes he had made, that he was exposed as an impostor. In his own estimation, he was a man of genius for whom it was not necessary to acquire academic knowledge through prolonged studies, but who was able to achieve anything, thanks to his innate genius.

Reading his life history, one sees that he was perpetually in pursuit of an identity which would do justice to his narcissistic conception of himself in terms of "I am a genius" and which at the same time would serve to deny his own identity. This denial of his own identity appears to me to be the chief motive for his actions, as is true in the case of other impostors. In the course of his masquerading, Demara did much capable work and could bask in the sunshine of his successes. His parents had wanted to finance his way through college and medical school but he was never interested in a conventional way of life. When interviewed by reporters he acknowledged his enormous ambition and his need to take "short cuts." He declared that he would like for a change to use his own name but that he could not because of all that had happened. Whenever Demara resumes his activities, one may presume it will be possible only under a usurped name or not at all. His statement that he cannot use his own name—however rational it may sound—is nevertheless the expression of a deeper motive.

Another famous impostor of recent years is the "physicist" Hewitt, who, under the name of Dr. Derry, began teaching theoretical physics, mathematics, and electrical engineering in numerous universities with great success, without ever having finished high school.⁴ Like Jimmy, he sometimes used his own name but, again like Jimmy, under false colors. He impersonated two different actual doctors of philosophy in physics, masqueraded as a nationally known man, and took responsible positions under various names. He had been unmasked twice, yet tried again to achieve success under still another physicist's name.

In Hewitt's life history, there are many analogies to Jimmy's history.

³ McCarthy, J. The master impostor, *Life*, January 28, 1952.

⁴ Brean, H. Marvin Hewitt Ph(ony) D, *Life*, April 12, 1954.

Hewitt's need for admiration was as great as Jimmy's, and the narcissistic motive behind his masquerading was equally evident. At the beginning of his career as an impostor, Hewitt was somewhat unsure of himself, but when he found himself being admired, his personality unfolded its full capacities. He was able to create for himself an atmosphere of power and prestige. When he felt that his masquerading was becoming too dangerous, he abandoned his project, changed his name, and embarked on another masquerade which became a new source of narcissistic satisfaction. Sometimes he was presented with an opportunity to work under his own name, as he was a gifted and really brilliant man who could have had a successful career. Such offers he always turned down; he could work only under another name, in an atmosphere of tension, in the precarious situation of imminent exposure. Like Jimmy, he regarded himself as a genius and courted situations in which he would be exposed as the counterpart of a genius—a liar, an impostor.

Demara, Hewitt, and Jimmy appear to be victims of the same pathological process of the ego—only the level of their functioning is different. Demara changed the objects of his identifications perhaps because he was driven by fear of impending unmasking. The objects whose names he temporarily bore corresponded to his high ego-ideal, and he was able to maintain himself on the high level of the men he impersonated. His manifold talents and his intelligence were outstanding, his capacity for sublimation was but little impaired. It was not lack of ability, but psychopathology which made him an impostor.

Hewitt had a much more consolidated ego-ideal. His interests were, from the beginning, oriented toward physics; his talent in this direction even made him a child prodigy; his path was marked out. But he rejected any success which he could realistically achieve through work and perseverance under his own name and preferred *pretending* under the mask of a stranger's name. The objects of his identification were physicists of repute, men who already were what he would have liked to become. In this as in the other cases, I consider the incapacity to accept the demands imposed by the discipline of study, and the lack of perseverance, to be a secondary motive for becoming an impostor.

Jimmy, in his striving for an ego-ideal, appears to us like a caricature of Demara and Hewitt. In contrast to them, he was unable to find objects for successful identification because his limited capacity for sublimation and his lack of talent made this impossible for him. He was able to satisfy his fantasies of grandeur only in naïve acting out, pretending that he was *really* in accordance with his ego-ideal. On closer examination, I was struck by the resemblance of his acting out to the performance of girls in prepuberty.

Various identifications which later in puberty can be explained as defense mechanisms and which one meets in schizoid personalities as expressions of a pathologic emotional condition, prove, on closer inspection, to have a specific character in prepuberty. They remind us strongly of the play of small children,

and seem to be an "acting out" of those transitory, conscious wishes that express the idea, "That's what I want to be like." It is noteworthy that this acting out has a concrete and real character, different from mere fantasizing.⁵

Jimmy, too, acted out his transitory ideal which never became fully established. Compared with Dr. Greenacre's "psychopathic patients,"⁶ Jimmy's ideals did not have the character of magic grandeur and were not so unattached to reality. Quite the contrary, Jimmy always turned to external reality to gratify his narcissistic needs. His emptiness and the lack of individuality in his emotional life and moral structure remind us furthermore of the "as-if" personalities.⁷ In contrast to these, Jimmy's ego did not dissolve in numerous identifications with external objects. He sought, on the contrary, to impose on others belief in his greatness, and in this he often succeeded. His only identifications were with objects which corresponded to his ego-ideal—just like the impostor Hewitt, only on a more infantile level. Another difference is that the "as-if" patients are not aware of their disturbance, whereas Jimmy, while firmly pretending that he *was* what he pretended to be, asked me again and again, sometimes in despair: "Who am I? Can you tell me that?"

In spite of these individual differences between the various types, I believe that all impostors have this in common: They assume the identities of other men not because they themselves lack the ability for achievement but because they have to hide under a strange name to materialize a more or less reality-adapted fantasy. It seems to me that the ego of the impostor, as expressed in his own true name, is devaluated, guilt laden. Hence he must usurp the name of an individual who fulfills the requirements of his own magnificent ego-ideal. Later we shall see that Jimmy's fear of being unmasked as an impostor increased when he began to be successful under his own name and figure.

As his treatment proceeded, Jimmy's fears increased as his acting out lessened. With this change of behavior he entered a new phase in his therapy, the phase of anxiety. It was this phase which revealed more of the nature of the process. But this does not mean that the phase of acting out was free of anxiety. It was anxiety that brought him to me, and anxiety kept him with me. In time, his increasing anxieties assumed a more hypochondriacal character. He examined his body, his pulse, and so on and wanted to be certain that a physician could be reached. It was not difficult to assume that a man whose personality was limited by an unsuccessful identification with his father repeated his father's disease in hypochondriacal symptoms.

⁵ Deutsch, H. *The Psychology of Women*, New York, Grune & Stratton, 1944, Vol. I., p. 9.

⁶ Greenacre, P. *Conscience in the psychopath, Trauma, Growth, and Personality*, New York, W. W. Norton & Co, Inc., 1952, p. 167.

⁷ Deutsch, H. Some forms of emotional disturbance and their relationship to schizophrenia, *Psychoanalyt. Quart.*, 11:301-321, 1942.

By and by, Jimmy gave up his grotesque acting out, and his behavior became increasingly realistic. First, he founded an institute for inventions. This project was still in accordance with his fantasy of being a great inventor. Because he had associated himself with a friend who, despite his naïve belief in Jimmy, was genuinely gifted scientifically and had already achieved recognition, and because of the considerable sums of money available, Jimmy gradually worked his way toward acquiring a going concern. Here, for the first time in his life, he functioned well and enjoyed a certain solid respect. He limited his acting out to founding a colony for artists in which he acted the role of a "brilliant connoisseur of art"; also he set up for himself some sort of an "altar" at home. He married a girl with an infantile personality who blindly believed in his genius and adored him. When she began to have doubts, he simply sent her away and threatened her with divorce. Love he never experienced; even from his children he expected gratifications for his narcissism and he hated them when they failed him in this respect.

The condition which now confronted us seemed paradoxical: The more effectively he functioned in reality, the more anxiety he developed. In the days when he had really been a swindler, he never feared exposure. Now that he worked more honestly and pretended less, he was tortured by the fear that his deceit might be discovered. He felt like an impostor in his new role—that of doing honest work. Obviously he remained an impostor after all, and, in his very real personal success, he now had an inner perception of his inferiority. In the beginning, we had had the suspicion that Jimmy always feared his own inferiority and that he was hiding his anxiety behind a bloated ego-ideal. It could now be better understood why he inquired after his identity, why he had the depersonalized feeling, "Who am I really?" In this, he reminds us of those more or less neurotic individuals who, having achieved success, experience like Jimmy the same inner motivation.

Jimmy's anxieties gradually acquired a phobic character. His professional activities were impeded by a fear of leaving town and of being too far from home. This evidently represented a counterphobic mechanism against his earlier running away.

Thus we may speak of a certain success in his treatment which was never a psychoanalysis. In my forty years of practice, I have never seen a patient as little capable of transference as Jimmy. He and I sometimes talked of "hot air therapy," for I called his grandiose acting out "hot air" until it was greatly devalued. At the same time, I appealed to his narcissism by showing him what he could really achieve. In this way we continued for eight years. About two years ago, I passed him on to a colleague who is continuing the therapy.

Reviewing Jimmy's pathological behavior chronologically, the connection between his preadolescent delinquency and his later acting out becomes clear. By the phrase he used when he came to see me as a fourteen-year-old,

"I became grown up too fast," he meant to say that he did not yet feel capable of playing the role his father had assigned to him for a time when he would be grown up. His high ego-ideal, cultivated by the father, and an identification with the "great father" did not permit him—despite a certain degree of insight—to wait for the process of growing up to take place. He demanded that the world treat him not according to his achievements but according to his exalted ego-ideal. The refusal of his environment to do so was an attack on himself, on his grandeur, on his ego-ideal. This feeling that hostile elements were aligned against him grew at times into paranoid reactions. He responded to these insults in a way which brought him to the borderline of real criminal behavior, but when he began to feel that he was defeated, he ran away.

Perhaps, if he had had enough aggression at his disposal, he would have continued his career as a criminal. An appeal to his conscience was fruitless, as, after all, he considered himself to be a victim and his actions as self-defense. Maybe this is true of all juvenile delinquents. Social injustice and a desire to avenge oneself for it is often given as a reason for delinquent behavior. In Jimmy's case, such a rationalization could not be used.

His passivity led him in another direction. Instead of fighting for his narcissistic "rights," he found less dangerous and more regressive methods of asserting his ego-ideal. What he was not, he could become by pretending. Only when this was made impossible for him—first through external reality (the army), then through his treatment—was he overwhelmed by anxiety and feelings of inferiority, and one could then realize the defensive function of his pathological behavior.

We suspect that Demara and Hewitt, the other two impostors mentioned, were also hiding such an ego through identification with someone else's ego, by means of what might be called a nonego ego. In these cases of a more solidly constructed imposture, the inner anxiety is partly projected to the outside, and the impostor lives in perpetual fear of discovery. Jimmy did not fear such discovery, for he had not assumed another's name. What threatened him was that if his pretending were to be unmasked, he would be laughed at as he was once ridiculed by his brothers and later by his schoolmates. He developed real anxiety only when he gave up pretending, so that both he and others were confronted with his "true" ego.

Let us consider the causes of Jimmy's pathology. Dr. Greenacre⁸—in agreement with other writers—finds etiological factors in the emotional deprivation of psychopaths and delinquents. Her emphasis rests on the combination of both indulgence and severity on the part of the parental figures; this is in accordance with Wilhelm Reich's conception of the character structure of the psychopath.⁹ The emotional climate of Jimmy's

⁸ Greenacre, P., *op. cit.*

⁹ Reich, W. *Charakteranalyse*, Vienna, Published by the author, 1933. (Translation: *Character Analysis*, New York, Orgone Institute Press, 1945.)

childhood was different, but evidently no less disastrous. Whereas Dr. Greenacre's patient was emotionally deprived, Jimmy was overloaded with maternal love. I knew the mother very well, and I know that she was one of those masochistic mothers who, loving and warmhearted, completely surrender themselves for the benefit of others. She was a masochistic victim not only of the despotic father but also of her children, especially Jimmy. Her last child's every wish was granted. Any active striving he had was paralyzed through premature compliance; every need for wooing and giving was smothered by the mother's loving initiative in meeting his demands.

I believe that the emotional overfeeding of a child is capable of producing very much the same results as emotional frustration. It contributes to an increase of infantile narcissism, makes adaptation to reality and relationship to objects more difficult. It creates intolerance of frustration, weakens the ego's ability to develop constructive defenses, and is in large measure responsible for passivity.

Jimmy's relationship with his father was very well suited to strengthen the predisposition created by the mother. The powerful, despotic personality of the father contributed to Jimmy's passivity, and the father's narcissism prepared the ground for Jimmy's later, fateful identification with him.

These attitudes of the parents created a predisposition for the pathological development of the boy. But it was a traumatic experience which activated this predisposition. The father's sickness and isolation caused an abrupt interruption of the normal maturing process of Jimmy's ego. The frustration stemming from the fact that Jimmy was no longer able to feel himself to be part of a great father crippled his ego which was not yet strong enough to endure the brutal attack of separation. The enforced awareness of his self as being distinct from that of his father was anachronistic in his development. The normal process of identification had not yet reached that degree of maturity from which further development would have been possible.

Simultaneously with the separation from his father came the devaluation of that powerful figure. Consequently, the character of his identification also underwent a change. What had so far strengthened his ego was no longer available. With the devaluation of the father, a shadow fell across his own identified ego. The fact that the traumatic event occurred in the latter part of latency was decisive for Jimmy's psychopathology. As we know, this period is of utmost importance for the maturation of the ego apparatus, for the establishment of a less rigid superego, and for the capacity to cope with reality. In a normal, gradual development of a boy in latency, not harmed by trauma, Jimmy would have transferred his identification with the father onto other suitable objects. Eventually his ego would have been ready to assimilate the identifications into the self and to achieve a reliable degree of inner stability. His ambivalent sexual relationship to the father would have yielded to tender love, and a path toward reality and

toward the formation of constant object relationships would have been made.

The pathogenic force of this trauma was due to two factors: (1) its suddenness, and (2) its daily repetition during the four years that preceded his father's death. As a result, regressive forces in the ego replaced progress in development, and the whole process of sublimation was impaired. * The boy was incapable of goal-oriented endeavor because he was unable to postpone reaching an attempted goal. The fact that his relationship to the father never became desexualized was revealed in his masturbatory fantasies of a passive-feminine-masochistic character and in his fears of homosexuality. His relationship to his mother became submerged in his identification with her as his father's debased sexual object. The manifestations of this identification could be traced back from his recent masturbatory fantasies to that period of his childhood in which he had been enuretic.¹⁰

It is interesting to observe pathology in what is commonly agreed to be normal. The world is crowded with "as-if" personalities and even more so with impostors and pretenders. Ever since I became interested in the impostor, he pursues me everywhere. I find him among my friends and acquaintances, as well as in myself. Little Nancy, a fine three-and-a-half-year-old daughter of one of my friends, goes around with an air of dignity, holding her hands together tightly. Asked about this attitude she explains: "I am Nancy's guardian angel, and I'm taking care of little Nancy." Her father asked her about the angel's name. "Nancy" was the proud answer of this little impostor.

Having referred to "normal impostors," I should clarify my conception of the term "impostor." The pathological impostor endeavors to eliminate the friction between his pathologically exaggerated ego-ideal and the other, devaluated, inferior, guilt laden part of his ego in a manner which is characteristic for him; he behaves as if his ego-ideal were identical with himself, and he expects everyone else to acknowledge this status. If the inner voice of his devaluated ego on the one hand, and the reactions of the outside world on the other hand, remind him of the unreality of his ego-ideal, he still clings to this narcissistic position. He desperately tries—through pretending and under cover of someone else's name—to maintain his ego-ideal, to force it upon the world, so to speak.

A similar conflict, though in a milder form, seems to exist also in the normal personality. In the complex development of a normal individual there are certain irregularities, and only seldom can a successful harmony be attained. Perhaps the identity between the ego-ideal and the self is achieved only by saints, geniuses, or psychotics. As one's ego-ideal can never be completely gratified from *within*, we direct our demands to the

* There are psychopaths endowed with great capacities for sublimation and creativeness, although their ego functioning is gravely impaired.

¹⁰ Michaels, J. J. *Disorders of Character*, Springfield, Ill., Charles C Thomas, 1955.

external world, *pretending* (like Jimmy) *that we actually are what we would like to be*. Very often we encounter paranoid reactions in normal personalities which result from the fact that their environment has refused to accept an imposture of this sort.

Both history and belletristic literature are rich in impostors. Thomas Mann's story about the impostor Felix Krull shows the most profound understanding of this type.¹¹ It is amazing to consider how the psychological genius of a writer is able to grasp intuitively insights at which we arrive laboriously through clinical empiricism. The passivity, the narcissistic ego-ideal, the devaluation of the father's authority, and the complicated processes of identification of the impostor Felix Krull are very well understood by Mann; and even the profound similarity between the shabby Krull and the wealthy, distinguished prince whose name and existence Krull, the impostor, takes over, is well understood by the writer.

I wish to close by repeating what I stated at the beginning. The case here discussed represents only a certain type of psychopath. I believe that such an individual typological approach to the large problem of psychopathy may prove very fruitful.

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¹¹ Mann, T. *Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull*, Frankfurt, Fischer Verlag, 1954. (Translation: *Confessions of Felix Krull*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1955.)