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## PERSONALITY AND INTELLIGENCE OF CONVICTS IN WEST VIRGINIA

A. STANLEY WEBSTER

Dr. A. Stanley Webster is author of articles in periodical literature on psychological problems in children, and of a monograph on the development of phobias in women. He is Chief Clinical Psychologist in the Eastern State Hospital, Knoxville, Tennessee, and Assistant Professor of Psychology in the University of Tennessee. In the present article he indicates that personality characteristics in a prison population are decidedly instable and quite unlike those in the normal population. Usual methods of treatment, therefore, are valueless in the prison.—EDITOR.

A testing program was conducted at the West Virginia Penitentiary, Moundsville, West Virginia, from June 1, 1949, to August 31, 1949, for the purpose of making a survey of the mental abilities and personalities of the inmates of this institution. The hope was that the data thus collected might prove useful in discovering some relationship between the degree of intelligence and/or personality pattern, and the type of crime committed. Practically speaking it was anticipated also that the results might be of value for (1) the prediction of parole success; (2) placement in the Medium Security Prison at Huttonsville, W. Va.; and (3) estimation of job aptitudes.

Accordingly the study was broken down into the following specific objectives:

1. To discover the percentage of feeble-mindedness of a random sample of the inmates of the West Virginia Penitentiary as compared with that of similar institutions.
2. To determine whether the intellectual level of recidivists differs significantly from that of first offenders.
3. To discover which personality traits, as measured by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, have the highest deviation from normal.
4. To determine whether the personalities deviate from the norm to a significant extent between recidivists and first offenders.
5. To discover the relationship between intelligence and the several types of crime.
6. To determine the relationship of personality type to type of crime.

Six hundred and fifty men were used in this study. All of those men who were able were given the Otis Quick-Scoring Test of Mental Ability and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. If they were unable to take the tests, other tests suitable to their needs were adopted.

The approximate percentage of illiteracy of the prison population tested as determined from all those men who, when called for testing, declared that they were unable to read or write, was 29 percent. All of the illiterates who had good vision were given the Scovill Classification Test Part I. None exceeded the 30th percentile rank, and most were below the 5th percentile rank, which leads one to believe that they were feeble-minded. The Wechsler-Bellevue Intelligence Scale was given to 35 of the inmates who scored three or below on the Otis Quick-Scoring Test of Mental

Ability. Seventeen of the cases, or approximately 50 percent who were classified as feeble-minded by the Otis Test were also classified as feeble-minded by the Wechsler; indicating that about one-half of the time that a person of this prison population secured a score of three or less on the Otis Test, he actually was feeble-minded. One assumes that the other half who secured such scores did so because of poor reading ability or poor vision, inasmuch as the Wechsler I.Q., which is administered verbally, exceeded the Otis I.Q. The mean intelligence quotient of the sample tested was 80.56, placing them as a group in the "Dull-Normal" classification. The range, however, was wide—from 0 to 130, or in other words, from extreme feeble-mindedness to very superior intelligence.

In this study the classification of crimes used was: Burglary, Fraud, Larceny, Murder, Robbery, Sex, and Miscellaneous. The mean I.Q.'s as found were respectively, 78, 86, 83, 75, 80, 79, and 83. Additionally it was found that the mean I.Q. for first offenders was 77, while that for recidivists was 80. Thus the actual rank order of crime according to intellectual level seemed to be as follows: Fraudists had the highest intelligence of any group tested; their mean I.Q. being 86. Larcenists followed with an I.Q. of 83; being slightly less than that of the Fraudists and slightly more than that of Robbers, whose mean I.Q. was 80. The Sex offenders and Burglars follow closely with intellectual levels of I.Q. 79 and 78, respectively. The lowest of all groups tested in intelligence was the Murderers, whose mean I.Q. was 75. The Miscellaneous Group was too small and too diversified to make any comment upon, and was included only so that no man might be turned away from the test room for lack of a classification category. Since the men with no previous record showed an average score of three points less on the Otis Test than did the men who had previous criminal records, the results were analyzed statistically. It was found that the critical ratio was 2.79, indicating that this difference in intelligence is a real one, and may be so regarded at a high level of confidence. This looks as if the more intelligent men are either less likely to profit from the experience of the penitentiary or else they learn, while in prison, more ways of anti-social behavior. Additionally the critical ratios and significance levels of each of the types of criminal activity heretofore mentioned in relationship to each other was computed. The results found, in general, indicated that there were differences in intellectual level among the various groups which were real. They could be regarded at a fairly high level of confidence as indicating that such differences are regularly found when the same classification scheme is used.

Concerning the relationship between personality type—as measured by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory—and type of crime: each group within the classification seems to manifest some relatively stable personality defects as contrasted with the other groups. Fraudists had a high hypomania score and a tendency toward several other personality defects. This might be expected in view of the fact that hypomania is characterized by an overproductive mind. The hypomania, coupled with compulsions (Psychasthenia) and delusions (Schizophrenia) would seem to indicate that a person might be deluded into thinking that he could be "smart enough to get away with it." Larcenists tend to be depressed, while Robbers are characterized by both hypomania and depression with a tendency toward

compulsions. That is to say that, in states of excitement or depression, Robbers may yield to compulsions of stealing, entering, or lying. Sex offenders are high on all scales and higher than any other group on the Masculinity-Feminity Scale. Burglars have relatively high hypochondriasis and depression scores and a tendency toward schizophrenia. Murderers are characterized by a rise in the psychopathic deviate scale.

Mention of the psychopathic deviate scale has been omitted thus far for two reasons: (1) it was relatively constant, and (2) it was higher than any other scale for all types of crime. Actually the average score on the psychopathic deviate scale was from 8 to 20 points higher than any other scale, showing that criminals are a very unstable lot as a whole. Or, putting it another way; when one considers the relative lowness of the other average personality scores, the psychopathic deviate scale becomes even more indicative of the regularity with which criminals have psychopathic tendencies. In terms of percentage, individuals classified as "psychopaths" by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory would be 67. This was calculated on the basis of a score of 75, arbitrarily adopted in this study, rather than a score of 70, since a score of slightly above 70 is to be interpreted with caution; and it is on this basis that one can reconcile the use of the limit of 75. Actually, if a criterion score of 70 instead of 75 had been used, the percentage of "psychopaths" would have run above 90 percent. Some may consider this percentage of individuals as high, but when one considers that every man in a penitentiary is there for breaking the laws and conventions of society, and that disregard or antagonism toward social mores is especially characteristic of the psychopathic personality, it can be seen that this percentage is, after all, not unduly high. Actually, when considering all of the scales of this test, it was the Sex offenders who showed the greatest deviation, while the Robbers were lowest, although quite close to Murderers.

#### CONCLUSIONS

From this study one concludes:

1. That the general population of the West Virginia Penitentiary at Moundsville, West Virginia, has a mean intelligence quotient which would be classified as normal, but below average. This fact is in keeping with many previous studies.
2. That the range of intelligence is great; extending from definite feeble-mindedness to superior mental ability.
3. That such range is present in each of the criminal categories.
4. That lack of ability to read seems to influence measured intelligence, placing some men on a lower level than their true intellectual capacity would indicate.
5. That refusal to admit poor reading ability or poor vision contributes to non-valid measures of intelligence; both placing some men on a lower intellectual level than that of which they are actually capable. Because some men refused to admit poor vision, the percentage of those classified as "Illiterate" was increased.
6. That if such refusals were manifest in a large percentage of the cases, the mean intelligence quotient of the entire prison population tested may be unduly weighted at the lower end.

7. That inasmuch as the entire population was not tested, the question arises as to whether those who were tested constitute a random sampling of the prison population. The majority of the men tested were those not engaged in work. Were they less intelligent than the workers? It is impossible to say; but if such were the case, the mean I.Q. may be unduly weighted at the lower end.

8. That, in general, there seems to be a relationship between level of intelligence and type of crime committed; such relationship manifesting itself most noticeably in the cases of Fraudists and Murderers—from highest to lowest mean scores.

9. That there is a predominance of psychopathic deviates in this population; this trait manifesting itself more than any other in all criminal categories.

10. That there seems to be, in general, a relationship between type of personality and type of crime committed; such relationship manifesting itself most noticeably in the cases of Sex offenders, Murderers and Robbers; from highest to lowest deviation from normal.

11. That considering all types of criminal activity for which men were committed; it appears that the overall personality picture is one of emotional instability.

12. That in addition to the intelligence classifications assigned to each type of crime, the classificatory groupings display personality traits as evidenced by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory which are characteristic of each criminal category. The mean score highest on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory traits appearing in the criminal categories is:

Fraudists—Hypomania

Larcenists—Depression

Murderers—Psychopathic Deviate

Robbers—Depression

Sex—Masculinity, Psychopathic Deviate, Hypochondriasis, and Depression.

Aside from these conclusions a number of implications systematically arose; all being concentrated in one area. These implications have important value for future research and may have some bearing on differences between other studies which were more apparent than real. Since there have been fairly large differences in the results found in various studies which seek to establish some relationship between criminal types and intelligence or personality, the methodology of the research must be carefully studied. Although statistical differences were significant in the present study, it may be that there are no practical differences between or among the various criminal classifications. To check this point a follow-up study is under way. In point of fact, however, any lack of practical difference may be due to the use of a biased sample; that is, using only workers, only non-workers or only volunteers, rather than testing the entire prison population. Too, the *esprit de corps* of the prisoners must be taken into account, since this seems to be the main deterrent to getting them to admit handicaps which would render them unable to be tested in the same fashion as the other men. Actually it would be better to fit the test to the individual man by means of a short personal interview. This is expensive in terms of time and labor, but undoubtedly would result in better methodology, and hence more accurate and applicable research.