

## **Chicano Psychological Assessment: A Critique of "Racial Intelligence and the Mexican People"**

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Historically, scientific racism has provided reinforcement for maintaining the *status quo*. Researchers who sought to discover and explain racial difference in intelligence generally operated from a functionalist or social facts paradigm. Gilbert Gonzalez shows that "Racism was essentially an ideological explanation for the social structure, and did not affect the distribution of property, but rationalized that distribution." In sum, scientific racism indicated that the social structure was based on the genetic make-up of racial categories.

Researchers of intelligence in ethnic minority children assumed that Anglo children were inherently more intelligent than their Chicano counterparts, and, therefore, superior. Of course, intelligence tests were administered in English; researchers rarely recognized the cultural bias or language problems associated with such indices. Naturally, the results supported the bias of scientific racists--Chicano children, and through association, the Chicano people, were below average in intelligence.

More recent research results, however, comparing Chicano and Anglo children on Neo-Piagetian measures of cognitive development indicate no differentiation between the groups.<sup>1</sup>

The data imply that Chicano children develop cognitively the same, and at basically the same rate, as Anglo children. These results are contrary to the premises of scientific racism and the controversial positions of Jensen<sup>2</sup> and Shockley who argue that minority children are biologically inferior. That is, Chicano children cannot perform certain cognitive activities that their Anglo counterparts can because of genetic endowment. There is no rationale for such an ethnic prediction, unless one can make the case that intelligence may be variable from one cultural setting to another. Even this does not automatically lead to the hypothesis that Anglo children will score higher than Chicano children, unless one is merely guided by ethnic or racial prejudice which has no place in the objective study of psychological phenomena.

The sampling designs of comparative ethnic experiments on intelligence are also problematic. Gonzalez shows, for example, that "Every intelligence study of Mexicans was carried out upon the members of the very poorest of the working class." In such studies, working class Chicanos are often compared to middle-class and upper middle-class Anglos. When differences occur, they are treated as racial, when, in fact, they are socioeconomic differences. Given the fact that ethnic background tends to be confounded with socioeconomic status

and perhaps other background variables (e.g., the command of the English language), it is difficult to assess the possible independent effect of ethnicity or race on psychological indices.

The psychological assessment of ethnic or racial minorities is a politically sensitive topic. Attempts to demonstrate ethnic or racial differences in intelligence or moral development should be done in a sensitive and thoughtful manner. Moreover, the researcher ought to be extraordinarily sure of the data before suggesting that there are meaningful ethnic or racial differences on such highly evaluative measures as intelligence or moral development. Clearly, such assessments hold potentially explosive consequences. The consequences of making a Type I error, of accepting differences as real when none exists, could be, at the very least, quite harmful to the esteem of ethnic minorities. Obviously, it is salient to conduct research in psychological areas as carefully as possible, and to be temperate in one's conclusions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>E.A. DeAvila, B. Harassy, and J. Pascual-Leone. *Mexican-American Schoolchildren: A Neo-Piagetian Analysis*. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1976).

<sup>2</sup>A.R. Jensen. "Do Schools Cheat Minority Children?" *Educational Research*. 14 (1971) 3-28.

## Critique

Educational institutions are representative microcosms of the society. If the society segregates, exploits, and excludes racial groups, then it can be expected that educational institutions will follow suit. The intelligence testing of the 1920s and 1930s was an academic response to eugenics theories and to contemporary political-economic policies related to immigration, miscegenation, and segregation. As Gonzalez concludes, the creation of intelligence tests and their application were not only an apologia but also a means to maintain the *status quo* in the society.

Since the 1960s most academicians have consciously avoided overt racist theories. However, the current political conservatism has established an atmosphere which encourages the retrenchment of social priorities by using "basic American" values as a means to correct economic inflation and recession. This re-cycling of basic values