

## PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Verna Peterson, University of Puget Sound

A young man walked into the office of the Government Director of Personnel to apply for a position in the State Department. He was quietly and carefully dressed, personable, and intelligent. He impressed the director very much and was likely to receive the position. But before it was made official, the Central Intelligence Agency had to clear him in regard to past records of tests and the like. In going back into the files of records compiled when he was in grade school, the C.I.A. found that he had wet the bed when he was eight years old, he had been repulsed by his parents sexual behavior, and he had been especially friendly with the boy who sat across the aisle from him in the third grade. No, this young man did not get the position: he had been found to be emotionally unstable with homosexual tendencies. This incident may sound like something from 1984 or Brave New World, but, no, today in the United States school children are being given psychological tests the results of which are being interpreted to the "nth" degree and which will follow them for life.

Psychological testing began when applied psychologists started experimenting with inmates of mental institutions and prisons to search the inner recesses of maladjustment. Through the work of these men, psychological tests were derived which, in the hands of the few competent people, were highly successful and contributed greatly to the diagnosis of maladjustment.

But where is psychological testing being done today? Of course, the clinical psychologist makes use of it in the course of his work with people seeking professional help. But when our public school system makes use of it, it is clearly overstepping its bounds. Why do I say this?

Let's look at some of the types of questions asked these children. Do your parents sleep in a double bed, or twin beds? Are you ashamed of your father's job? Do you frequently feel that your parents don't love you? Do your parents drink at home? Do you ever wet the bed? Do you daydream frequently? From the answers to these questions labels are put on the children. From the answer to a seemingly innocent question, such as, "Do you sometimes enjoy being alone?" a child may be labelled "anti-social." Years later when this person is being considered for an executive position he is turned down because of the particular way he felt one day in the fourth grade. From the answer to the question, "Do you sometimes dislike your mother and want to fight back?" it may be deduced that this child is very hostile. Maybe it happened that that morning his mother made him wear his rubbers to school and he didn't appreciate her concern. Does this mean Joey has tremendous pent-up hostility and that years later this would make him unfit to join the elite company of Fulbright Scholars? What does a child do when asked, "Do you ever wet the bed?" If he is like most children, he may when he is frightened or unusually upset. But that doesn't mean he's an enuretic and emotionally unstable. The chronic enuretic would probably answer, "No," because of shame, anyway. A projective test for sexual perversion known as the "Blackie Test" has actually been given third and fourth graders in the public schools. This test consists of a series of cartoon pictures of a puppy in various situations. According to the stories told by the children concerning the pictures, various attitudes toward sex are deduced. Our schools are turning out lesbians, nymphomaniacs, and homosexuals that don't exist, simply because when they were small these children told stories about a puppy going off into the woods with another puppy, or licking its mother when it was happy; these results were put in readily accessible permanent files. When persons who are not clinical psychologists and not qualified to interpret psychological test results, when persons who know nothing about the child except what he put down as answers to the questions, begin to attach deep and psychologically significant terms to those answers, then I say that the school system is overstepping its bounds.

Another reason why psychological testing has no place in the schools: some children are sensitive. Being asked questions about bed wetting, sexual curiosity, and aggressive behavior is a traumatic experience for them, even though they do not behave in the way frowned upon. It's the case of the person who has been accused of stealing feeling like a thief whether he is one or not.

But the child is not only asked questions about himself. His parents come under scrutiny, too. He may be asked questions on a test that you as a parent would not answer about yourself. But your innocent child, doing just what he is



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instructed to do, will answer these questions. And in doing so he is being forced to evaluate you as his parent. "Do your parents fight often?" he is asked. "About money? About You?" Yesterday you, his mother, bought a coat you had seen on sale that was such a good buy you couldn't pass it up. Your husband complained bitterly for the first time in your married life about your spending too much money on clothes. Joey remembers this, and to him it seems like a real crisis: his father didn't used to talk to his mother like that. "Do your parents fight about money?" Yes, and now Joey wonders about his parents and the school wonders about his hime. The child has been used to spy on his parents.

Junior high children are being given tests that ask about their parents drinking habits and make a child wonder if his parents are alcholics. Questions about his parents' sexual behavior arouse his curiosity. "Hmmm, I'll have to notice what Mother and Daddy do at night." No, you may not want to answer these questions, but your child will do it for you. Is this the legitimate sphere of the school system?

These test results, with their interpretations, then go into the child's file. A file open to any number of people to whom the psychological terms used represent something mysterious and with deep implications. Regarding these results, psychiatrist Dr. Sol W. Ginsburg of Columbia University has warned against this very thing. He reminds us that only competent persons, of which there are very few, must administer these tests, and precautions must be taken to keep results out of the hands of laymen.

The school is not the place for psychological testing. In testing every child it encourages incompetents to interpret results and it uses tests for maladjusted children on normal ones. It can provide a traumatic experience for the child. It asks questions it has no right to ask. It puts highly technical results in the hands of laymen, it can brand a person for life as something he never was, and parental consent was never given for these tests. The parents didn't even know Joey was going to take them.

Psychological testing in the public schools? Good idea. Good idea, until asked about his parents sex habits, his desires to experiment with a boyfriend behind closed doors, and his feelings of hostility toward the kids across the street. Good idea, until twenty years later Joey is turned down for a position he worked hard to earn and which he deserves. Are we going to let this go on until it turns us into a warped society? Let us put a stop to this menace before you find out that you were rejected because you wet the bed, were anti-social, and had tendencies toward sexual deviation.