

THE BINET TESTS IN RELATION TO IMMIGRATION *

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I went to Ellis Island to see if the methods used in keeping out defectives could be improved. In that first visit, both Professor Johnstone and myself were much discouraged. We went home and said we didn't see how much could be done because of the great number that were coming in every day. There are about 5,000 a day, 29,000 in a week, and there are comparatively small facilities for handling them. I went again last spring, and was able to look a little more intelligently at it. It takes a second visit to any institution to get much of an idea of the institution. After getting back to the city, I wrote the Commissioner and said we would be willing to make an experiment. We returned on Saturday, but no immigrants came in that morning because of a fog on the Bay. About one hundred were ready to leave. We picked out one young man whom we suspected was defective, and, through the interpreter, proceeded to give him the test. The boy tested eight by the Binet scale. The interpreter said, "I could not have done that when I came to this country," and seemed to think the test unfair. We convinced him that the boy was defective. That was so impressive that the Commissioner urged us to come back on the following Monday. We did, spending the day there and trying some experiments. We placed one young lady at the end of the line, and as the immigrants passed, she pointed out the ones she thought defective. They were taken to the quiet room, and we proceeded to test them. She picked out nine, whom she thought were defective. The result was that every one of the nine were below normal, according to the Binet test.

Again the result was so striking that they asked us to come back later. Last fall, the young ladies were there a week and tested a great many. Indication from the data we had in hand,

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were that they were getting about ten per cent. of the feeble-minded immigrants who were coming in. The ordinary doctors were getting only ten per cent. while with the Binet scale it was possible to get ninety per cent. One reason why we had not taken up this work before was because it is exceedingly difficult to handle the Binet scale through an interpreter. We found many troubles before us. The interpreter was much inclined to say, "That is all right," when perhaps the questions were not answered just as they should have been. Another difficulty is that you cannot be sure that they translate your language correctly from a psychological standpoint. In order to get the best results, the interpreter should be trained in psychology.

The result, again, of that week's work, although the doctors did not fully agree with our conclusions, was that they were willing that we should come back to make further experiments. Last spring, we had the opportunity and the finances, and sent these two ladies there for three months.

After a person has had considerable experience in this work, he almost gets a sense of what a feeble-minded person is so that he can tell one afar off. The people who are best at this work, and who I believe should do this work, are women. Women seem to have closer observation than men. It was quite impossible for others to see how these two young women could pick out the feeble-minded without the aid of the Binet test at all. The doctors picked out all the defectives they could find. Then our examiners stood there and picked out quite a number and sent them back for reconsideration. I am rather strongly inclined to think that the physicians simply looked them over and said, "Oh, no! There isn't anything there." I am sure it would be a good plan to take the names and addresses of these people about whom there is any doubt, and try to look them up a year or two later. We could then see how many make good. Every one who makes good and becomes a useful citizen, will discredit our test; but every one who becomes a public charge, will confirm our diagnosis. We attempted to obviate difficulties by testing some we thought were normal. For instance, in the Bohemian group, we picked out some normal persons and tested them. The

doctors said they would not pass our test anyhow, but we found as a rule that they did pass the test. The Binet scale in the hands of experienced men or women will be of tremendous value in the immigration problem. Although not always correct, the number of defectives held at the Island will be more nearly so, even if the doctors themselves picked out many more cases than they are now doing. Our examination of immigrants at present is very defective. They have not money enough to do the work thoroughly. If the dozen physicians have to examine 29,000 a week, toward the latter part of the week these immigrants are going to get through easily. Because of this, one immigrant was heard to remark before they landed, "I hope we will get to Ellis Island on Sunday night."

Using the psychological method of examining the percentage of immigrants that would be picked out as defective would be much greater than now. The Binet test might be used even with immigrants.

DISCUSSION

Dr. Walter E. Fernald, Waverly, Mass.: We have found that from ten to fifteen per cent. of mental deficiency is due to some specific mental disease. Very few cases of actual mental defect begin after the age of three or four. Professor Goddard has called attention to the fact that by mere observation alone, his trained workers were able to pick out more mental defectives than the doctors. In our institution we had a boy who could read the daily papers, yet could not tell me the name of any of the towns around Stoneham where he had lived all his life. Another boy who came to me had lived near the St. Charles River. Yet he could tell nothing about it nor the surrounding country. These boys had no curiosity whatever.

The question as to what the boy has read is very important. If he has read no books, it is a very singular thing. A girl of fifteen told me she had never read a book except her school textbooks. The absence of knowledge and the absence of interest in that patient's environment led me to minimize the apparent stu-

pidity of that patient. This girl was put in a family where she had splendid opportunities. She attended church, was given many books to read as well as papers, and in a month's time she was a very different person. Asking questions regarding objects of common interest, such as "What did you see on your way to my office this morning? How long would you boil an egg? How long would you boil tea?" may enable one to get at the power of discrimination.

For many years, I made the statement that no feeble-minded person could do long division. But a teacher, from Vineland, I believe, convinced me that that statement was not true, by showing me a feeble-minded child who could work in long division. However, very few are able to do this. Their ability to do abstract, methodical work is very limited.

One day I thought I would test two of our employees in the use of abstract words. So I called in two men who were running lawn mowers. There was no question about the mentality of these men, but neither of these men could tell the difference between event and advent, happiness and honor, showing that the inability to express one's ideas in this way is not necessarily due to feeble-mindedness.

Dr. Wm. Healy, Chicago, Ills.: In the light of my very extensive experience, I will give you a cursory report. In regard to Court work, what does the judge or jury want to know? They want to know what can be predicted of the case. What can we say of his future career? In this work, we meet with many difficulties. Psychology has been termed the science of behavior; behavior interpreted in correct terms. Conduct is merely behavior. It is always the result of forces that are at work in our mental life. In studying groups of delinquents, one finds it necessary to study them from different angles. The Binet test is especially valuable in this work as it aids us greatly in classification. We find it necessary to study special abilities.

When our lives are adjusted steadily to one issue, then only do we become different individuals socially. This is immensely interesting from the standpoint of delinquency itself. There are

certain inhibitions at work. Things that come up are obsessions in the minds of these persons. One must know about the shocks the individual received. An individual who has recently been arrested is a very different individual after arrest than before. The individual after trial is a very different individual from the one before the trial. If hope is given, the individual is not the same. The complexity of the case is very interesting. I have recently studied the cases of one thousand offenders. I believe we find the most interesting cases in the poor grades. About seven per cent. of all offenders, taking the poor class, are epileptics, a very interesting thing from the professional standpoint. Of the thousand cases, 674 were distinctly above sub-normal, (67 per cent.) 69 cases of psychoses, 97 cases feeble-minded, 81 cases sub-normal, 79 cases dull—possibly physical causes.

The 97 cases of feeble-mindedness includes only a few imbeciles. The causes which we found are over use of alcohol, cocaine and narcotics, most excessive indulgence in bad sex habits, bad heredity, bad physical or mental environment, traumatism.

I gave the above figures to show the complexity of the cases with which we have to deal, and to show that the Binet tests aid us greatly. The Binet scale is of very great value in classifying these children when they enter an institution.

In closing, I merely want to say as I said to an Eastern Judge, there is nothing that offers the complexity that this problem does. The Binet test has a direct bearing on the point under issue, namely, delinquency.

Dr. C. S. Berry, University of Michigan: Under existing conditions I cannot see how we can be positive in our diagnosis of the higher grades. If we could get them for the ages of thirteen and fourteen, then we would be better able to diagnose them correctly. It seems to me we ought to supply tests for the higher ages.

Dr. Goddard: We recognize the inability of these children to handle abstractions. "What ought you to do when one contradicts you?" This question was asked by one of our examiners, and the answer was, "When I am right, I am right." I said to one of the patients, "Becky, what is a table?" "A table is to

eat on." "Becky, What is a mouse?" "I do not know." She could not think of any use for a mouse. We have that fundamental fact. These people cannot deal with abstractions, and this accounts for some of the errors in the use of some of the tests. These tests for fifteen years we might as well discard because we have all found that they are not reliable. They do not test the relative mental development. I can see that the human mind at about the age of twelve normally begins to specialize. If he does specialize you will call him a genius, if not, a moron.