

1954

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### Recommended Citation

Saul Kasman, On Human Nature for Investigators, 44 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 737 (1953-1954)

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# ON HUMAN NATURE FOR INVESTIGATORS

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Dr. Kasman has asked us to say that the opinions expressed in this article are his own and not necessarily of the Illinois Public Aid Commission.—EDITOR.

## INTRODUCTION

Human behavior is a complex phenomenon. Psychology, the science of human behavior attempts to understand and analyze the why and wherefore of human actions. The major objectives of psychology as a science of human behavior are: (a) observation, (b) prediction, and (c) control.

The investigator's functional responsibility to his job fits the above objectives in every respect. The investigator is called upon to investigate public assistance frauds in terms of field activities: home visits, collateral calls to neighbors and other individuals who may be able to give data and information. He likewise collects evidence and analyzes this evidence in terms of intent to defraud or other human motivation. He does a lot of observing and deducing. With the evidence thus collected he is in a position to make certain conclusions: both in terms of prediction and causation of the fraud. He is then ready for the next step: control of fraud. He gets the state machinery into motion to control as well as deter commitment of future frauds through obtaining conviction and restitution, i.e., punishment for the act as well as serving as deterrent to future similar acts.

One of the basic questions one has to raise in connection with the commitment of fraud is: Is fraud a normal or abnormal aspect of human behavior? To what extent is honesty measurable or noticeable in human behavior? Are we looking at fraud only from the legal standpoint or are there other questions with which we ought to be concerned, if we are going to get anywhere in understanding fraud per se, and as it appears in public assistance in particular?

From the standpoint of psychology, fraud as found in public assistance, seems to appear primarily as *deception*. The causes for deception, however, are not only difficult to trace, but are also difficult to observe and discover without actually subjecting the suspect to scientific detection through the lie detector, e.g. It is true that the indefati-

gable investigator may literally unearth sufficient evidence to show that a fraud has been committed, and may point to plausible causes. This fact, nevertheless, does not clear up our first point mentioned above, namely is fraud a normal or abnormal aspect of human behavior?

Why should a person applying for public assistance want to commit a fraud? Was this fraudulent intent present at the time of application? To what extent is fraudulent behavior repetitive? Is fraud traceable to the home? Is fraud traceable to other factors? We can raise a lot of other questions which are pertinent to the problem of fraud. We all agree that fraud exists and is a problem and that any knowledge we can bring to bear upon the subject which will help the investigator will also shed light on this aspect of human behavior.

If we are to accept the hypothesis that fraud is primarily an act of deception, what do we know about deception? Under what circumstances do people deceive? When and where will people draw a line in deception, i.e., how far will people go in deceiving? Is there a code of ethics with respect to deception as applied to groups? For example the statement that persons belonging to a certain group (say gangs of delinquents or criminals) will be honest as far as their own members are concerned, but dishonest as far as outsiders are concerned. Finally, is deception a general trait of character and personality or is it a specific habit which is acquired in the home or in other social milieu?

### THE NATURE OF DECEPTION

Psychologists were concerned with this problem from two approaches: (1) The causes or reasons for deception, and (2) How to detect deception? The answer to the first question may be found in the monumental study in deceit by Hugh Hartshorne and Mark A. May which was carried on as a part of a project by Teachers College, Columbia University into Character Education—an Inquiry in co-operation with the Institute of Social and Religious Research in 1928.

These scientists report that "Deception, helpfulness, co-operation, persistence, and inhibitions were groups of specific habits rather than general traits." In other words people are not born honest, helpful, co-operative, etc., but develop these habits in terms of their environment and cultural habitat. They go on to state that "When situations permitting dishonesty were altered, as when one moves from a classroom to a party or an athletic contest or has an opportunity to steal money rather than copy answers of a test from an answer sheet, then there was considerable alteration in the practice of deception. As

the situation became less and less alike there was found greater and greater diversity of behavior, so that one could not predict from what a person did in one situation to what he would do in a different situation."<sup>1</sup>

For a better understanding of the implications of this outstanding study on the psychology of deception the conclusions of the study are quoted:

In the case of deceit, we have pointed out the significance of classroom experience and friendship as perhaps the dominant cause of both honesty and deception. Next come constitutional factors, such as intelligence, resistance to suggestion, and emotional stability, all of which are associated with honesty. The latter of course is perhaps as much effect as cause—or, better, both honesty and low neurotic scores indicate satisfactory life adjustments. Third in importance come the home and the general and economic social background. When these are on a high level, deception is rare. When they are on a low level, deception is common.

It seems to be a fair conclusion from our data that honest and deceptive tendencies represent not general traits nor action guided by general ideals, *but specific habits learned in relation to specific situations which have made the one or the other mode of response successful.*<sup>2</sup> For deceptive children, success has come to be defined in such a way as to encourage and permit dishonest methods for attaining it. As an illustration of how such concepts may arise one has only to think of much parental discipline, with its emphasis on outer conformity, and of much school practice, with its emphasis on marks more than on inner growth.

These hints as to the origin of deceptive behavior are amply borne out by a number of facts. For one thing, boys and girls differ in deceptiveness precisely at the points where they differ also in *motive* for deception, i.e., in what can be gained by it. In private and progressive schools, for example, where motives tend to be equalized between the sexes, very slight sex differences occur. Again, deception does not decrease with age or grade. The school teaching regarding dishonesty and school methods of suppressing certain of its manifestations do not materially affect its appearance when opportunity is offered for practicing it, even when the gains to be won are relatively slight. If it is suggested to pupils that marks on a test will count on their monthly grade, the amount of deception at once increases.

Whatever behavior is studied, the general picture holds true. Conduct represents an achieved association between a certain type of situation and a certain type of response. Such terms as *honesty* and *self-control* are names which the observer may, for convenience, apply to this or that group of conducts which show specified resemblances, but there is no evidence that in grades five to eight the children themselves have developed any great sensitiveness to such general terms either as motives or as cues to action. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Reference to this study has been made recently by Dr. Charles E. Hendry, Director, School of Social Work, University of Toronto, Canada, who has said:

1. HARTSHORNE, HUGH, MAY, MARK A., and SHUTTLEWORTH, FRANK K., STUDIES IN THE NATURE OF CHARACTER, Vol. III, STUDIES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF CHARACTER, p. 1, The Macmillan Company, 1930.

2. Italics supplied.

3. Taken from STUDIES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF CHARACTER, HARTSHORNE, HUGH, and

When youngsters were given opportunities to cheat and be dishonest, those who took part in Sunday School, Scouts and other similar character-building programs gave as much evidence of deceitful behavior as those, with otherwise comparable background, who did not participate at all. As a matter of fact, it is found that in certain youth-serving organizations the more successful a member was in moving up the achievement scale the more disposed he was to be dishonest.<sup>4</sup>

Hartshorne and May continue:

That amount and consistency of character tend to go together. If we hold with the moralists that honesty is *ipso facto* a trait of character, then we must accept consistency as an associated phenomenon. If we hold with the psychiatrists that integration is the desideratum of character, then we must conclude that such prosocial behavior as honesty, service, and self-control are at present involved in such integration. It may be questioned, therefore, whether both moralist and psychiatrist are not tending toward abstractions.

The quality of any act is thus found from its contribution to the life of the group, and the organization of these acts into a consistent self is achieved not through a process of self-exploitation but through a process of social-idealization by which situations, otherwise in conflict, are subsumed under some one concomitant which, through intelligently directed experience, becomes potent to control conduct.

In this analysis we come upon the problem of individual functioning and growth within existing social situations which make contradictory demands upon one and which are incapable of external organization. No matter what may be a child's notion of an ideal family and an ideal school, his own family and his own school may hold to contrasted standards, and he must live in both. It is not surprising, therefore, that our present generation of children show little integration of character. What little there is, however, is chiefly the property of those whose type of performance is prosocial rather than antisocial. These have already begun to achieve that ascendance of idea over circumstance which is the chief mark of the man of character.

It is of considerable importance that such consistency of character as pupils have achieved is the product of experience *preceding* the fifth grade in school and does not materially increase as they move up through the eighth. It would seem to be implied that radical changes were called for in our prevailing methods of character education.<sup>5</sup>

From the above excerpt one gets the realization that deception or lying is an expedient pattern of behavior in terms of specifically related situations. It definitely establishes a cause and effect relationship as to deceiving, as well the fact that deceiving in terms of a particular person is satisfaction of a *need*. It does not matter very much, that such behavior in terms of the legal or social conception of the act is antisocial. It means that as far as the individual is concerned he gets the satisfaction. It was further brought out that deceiving per se is a neurotic or maladjusted behavior pattern. The greater the individual malad-

MAY, MARK A., pp. 371-376, Chapter XXVII, CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHARACTER, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1930.

4. HENDRY, CHARLES E., *What Price Honesty*, in ADULT EDUCATION, April 1953, Volume 1, No. 11, p. 3.

5. HARTSHORNE, HUGH, and MAY, MARK A., *Op. cit.*

justment the greater the deception, and conversely, the greater the personality integration, the lower the deception. Individuals coming from good homes and where character and moral education plays a significant role will not resort to lying, nearly as much as would individuals who come from underprivileged homes. Thus when the investigator is confronted with a fraud situation he is also confronted with environmental effects and can really do little to mitigate the situation except by performing his duty, namely, obtain conviction and restitution.

It is interesting, also, to approach the problem of deception from the point of view of *semantics*. The science of semantics is concerned with the meaning of meanings. That is, words mean one thing to one person and another thing to another. The client may not look upon fraud in exactly the same way as would an investigator. He may not only rationalize fraud and make it justifiable, but in the light of the above quoted study may even find it expedient. Also, because a client's conception of truth as he sees it may be entirely different from that of the investigator. In line with this it would be appropriate to quote Alfred Tarski's *Semantic Conception of Truth*:

The predicate true is sometimes referred to psychological phenomena such as judgments or beliefs, sometimes to certain physical objects, namely, linguistic expressions and specifically sentences. . .<sup>6</sup>

When a client makes a fraudulent statement, whether conscious or not, it may be a manifestation of a judgment or belief he has that as far as he is concerned is true. Thus in seeking convictions not only is it necessary to prove intent, but also to show that it was done consciously, and that the person at the time of making the statement was actually engaged in the process of deceiving. According to the semanticists this may be quite difficult to prove.

The problem of truth is no less serious in the courtroom. F. K. Berrien writes the following:

Is the witness telling the truth? This question is a recurring theme in nearly every courtroom scene. It injects itself into every examination by the police prior to the arraignment of suspected criminals. Though rarely answered directly, it is perhaps the key question affecting the course of justice.<sup>7</sup>

Thus we find that the psychologist had attacked the problem of deception from an entirely different point of view. The underlying assumption in the use of devices to detect deception is that the person who

6. Tarski, Alfred, "Semantic Conception of Truth" in Linsky, Leonard, *Semantics and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 14, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Illinois, 1952.

7. BERRIEN, F. K., DETECTING DECEPTION, Chapter 16 in PRACTICAL PSYCHOLOGY, p. 445, Macmillan Company, New York, 1948.

tells a lie will most likely be more emotionally disturbed than would a person who is telling the truth. The lie detectors used do not detect a lie directly but they do indicate physiological changes which accompany emotional disturbances. Again to quote Berrien:

These alterations in bodily functions, may and do appear when emotions other than those associated with lying are stimulated. Just as the physicians must be trained to integrate, discount, and interpret the various symptoms presented by a given patient before he can arrive at a diagnosis, so the records from a deception test must be interpreted by a skillful operator. The skill of the operator in framing questions and in searching for key points that will produce the lying reaction uncomplicated by other responses is perhaps as important as the apparatus employed.<sup>8</sup>

This fact was also brought out by C. H. Patnode, Special Agent, United States Secret Service in a talk he presented at a Conference on Criminal Interrogation and Lie Detection held at New York University, November 8, 1952, as follows:

The integrity of an operator is of the utmost importance, and the future of the lie detector is dependent upon this one virtue. An operator must interpret charts as he finds them, and in so doing must forget what facts or evidence they may be against the subject . . . and . . . a good lie detector operator must be able to inspire confidence in a suspect and keep him at ease.

One may take a leaf from the above quotation and apply to the investigator, namely, the more confidence he can instill in a recipient during an investigation, and put him at ease, the more likely is he to get at the truth or get the facts that he is after. The emphasis here is on objectivity and factual data. Of course, observation plays an extremely important role here. Psychologically speaking there are many personal factors which affect the powers of observation and thus yield data contrary to fact. Common visual defects, for example, may prevent clear observation. Expectations and emotions also affect sensory perception. If one has certain misconceptions and set expectations, one may look for data in terms of these factors. Likewise, if one is emotionally involved in the job of investigation, objectivity would be most difficult to achieve.

### PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

How does the preceding tie in with the investigator's job and his dealing with families on public assistance? What are some of the implications?

Receiving public assistance is a form of economic behavior. It is also dependent behavior. It is a different type of behavior from that

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8. *Ibid.*

of the wage earner. In both instances need is a factor. In public assistance need is established in terms of the law, agency policy and procedure and other data, before the applicant is eligible to receive public assistance. The investigation of the application process itself is done by the public assistance worker, another kind of investigator. It is also assumed that this initial investigation has failed to show fraud, since a grant has been given. Thus when suspected fraud is reported to the "fraud" investigator it is generally a recipient of such aid rather than an applicant.

Since a majority of the cases investigated deal with families receiving Aid to Dependent Children, let us look at the problem from their standpoint. A large number of families receiving Aid to Dependent Children come from so called underprivileged homes. Desertion, separation, disability or illness of the wage earner, death of either of the parents are factors which determine eligibility. Illegitimacy is also a factor, especially if it is not possible to establish the identity of the putative father. Economic resources or their lack play a very important role in the establishment of eligibility for this type of aid.

Therefore, when a fraud has been committed information regarding assets or social data or both has been withheld either at the time of application or after the grant had been given which would have made the family ineligible. It is precisely this fact that bothers the investigator as well as the agency. Thus the investigator who goes out on a case, is very often fired with a sense of indignity. He is out to get the information which will bring these "malefactors" to justice. In his zeal he may be forgetful of the objectivity of his task. The techniques, whatever they are, will be brought to bear upon this investigation. The most important tool the investigator has available is the interview and the interrogation process. In interviewing the suspected recipient he tries to get additional evidence which will either confirm the suspicion or absolve the recipient from it.

What knowledge does psychology have available which will help the investigator in interviewing? At the present time there are no psychological tests, which when given to the recipient, would tell us whether they are telling the truth or not. The investigator has to rely solely on his training, experience, native ingenuity and judgment in getting at the truth. He has to do a lot of routine checking and verifying. In fact, he soon discovers that there is really no short cut to the process of investigation. At the same time he should be reminded that fraud is not committed along *logical* lines. It is more of a *psychological* act, and most likely has no logical basis as such. Perpetrating a fraud very

often takes place on *expediency basis*, very akin to embezzlement. It is behavior aimed at the satisfaction of a need. Very often it is economic need, but it most likely has a psychological basis as all needs do. Above all the investigator should remember that the real motivation for fraud is rather difficult to establish or trace.

When the recipient is questioned by the investigator, he may appear or actually become emotionally disturbed. This situational disturbance may be either a manifestation of guilt or of fear, or of a deep seated maladjustment. The investigator should not be prone to jump to conclusions that the recipient is guilty simply because he or she is upset. When an applicant is gripped with fear lest their grant be taken away he or she may make irrational and uncalled for remarks. Some of these remarks may even be insulting to the investigator. In such cases they are purely manifestations of hostility or resentment to the investigator. In that case it would seem natural that the recipient would act that way. If the investigator retaliates by showing similar resentments and hostility he will then only defeat his own purpose which is to get at the truth.

It is interesting to note in the light of the above discussion the psychological hypothesis of frustration and aggression in terms of human behavior. In terms of this hypothesis, receiving public aid may be interpreted as *frustration and failure*, as far as getting normal ways of making a living or of sustaining oneself is concerned. Very often frustration and failure may lead to aggression. The frustration-aggression hypothesis in human behavior may serve as an explanation as to why recipients commit an act of fraud. Fraud, as seen from this point of view, may be considered as conscious or unconscious aggression against society. The recipients may blame society for their plight by trying to get more assistance than is coming to them, thus getting even for the good things of life they have been deprived of. This psychological stand does not try to justify their behavior or absolve them of the responsibility they have to report assets to the agency. It merely serves as possible further explanation as to why people commit fraud.

#### APPLICATIONS

What is the armamentarium of the investigator during an interview or any other aspect of investigation? First and foremost is *observation*. Clear and undistorted observation by which the investigator can discriminate the relevant from the irrelevant facts is extremely important. He has to be conscious of the recipient's speech, facial expressions,

body tensions, and posture, and any cues which would indicate inner mental and emotional states.

Likewise auditory sensations must be taken into account. Inaudible speech or poor hearing on the part of the investigator very often leads to the loss of important segments of information given. The tone of voice, humble, biting or sarcastic will show emotional feelings.

The cutaneous senses, taste and smell, do not play nearly as important a role as far as the investigator is concerned as do those of vision and audition. However, the conditions known as *Expectation and Attention*, are quite important. Conscious attention to items under investigation without imparting a personal meaning to them, but viewed objectively is more likely to yield factual and undistorted evidence than careless attention would. In expectations, we look for something that we have a "fixation on" rather than try to see the external conditions as they are. Likewise, under expectations, we are apt to overlook items right under the very nose of the investigator, simply because he had his mind made up to look for something else, or even distort facts to fit the expectations.

Along with expectations one might mention the emotions. It is a well known fact that observations made under the impact of excitement are quite inaccurate. Such expressions as "blinded by anger," or "upset by grief" are examples of emotional conditions which affect the reflective mental processes to a considerable degree.

Finally, there is really no substitute for intelligence, alertness, ingenuity, and logical reasoning from given facts. The investigator will always be rewarded for effort, energy, persistence, steadfastness, and a devotion in the search for truth.