

The association of psycho-neurosis with mental deficiency / by Charles S. Myers.

Contributors

Myers, Charles S. 1873-1946.

Publication/Creation

[Place of publication not identified] : [publisher not identified], [1923?]

Persistent URL

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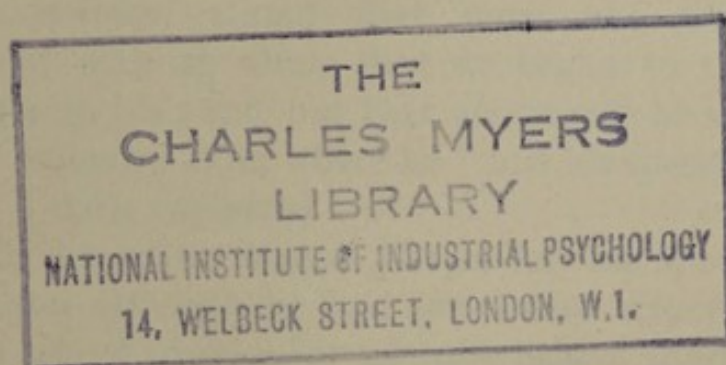
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WITH MENTAL DEFICIENCY

BY

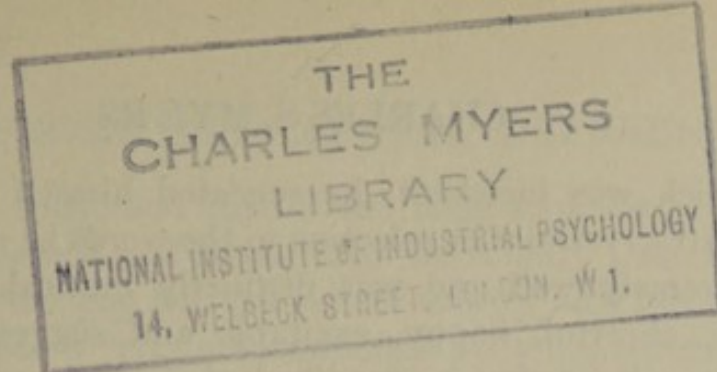
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THE ASSOCIATION OF PSYCHOLOGISTS
WITH MENTAL DEFICIENCY

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THE ASSOCIATION OF PSYCHO-NEUROSIS WITH MENTAL DEFICIENCY

BY

CHARLES S. MYERS

IN this paper I wish to present an account of two school children which have come under my observation during the past five years, in which mental defect was associated with psycho-neurotic symptoms. For much of the information which I am able to give I have been dependent on, and wish to express my gratitude to, Miss Peyton, the Head Mistress of the School for Mental Defectives in which the boys were being educated, and Miss L. G. Fildes, who carried out the tests described in the paper.

The first case, A.B., was admitted to the School in January, 1915, then aged 8 years 2 months. When tested four years later, in May, 1919, by the Stanford-Binet tests, his intelligence quotient proved to be 52, his mental age being 6 years 6 months; *i.e.*, there was a retardation of about six years. He had an apparently normal brother at work. A fatal accident befell his father, a heavy drinker, two months before the boy's birth. His mother, a cook in service, stated that until two years old he was boarded out with an aunt, that he began to talk normally while he was with his aunt, but that afterwards he was transferred to another woman's care, where he "lost his speech" after being shut up in a dark cupboard.

When admitted to the School for Mental Defectives, his speech was very imperfect; and although he had previously attended school he could do no school work. He left this School shortly after I saw him, by which time his speech had improved enormously and he had learnt to carry out some coarse handwork. He could also read and write the alphabet and many small words. His behaviour and speech were marked by complete absence of continuous attention. He was always restless and anxious to do something, but was perpetually distracted by any passing occurrence. Through such inattention he was wholly incapable of learning at school, except under individual instruction. In his

talk, which was incessant, he repeated himself constantly and showed little restraint or selection in the words he used. He could sing extremely well and was distinctly musical. He was mischievous, cheerful, happy, excitable and suggestible, clever at mimicking others, but he readily lost control over bodily movements, speech and laughter. He explained his wild behaviour by the words "me happy." He exhibited no distrust of strangers.

In the absence of external excitement, however, he showed certain dominant interests. Some of them had reference to recent passing events, *e.g.*, his birthday, Christmas, etc.; these controlled much of his speech and conduct. One interest, however, was permanent. Almost any topic, if pursued, would lead to the subject of death, birth, God, Satan and angels. Thus, when Miss Fildes asked him in an experiment to give an association in response to the word "goat," he replied: "Can milk him—get milk out of him—only butt you like a cow. Oh! when a cow toss you you come down bang and are dead. God knows, don't He? I know how God looks [shows this with foot stretching out, hand over eyes]. Satan—God's best angel—naughty—if Satan made you naughty he put you in the burning fire. No good—ought to be in fire himself."

Again, in the middle of solving a jig-saw puzzle, he remarked: "How did God get you down here when He made you? Funny how He got you down. Come down small. Mr S.'s baby not growed to boy yet. Been here long time I think. Do you come down hole? I seen them at funeral put box into hole. Make hole deep—*this* big—oh! deeper than this floor. Man put cord round box and put it down slow—not fast—might break it. How do God get box up? I think it go along and He pull it up by cord—angels carry it to heaven. How do He make you? Do you be an angel when you get to God? I seen Him when He make me—ugh! great big man. Do you remember when He make you? Funny how He get you to earth," etc.

These instances are typical of a constant form of speech, whenever free speech was allowed; and there is evidence that the same topic was a favourite one when he talked to other boys. A dream of his recorded is one of "black things sitting on the end of the bed, which had come to take him."

We were able to get from him his distinct recollection of being taken one day, when he was about three years old, by the woman with whom he had been boarded, to a funeral. He saw the coffin put into the ground and he was told that the coffin lid was screwed

down over the body, and that if the body happened to be too large it was squeezed and forced into the coffin. Unfortunately, as I have said, the boy left the School shortly after we began to observe him, since a certain educational Body desired to transfer him to its own School. But from the facts here described the psycho-neurotic condition of the boy is obvious.

The second case I am able to record in fuller detail. C.D. is now in his eighteenth year and has been in the School for eight years. When first admitted, he refused to speak to anyone and nothing would induce him to smile. He repelled all advances towards friendliness and remained in this state for about three months. Shortly after admission he began to show great interest in the bedrooms belonging to the staff of the school, expressing a wish to "help clean them"; and late one night he was discovered peeping through the keyhole of the cook's bedroom while she was undressing. When asked why he was doing this, he replied, "I wanted to see what clothes she wore." He was overheard telling another boy the nature and names of women's underwear.

C.D. lived at home until he was admitted to the School. His father, when he visits the boy, is generally under the influence of drink. The father's version of his son's early childhood is that the mother treated him very cruelly, throwing him downstairs and often injuring him. The mother died (or went away) when the boy was about three years old and another woman took her place who left before the boy was admitted to the School.

The boy is reported by the Head Mistress of the School to be now much less anti-social than before, but to be still morose and reticent. He is selfish and hoards everything on which he can lay his hands. He works in the garden and kitchen now and is generally amenable to reason under good management. He is a good worker and gives valuable service when not "upset."

The following determinations of his intelligence were made by Miss Fildes:—

Date of Examination	Age	Mental Age	Intelligence Quotient
8. 10. 20	14 yrs. 10 mos.	7 yrs. 8 mos.	52
27. 4. 21	15 yrs. 4 mos.	7 yrs. 8 mos.	50
25. 10. 21	15 yrs. 10 mos.	7 yrs. 10 mos.	49

In 1922 our attention became more closely directed to him

chiefly because of the results of some 400 free associations to which Miss Fildes had subjected him, 50 words at a time, on four different occasions, during November and December of the previous year. Each different series of fifty words was repeated a second time at each sitting. His average reaction time was about five seconds, therein agreeing with those of 18 other boys tested at the school during the same months. But the number of his "senseless" associations was more than three times as great. The striking feature of his senseless replies was that a large number of them, about 20 per cent. of the total number of associations returned, referred to women's articles of clothing, or to objects connected therewith, as may be seen from the tables.*

The sequences—drawers, petticoat, bloomers; frock, skirt, coat; drawers, windows, bodice, bloomers, drawers, blouse, frock, stockings, shoes—are noticeable. Likewise such sequences as nose, eyes; teeth, mouth; teeth, eyes, nose, hair, occur among his replies. It will also be observed that the reaction times for these words are not different from those for "sensible" replies.

Classification of the above 400 Associations

Type of Association	1st response		2nd response	
	Number	Aver. time	Number	Aver. time
Co-ordination ...	38	4·8	42	3·1
Predication ...	12	6·4	10	3·9
Causal Dependence	0	—	0	—
Co-existence ...	9	6·2	12	5·3
Identity ...	1	4·0	2	3·0
Motor Speech ...	4	4·0	8	4·0
Sound ...	1	6·0	1	4·0
Mediate ...	0	—	—	—
Senseless ...	135	5·1	124	5·3
Fail ...	0	—	1	28·0

The average percentage of senseless responses among eighteen other mentally defective boys tested with the same associations is 20 per cent., as against about 67 per cent. in this case. Much the commonest form of senseless response, in the majority of cases, is the name of an object present. Normal children above the age of seven years seldom give senseless responses.

*EDITORIAL NOTE.—For technical reasons it was found necessary to omit the tables which illustrate very well the point made here, *viz.*, the recurrence of response words dealing with objects of female attire.

Taking the results of the same eighteen boys :—

1. The average reaction time is about as long and is very variable. (Average time=5.60 seconds.)
2. Only 48 per cent. of the whole number of reactions are repeated on the second response.
3. There is a great deal of repetition in the responses. On the average, each boy uses only seventy different words for each hundred responses.

I saw him first on March 1st, 1922. He then appeared a dull, loutish youth, somewhat shy and reticent. His general conduct was otherwise not abnormal, save for an occasional jerkiness of the head. He appeared to remember nothing of his mother, save by hearsay that she beat him and starved him. He recalled an occasion when two men living in an adjoining room terrified him by letting a collie dog into his bedroom which climbed on to his bed. He admitted that thoughts of women's clothes often intruded into his daily work. The word "petticoat" proved to evoke in him an image of a certain lady who frequently visited the School (he revealed her name after great pressure had been put upon him) going to the lavatory and lifting up a white petticoat. He said that "stockings" evoked an image of one of the members of the school staff (her name was also revealed only after persuasion) putting on her black stockings. These were incidents, no doubt, he had actually witnessed by surreptitious peeping.

He proved to be quite ignorant of the nature of sexual connection, believing that babies were brought into the world by angels who carried them under their wings.

After some difficulty he was induced to pass into a dreamy hypnoidal state, in which I succeeded in reviving memories of his mother. He recalled seeing her pass urine. "It was nice," he observed. The word "stockings" now revived an occasion of being in bed with his mother and seeing her get up, sit on the bed and put on her stockings. He spontaneously recalled seeing his father being "on top of his mother and playing about."

On waking, he recalled all that he had just said, and he observed that he had never been able to recall these scenes before. He said that he dreamed occasionally of seeing "a woman's number one," but that it was of no particular woman.

Thereupon I attempted to explain to him the reasons for the intrusion into his thoughts of ideas of women's underwear, and

he was given some notion of the nature of sexual differences and functions.

A few days afterwards the Head Mistress asked what we had been doing with the boy, as he was showing so much improvement in general demeanour and behaviour and was now so much more tractable. She wrote recently, "his mental attitude was wonderfully improved after you had talked to him." Miss Fildes noted, in July last, "his general attitude and response certainly improved, and I think the improvement is, on the whole, maintained."

When I saw him again in May, 1922, he said that the intrusion of the thoughts of women's underwear, etc., had entirely ceased, that he had no dreams of a woman's private parts and that he felt, as he expressed it, "more sensible." He appeared far brighter and more responsive.

Two months later—nearly five months after the psychoanalytic interview with the boy—the Stanford-Binet tests were re-applied. The results of this and the two previous tests are as follow :—

Date of Examination	Age	Mental Age	Intelligence Quotient
27. 4. 21	15 yrs. 4 mos.	7 yrs. 8 mos.	50
25. 10. 21	15 yrs. 10 mos.	7 yrs. 10 mos.	49
27. 6. 22	16 yrs. 6 mos.	8 yrs. 7 mos.	52

The improvement indicated in the last examination is especially well-marked, comparing it with the earlier ones. In the course of eight months his mental age advanced nine months—a somewhat unusual occurrence in a defective of his age, the more ordinary condition being a gradual lowering of the intelligence quotient. It is, perhaps, more unusual in his case, seeing that he advanced only two months in mental age during the preceding year. There was no indication in the results of the tests that this improvement in intelligence had taken place along any particular line. But the boy was unquestionably improving. For on three occasions in May, 1923, repetition of the association tests evoked reaction words or responses which might be normally expected of a boy of his mental age. They were obtained by the same experimenter. Nothing had been said to him about the type of response so commonly returned by him on the previous occasions.

The sitting on May 12th took place in the morning before work, that on May 16th in the afternoon after he had been working from 7 a.m. and when he might be presumed to be tired. The

sitting on May 25th was at 9 a.m., when the boy had been upset by some household disturbance and had been crying for some time.

Despite these circumstances, favourable to loss of higher control, there is not a single reference in his 300 replies to women's articles of clothing; indeed, there is not a single instance even of a "senseless" response. The reaction time has also fallen to about $2\frac{3}{4}$ seconds. The associations may be thus classified:—

Classification of the above 150 Associations (first responses only)

Type of Association.	May 12, 1923		May 16, 1923		May 25, 1923	
	No.	Aver. Time	No.	Aver. Time	No.	Aver. Time
Co-ordination ...	18	2'3	25	2'56	25	2'3
Predication ...	10	7'3	6	4'1	11	2'4
Causal Dependence	1	4'0	0	—	0	—
Co-existence ...	18	3'4	13	3'1	7	2'2
Identity ...	0	—	0	—	2	2'5
Motor Speech ...	1	2'0	1	1'0	1	2'0
Sound ...	2	2'0	4	2'5	3	4'0
Mediate ...	0	—	0	—	0	—
Senseless ...	0	—	1	2'0	1	14'0
Fail ...	0	—	0	—	0	—

No mention has yet been made of the experiments in free continuous, or serial, association which were carried out on the boy in November, 1921, and in January, 1923. Here is a list of 70 successive words returned by him in ten minutes on November 8th, 1921:—

Bloomers, petticoat, drawers, night-gown, skirt, frock, shoes, stockings, eyes, nose, teeth, smell, glasses, fire, coal, flowers, hat, coat, clothes, books, hands, legs, feet, stockings, shoes, bloomers, coal, chair, hair, comb, dog, cat, rat, picture-frame, book-stand, pen, ink, coal, wood, stone, glass, stand, handkerchief, lavatory, watch, bed, chamber, paper, coat, petticoat, drawers, bloomers, skirt, frock, stockings, legs, hair, eyes, teeth, nose, trees, glass, stone, house, number two, paper, table, laughing, leaving the room, fire, cardboard.

It will be observed that nearly 40 per cent. of these words refer to articles of women's clothing, excretions, etc. This test was repeated on May 25th, 1923, with the following result:—

Hair, eyes, teeth, nose, coat, skirt, frock, petticoat, drawers, bloomers, stockings, feet, shoes, chamber, lavatory, dog, rat, trees, field, books, glasses, combs, stays, chair, paper, chemise, rubber,

rule, cup, tale, knife, pen, ink, water, bed, nightgown, watch, window, chair, bedroom, cup, skirt, legs, coat, drawers, bloomers, petticoat, stockings, shoes, feet, petticoat, stays, chemise, hair, comb, spectacles, eyes, teeth, nose, water, boat, ink, chamber, lavatory, match, glass, coat, book, rule, rubber, money, pin, coat, fire, coal, bucket, wood, skirt, petticoat, shoes, stockings, bloomers, case, chamber, bedroom, lavatory, table, chair, house, curtain, carpet, cardboard, box, can, puzzle, matches, pictures, window, skirt, petticoat.

These words were returned more speedily than before ; but their character is unchanged, despite the fact that the ordinary association test applied on the same day failed to reveal even a single instance of reference to articles of female clothing, or the like. The following series of responses were then obtained from him :—

Series 1: Serial association

25th May, 1923

Horse, cow, skirt, petticoat, drawers, bloomers, stockings, shoes, coat, frock, hair, eyes, teeth, nose, glasses, stays, chemise, table, paper, bedroom, nightgown, watch, pictures, stove, carpet, chair, puzzle, picture, house, looking-glass. (Time=2 min. 8 sec.)

Series 2: Told to give any words which " dog " made him think of

Dog, cat, horse, cow, pigs, chickens, rat, mouse, peacock, pheasant, duck, gander, geese, turkeys, frogs, toads, pigeon, rabbit, hares, mole, birds, eagle, stag, dog, snake, stoat, weasel, cat, butterfly, worm. (Time=3 min. 28 sec.)

Series 3: To give words suggested by " motor "

Motor-car, bike, motor-car, motor-bike, motor-lorry, train, railway, trucks, motor-scooter, bus, charabanc, trams, steam-roller, cart. (Time=3 min.)

Series 4: To give names of objects in the room

Fire, chimney, stove, coalbucket, shovel, table, papers, books, matches, box, typewriter, case, jug, pictures, cupboard, drawers, vases, bookcase, books, poker, oilcan, glass, windows, looking-glass, curtain, chair, coat, box, watch, pen, carpet, floor, door, electric light, paper clip, pencil, ink, walls, ceiling. (Time=3 min. 30 sec.)

Series 5: Serial association

Trees, skirt, coat, petticoat, bloomers, drawers, stockings, shoes, hair, eyes, teeth, nose, chemise, stays, bedroom, nightgown, chamber, lavatory, trees, house, table, jump, grass, window, drawers, ink, pen, watch, glasses, stove, pencil, paper, wire, books, motor, skirt, shoes, chair, electric light, post-office, comb, brush, carpet, ceiling,

frock, skirt, coat, drawers, bloomers, petticoat, shoes, stockings, stays, chemise, case, typewriter, table, vase, chair, lamp, garden, trees, shed, pen, ink, fire, glass, window, paper, pencil, box, garden, plants, comb, brush, box, motor, oilcan, puzzle, matches, coat, cap, act, rain, field, town, country, walk, play, shops, wheelbarrow, table, books, typewriter, bookcase, chair, trees, shop, sweets. (Time=8 min. 39 sec.)

Throughout these tests of May, 1923, he showed remarkable improvement in his attitude towards the experiments and his general behaviour has continued to improve, although he is still always easily "upset," whereupon he becomes difficult to manage.

[Since this was written, however, he has left the School, as he was getting too old for it and had, on one occasion, attempted to embrace one of the matrons.]

Conclusion

In these two cases we see the influence (*a*) of the emotion of fear; (*b*) of infantile "sexual" feeling; (*c*) of interest and curiosity, associated with thoughts (*i*) on the before- and after-life, and (*ii*) on sexual differences and women's underwear. In the first case the original experience—the funeral—was not repressed; in the second—seeing his mother in her bedroom—it was readily recoverable in the hypnoidal state. In the first case it was associated with a defective development of attention, flight of ideas, loquacity, openness to strangers, cheerfulness and mischievousness; in the other it was associated with taciturnity, moroseness, selfishness and hoarding. In the latter, removal of the repression and brief "re-education" induced an appreciable improvement in intelligence and especially in his ability to make the best use of his mental powers.

In both cases the all-distracting "complex" was practically undisguised. Its affect led in both cases to constant intrusion of the theme into the current of everyday thought; in the first case to constant inquiry, and in the second case to peeping through keyholes in order, apparently, to gratify curiosity.

Psycho-therapeutic treatment was attempted in the second case, and led to very definite intellectual and moral improvement.

In normal children such themes would most likely have been repressed or disguised, and the associated impulses more or less controlled. But in the mentally defective child, criticism and control must prove far less potent. Thus, in her instruction of

such children in reading, Miss Fildes has reached the conclusion that their inability to read is often due to their uncritical, uncontrolled acceptance of the idea that they are unable to read.

It is suggested that not only is the mentally defective state thus responsible for the development and persistence of the psycho-neurotic condition, but that the latter reacts in turn on the slowly-developing mind of the mentally defective child, aggravating his mental deficiency, and responsible perhaps for the often continued childishness of his later behaviour. It seems unlikely that mental deficiency is ever directly and solely due to a psycho-neurosis; but I feel convinced that certain cases of mental deficiency, and especially that many cases of mental backwardness, can be enormously improved—above all, in early life—by attention being paid to any concomitant psycho-neurotic disturbance, thereby permitting of the full development of such intelligence as lies dormant. The undesirable surroundings in which many such children spend the first years of their life are only too favourable for the later appearance of psycho-neurotic symptoms.