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A Bias of Intelligence Testing

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Abstract. This article describes a bias of intelligence testing that is explicated less often, yet is more profound than the biases commonly presented in psychology textbooks.

Psychological textbooks most often present the following biases as challenging the reliability and validity of intelligence tests: (1) each test item brings with it a degree of microcultural and microsocial familiarity that affects its difficulty for test-takers from different societies and cultures; (2) test-takers classified as a group by various demographic variables--e.g., race, ethnic group--test differently on the same item, the same test; (3) full scale test scores manifest predictive validity with some so-called successful destinations in majority cultures but not with others of majority or minority ones; (4) tests appraise only ability and not personality and motivational variables that, together with ability, lead to adaptive behavior; (5) tests claim to appraise ability but cannot differentiate it from aptitude, achievement, and task performance; (6) tests claiming to appraise intelligence differ in assumptions about what intelligence is and how many different components are subsumed by it; (7) as with polygraphy, the reliability and validity of individually administered intelligence tests are significantly dependent on the expertise of the test administrator; (8) because of continual changes in any test population and of the social transformation of knowledge, even the best attempts at standardization are immediately obsolete; and (9) corrupt phenomena lead to compromising the test--its administration and scoring.

Much less mentioned as a bias--but more important--is the notion of individual traits being the biggest significant predictor of worldly success, i.e., of adaptation. Although, predictive validity figures often do not reflect a majority of the variance associated with adaptation, the testing industry and testing consumers--i.e., schools and employers--use the tests as if this were the case. Yet a very strong case can be made that social status, social pressures from significant others and peers, and various types of social groupings and networks reflect more variance associated with adaptation. A logical outgrowth of this case is that intelligence tests--as far as they perpetuate the notion of that individual characteristics bear the major responsibility for adaptational success--actually perpetuate a tolerance for adaptational inequalities, viz., economic disparities and disparities concerning achievements valued by the majority culture and for the social factors perpetuating the disparities. In essence, the unsuccessful are being personally blamed for the inequitable rules and goals of the game into which they are born. (Even test results suggesting variants of mental retardation may often be significantly associated with social factors leading to anything from inadequate experience with test items to inadequate health services associated with physical and psychological trauma and dysfunction.

Textbooks and training covering bias need to explicitly focus on intelligence--conception and testing--as a beard affording power relationships and political inequity the luxury of remaining in the closet. (Helms-Lorenz, M., & Van de Vijver, F. (1995). Cognitive assessment in education in a multicultural society. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 11, 158-169; Laosa, L.M. (1996). Intelligence testing and social policy. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 17, 155-173; Livingstone, D.W. (1995). For whom The Bell Curve tolls. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 41, 335-341; Loury, G.C. (October 13, 1997.) Comparative disadvantage. *The New Republic*, p 29; Saccuzzo, D.P., & Johnson, N.E.

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(1995). Traditional psychometric tests and proportional representation: An intervention and program evaluation study. *Psychological Assessment*, 7, 183-194.) (Keywords: Assessment, Bias, Truth, Typology.)