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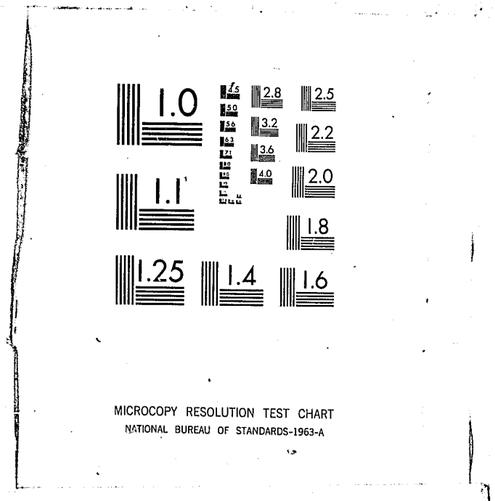


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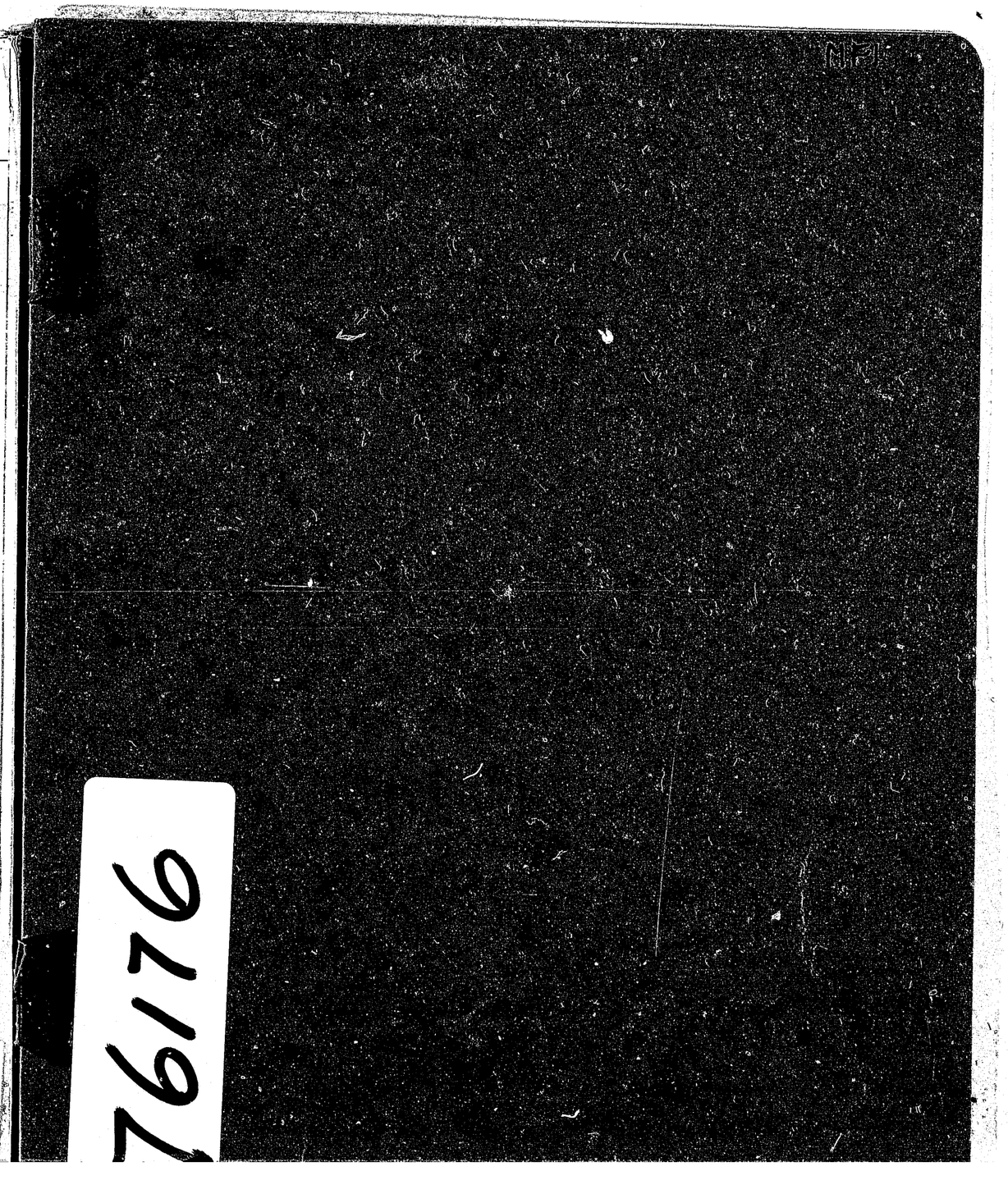

# ASSESSMENT OF THE YOUTHFUL OFFENDER: A REVIEW OF CURRENT PRACTICES

Final Report to the National Institute of Justice
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## ASSESSMENT OF THE YOUTHFUL OFFENDER: A REVIEW OF CURRENT PRACTICES

### SUMMARY

Correctional authorities within the institutional setting are responsible for identifying youthful offenders who may be potential management problems. Correctional authorities must also gather and assess enough information about the offender to assign each youth to the most appropriate available treatment or rehabilitative programs offered by the institution. Additionally, assessment of the learning abilities and skills of the youthful offender must occur to determine the need for placement in special education classes. The following report is a summary of a literature review of the assessment of the youthful offender in a correctional setting.

### Approaches to Assessment of the Youthful Offender

Various authors have addressed the need for adequate classification systems to be used in the management and treatment of offenders in correctional institutions. Baker, Stewart, Kaiser, Brown, and Barclay (1979) discuss the need for a practical, efficient, and low-cost classification system to be used in the management and treatment of offenders within institutions. The first approach mentioned by these authors is the traditional approach or the clinical diagnostic method of assessment.

Eysneck uses this clinical diagnostic approach to assessment in his scale on neuroticism, introversion, and extroversion. Bartol and Holanchock (1979) determine that the generalizability of Eysneck's theory is questionable, especially when applied to minorities.

Megargee and Bohn (1977) also use the traditional approach to assessment with the M.M.P.I. as the assessment tool. They define types of youthful offenders on the basis of their M.M.P.I. scores. They found that M.M.P.I. scores tended to fall into specific groups. Youthful offenders in these specific groups also differed on demographic, academic, and social developmental variables. Megargee and Bohn feel that these test results have implication for the management and treatment of these offenders.

Holland and Holt (1980) used staff ratings to predict the behavior of 293 minimum security prisoners. These authors suggested that the ability of decision-makers to predict behavior of the offender was not accurate enough to justify formulation of case dispositions.

A second assessment approach to be used by correctional officials in the management and treatment of offenders is the industrial placement and selection model. Baker, Stewart, Kaiser, Brown, and Barclay (1979) describe Kentucky's adult and juvenile classification system for assessing and classifying inmates. This information is used in initial classification and assignment, and in reclassification and parole review. Juveniles, men, and women are assessed by a multimethod computerized screening system which covers nine major classification categories and requires two and one-half hours to administer.

A third assessment approach being investigated by correctional officials in the management and treatment of the youthful offender is the bio-social assessment approach. Platt and Takagin (1979) describe the history of psychobiological analysis. These authors mention Hooton's anthropological treatise on criminal stock of the 1930's, criminal violence and brain damage research of the 1960's, chromosomal research of the XYY genes in the 1960's and 1970's, psycho-surgery and bio-technology investigated by Delgado and Schwitzgebel in the 1970's, and the current emphasis on psycho-biological analysis and XYY genetic research.

A General Discussion of the Assessment of Intelligence

William Mosley (1978) states that the major criterion for a certification of mental retardation is an intelligence quotient derived from an individually administered test administered by a state approved certified or licensed psychologist. Various authors have indicated that the intelligence quotient derived from a particular I.Q. test does not represent a permanent characteristic of that individual since I.Q. scores can fluxuate. Anne Anastasi (1971) states that an intelligence quotient is not an index of an innate intellectual potential and does not represent a fixed property of the organism.

I.Q. scores are used as a basis of comparison to either a "normal" group (Norm Referenced measurements) or to a specific behavior which the I.Q. score predicts



(Criterion Referenced measurements). Greco and Thomas (1974) discuss these two methods of comparison. They suggest that both these measurements are on the same continuum.

Criterion referenced measures are frequently used to predict a child's academic success in the public school system. Krech, Crutchfield, and Livson (1974) state that mental tests predict scholastic success. William Mosley (1978) states that the purpose of I.Q. test results are to predict academic success, evaluate student progress, and to group children in school. He states that this last category is the most important.

A comparison of an individual I.Q. score to the group of children that was used to standardize the WISC-R is an example of norm referenced measurements. The WISC-R was standardized on 2,200 children across the United States. Racial and cultural minorities were included in the group on the basis of their proportion within the total United States population. The purpose of the WISC-R standardization process was to profile the average American child. Anne Anastasi indicates that test results can serve as a measure of subculture deviation from the normative population. She further states that the same cultural differentials that impair test performance on the I.Q. test are likely to handicap the child in school achievement and in job performance.

The Effect of Situational Variables on Performance on the I.Q. Test

Numerous variables have been found to affect performance on I.Q. tests. Perry London (1975) states that performance on I.Q tests is dependent on good educational opportunities. Anne Anastasi (1971) discusses various situational variables in relation to performance on I.Q. tests. She indicates that coaching is one situational variable that can affect a child's performance. The usefulness of coaching depends upon the child's abilities, her early education, her general experience, on the nature of the test, and on the amount and type of coaching provided. Children with deficient educational backgrounds are more likely to benefit from special coaching than children with superior educational opportunities. She further states that the closer the resemblance between test content and coaching material, the greater will be the improvement in test scores. The more closely the instructions are restricted to specific test content, the less likely

is the improvement on the I.Q. scores to extend to the criterion performance of school achievement. She further states that test scores are invalidated when a particular experience raises the I.Q. score without appreciably affecting the behavior domain that the test is designed to predict. Practice is another variable which can affect I.Q. scores. Retesting results in higher scores, and test sophistication in this situation must be taken into account.

Test anxiety appears to have a linear relationship to performance on I.Q. tests. A small amount of anxiety is useful in the test taking situation to motivate the child, but excessive anxiety can have a paralyzing effect on the child and will result in lower test scores.

Motivation is a situational factor which must be considered in performance. Test motivation can differ in ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Examples of different types of motivation are suspicion, insecurity, fear, and cynical indifference. School failure leads to feelings of histility and inferiority toward any academic material. This negative attitude can result in lower test scores.

Test examiner age, sex, race, socioeconomic background and warm or cool personality can affect performance on an I.Q. score. The emotional climate of the child is another situational factor of importance. Emotionally disturbed children are more influenced by situational variables. Children being examiner during a period of intense readjustment to an unfamiliar and stressful situation are adversely affected and will consequently have lower test scores. Additionally, the activities of the child immediately preceding the testing situation can affect a performance. Emotional disturbance and fatigue have a handicapping effect on the child during the test taking situation.

Culture-fair Tests

Attempts to construct culture-fair tests have been moderately successful. Some authors feel that it is impossible to be fair to more than one culture in the testing situation. consequently, test interpretation of minorities should be viewed with extreme caution.



Krech, Crutchfield and Livson (1974) state that efforts in developing culture-fair mental tests have been only partially successful. They further state if cultural bias is reduced the test could result in a poorer predictor of school achievement that itself involves culturally biased evaluations. Anne Anastasi (1971) suggests that we need a test that presupposes only experiences common to each culture. She believes it unlikely that any test can be equally fair to more than one cultural group at a time. I.Q. tests measure cultural distance between groups as well as the individual's degree of acculturation, and the child's readiness for educational and vocational activities that are culture specific. Again, she states that the same cultural differentials that impair test performance are likely to handicap the child in schoolwork and in job performance.

Krech, et al, (1974) state that we should always keep in mind that black minorities are measured against the standards of the white majority. When a minority child is tested, many of the relevant variables in the psychological situation are beyond the control of the best trained and the best intentioned tester. Therefore, test results of minorities should always be viewed with caution.

Authorities Critical of I.Q. Tests and the History of Intelligence Testing

William Mosley (1978) notes that authorities in the field of psychology, linguistics, education, and sociology have expressed criticism of I.Q. tests believed to be racially and culturally biased. Opton (1979), likewise, indicates that the history of I.Q. testing can be traced to racial prejudice.

Criticisms of Test Selection and Special Education Programs

Opton (1979) discusses the case of Larry P. vs. Riles and states that tests used to place children in special education classes were racially and culturally biased. Minority representatives suggested changes in test selection criteria, especially I.Q. tests that cause the racial imbalance. Lawyers representing minorities indicated that tests were chosen on frequency of use rather than how biased they were, that no hearings were held on the merits of test choices, that no independent experts were consulted, and finally, that no representatives of minorities were consulted in test selection. Special education classes were called inferior and dead-end. Federal District Court Judge Larry Peckham concluded

that the educational system of California deliberately segregated minorities into these dead-end classes. Peckham found discrimination purposeful and said that the educational system of California should have known better. He concluded that I.Q. tests discriminate against black children resulting in the segregation of a disproportionately large number of black children in special education classes for the educable mentally retarded. He specifically mentioned the WISC-R and the Stanford Binet has having an anti-black cultural bias.

Additional Criticisms of I.Q. Tests

Many testing authorities voice the same criticisms of I.Q. testing. London (1975) states that I.Q. tests are culture-bound and loaded against minorities. Krech, et al, (1974) state that blacks are measured against the standards of the white majority. Mosely (1978) states that a great problem exists in misplacing the minority child in special education classes by using tests standardized on the white majority. Mosley believes that these tests are used for the purpose of grouping the minority children in inferior and in dead-end school programs. He further believes that the tests don't measure minority verbal skills and the tests are unfairly used as a primary means of classification. He states that there is cultural bias in the test, in the tester and in the testing situation.

Recommendations for Improving Test Performance

Minority representatives advocate the control of situational factors which may adversely affect a child's performance on an I.Q. test, a multi-criterion approach to testing, continuous testing, and a greater emphasis on the skills and abilities of the child rather than the child's deficits.

Krech, et al, (1974) make the following suggestions for controlling those variables which may affect performance on an I.Q. test. They suggest individual rather than group testing, using simple terms and no writing. The tester should use the primary language of the cultural group, and practice materials to ensure familiarity and comprehension of material. Long periods of acclamation should be used to familiarize the child to the testing situation. Additionally, the tester should be from the same cultural group and should choose physical surroundings familiar to the child for the testing situation.



William Mosley (1978) suggests that the tester recognize that what the child does not do is not always what the child cannot do. The tester should includ information about the child's learning styles and problem solving strategy in the assessment data. The tester should determine if the child functions effectively within the child's own society. The tester should identify the child's special education needs rather than focusing on the child's deficits. The tester should identify the competency or skill level of the child in each academic area and determine what is needed for the child to progress to the next level. Finally, the tester should focus on the child's assets and strengths in order to develop her/his skills, and should view assessment as an ongoing not a static process. A multi-criterion approach should always be used in assessment.

A Different Approach to Intelligence Testing

Dr. Thomas Oakland (1977) suggests that "while biased testing may have occurred, far more evidence indicates that the use of test data has been the biasing factor rather than the tests themselves." Research reported in Dr. Oakland's book indicates that each ethnic group has its own strengths and weaknesses in relation to other groups, but that regardless of the ethnic group, lower-class children obtained lower scores than middle-class children. Additional research indicates that performance level of the child on an I.Q. test is related to a warm, responsive, and receptive but firm style of the examiner rather than his/her sex, racial, or ethnic background.

Dr. Oakland addresses the subject of language bias, and indicates that the assessment of intellectual aptitudes of non-English speaking children is most valid when done in their native language. However, when the child is bilingual, the goal should be to use a language style which maximizes the child's opportunity to understand what is required of her/him and to be able to respond freely and comfortably by using her/his best language abilities. Parallel forms of standardized tests in alternative languages have been developed for this purpose. However, translating a test from English to an alternative language may not remove language biases; it may serve to increase them. Dr. Oakland further states that translating aptitude tests into non-standard dialects, such as those manifested by blacks, appears to result in little improvement for black children.

Dr. Oakland strongly supports the concept of a non-discriminatory diagnostic-intervention program. This program would assess and treat organic dysfunction, assess social role performance in a variety of social systems, assess process or ability deficits which interfere with the acquisition of academic skills, assess academic subject matter content mastered, and finally provide a basis for estimating learning potential in a manner which is not racially or culturally discriminatory.

Summary

Numerous authorities in the field of corrections have addressed the need for a practical, efficient, and low-cost classification system to be used in the management and treatment of the youthful offender. Various classification systems are used for this purpose. The traditional approach is the clinical-diagnostic method of assessment. Eysenck's scales of psychotocism extroversion, and neuroticism are examples of the traditional approach. A study of the validity and reliability of this method of assessment indicated that the generalizability of this method of assessment is questionable, especially when used with minorities.

A second example of the traditional approach to assessment is being investigated by Megargee and Bohn. These psychologists defined youthful offenders on the basis of their M.M.P.I. scores. Scores tended to cluster in ten distinct groups; these groups differed on demographic, academic, and social developmental variables. This information could be used in the management and treatment of the youthful offender in the institutional setting.

A second approach to internal assessment of the youthful offender in the institutional setting is the industrial placement and selection model used by the Kentucky correctional system. It is called a multi-method computerized screening system for the classification and assessment of inmates, and is used in initial classification and assignment and in reclassification and parole review. This system covers nine major areas of classification and requires two and one-half hours to administer.



A final approach to assessment used by correctional authorities in the United States is the bio-social approach to criminology. An example of this type of assessment is genetic research on XYY genes.

Some correctional authorities have questioned the abilities of correctional decision-makers to predict the behavior of offenders within the institutional setting, and have determined that this ability is not great enough to justify the formulation of case dispositions.

Since the major criterion for a certification of mental retardation and special education placement of the youthful offender is an intelligence quotient that is derived from an individually administered test administered by state approved certified or licensed psychologists, a general understanding of the concept of I.Q. and intelligence testing is useful. Many authorities in the field of testing believe that intelligence is not a fixed property of the organism, and fluxuates according to the situation and the emotional stability of the person taking the intelligence test. I.Q. scores can be compared to a normal or standard group (norm referenced measurements) or can be compared to a specific behavior such as school achievement (criterion referenced measurements). Some authorities believe that these measurements are on the same continuum.

I.Q. tests are most frequently used to predict students' academic success, to evaluate student progress, and to group children in school for the purpose of special education programs. Test results can also serve as a measure of sub-culture deviation from the normative population. The same cultural differential that impairs test performance on the I.Q. test are likely to handicap the child in school achievement and in job performance.

The relationship between test performance and situational variables is discussed by numerous testing authorities. Examples of situational variables which affect performance scores are coaching, practice in test taking, test anxiety, motivation, and the emotional climate of the test taker. Examiner variables such as sex, race, and socio-economic background are also thought to be important.

Virtually all authorities in the area of testing agree that a culture-fair test does not exist at this time. Some authorities believe it unlikely that any test

can be equally fair to more than one cultural group. Consequently, test results of minorities should always be viewed with extreme caution.

Numerous authorities in the field of psychology, linquistics, education, and sociology have criticized I.Q. tests as discriminatory and culturally biased. In a recent court decision (Larry P. vs. Riles), the history of I.Q. tests was traced to the racial prejudice of those psychologists who devised the original intelligence tests. Intelligence tests used to place children in special education classes were declared racially and culturally biased. Representatives of minority groups in the case specifically cricitized the test selection criteria of the California Department of Education. The WISC-R and the Standord Binet were particularly mentioned as racially and culturally biased. Special education programs were also criticized as inferior and dead-end.

Other authorities in the field of testing have also criticized the tester and the testing situation as being culturally and racially biased.

Minority representatives now demand a comprehensive diagnosis for the child which is adapted to the child's language and ethnic origins. They indicate that tests should not discriminate racially or culturally and that only individualized, culturally adjusted intelligence tests should be used.

Other recommendations by minorities include greater minority representation in tests selection, and greater control of those situational factors which may affect the child's performance on the intelligence test. A multi-criterion approach to diagnosis is strongly suggested with greater emphasis on the child's strengths as well as the child's weaknesses. Finally, diagnosis and appropriate intervention should replace labeling of the child.

Dr. Thomas Oakland of the Educational Psychology Department of The University of Texas advocates a slightly different approach to minority testing. Dr. Oakland states that "while biased testing may have occurred, far more evidence indicates that the use of the test data has been the biasing factor rather than the tests themselves." Oakland suggests a nondiscriminatory diagnostic-intervention program using a multi-model approach which would assess and treat organic disfunctions, assess social role performance in a variety of social systems, assess



learning skill deficits which interfere with the acquisition of academic skills, assess academic skill development and would provide differential instructions tailored to move the child from where he or she is to where we want her or him to be. Finally this approach would provide a basis for estimating the child's learning potential in a manner which is not racially or culturally discriminatory.

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