

Spotlight on Ethics

The Bell Curve Revisited

Scientists have been trying to define and measure intelligence for quite a long time. Francis Galton (Darwin's first cousin) thought that all inherited traits, including intelligence, could be measured. But, as mentioned in this chapter, it was a Frenchman, Alfred Binet, who developed an intelligence test when the French government paid him to find a way to distinguish normal children and what were then termed inferior children.

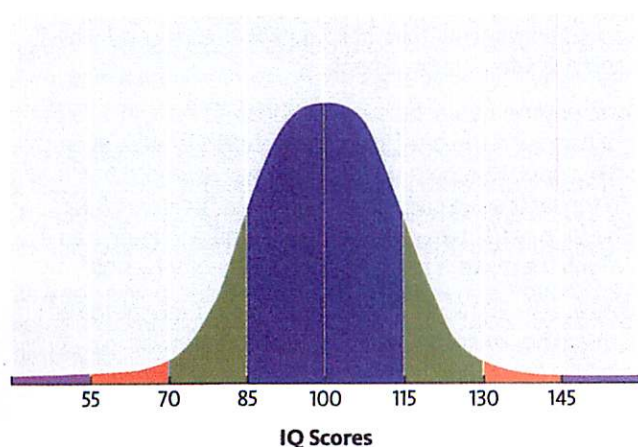
Binet's test came to the United States in 1917 and was used to test military recruits in World War I to see what assignments they would be suited for. Soon after, a Binet test was administered to a prisoner on trial for murder in Wyoming. Because the prisoner fared so poorly on the test, the jury acquitted him by reason of his mental condition. Schools around the world began using the Binet test to place children into learning groups. The tested IQ value followed a person throughout his or her life.

Originally, IQ was calculated as the following ratio: 100 times the person's mental age (as determined by the Binet test) divided by his or her chronological age. An average IQ, as shown by the bell curve in Figure 11.16, was considered to be 100.

This type of calculation was originally applied only to children. In 1939 David Wechsler published the first intelligence test explicitly designed for an adult population: the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS).

Although the inheritance of IQ has been investigated for nearly a century, much controversy remains about its definition, causes, and the methods and accuracy of testing IQ. Many studies and educators asked: "How can we test for intelligence?" and "What should be included in an intelligence test?" In schools, children were being placed in classes based on the results of IQ tests. But these tests turned out to be biased against certain groups because of the ways in which questions were asked. As a result, the IQ test (Figure 11.17) slowly became discredited but was still used in many areas.

Figure 11.16 IQ Scores The distribution of adult IQ scores follows a typical bell curve. The average score is 100; approximately half the scores are above 100 and half are below.



In 1994, the publication of *The Bell Curve*, written by psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray, changed perception of IQ tests yet again. In their book, the authors tried to analyze the validity and importance of IQ testing. However, educators and scientists are still arguing about the conclusions. Some of their controversial conclusions are:

1. Low measured intelligence and antisocial behavior are linked.
2. Low test scores of African Americans (compared to those of whites and Asians) were said to be caused by genetic factors.
3. The bell curve of IQ test scores was said to prove that some groups were inferior and linked poverty with low intelligence.

This book caused an uproar and caused many people to rethink the use of IQ tests as a measurement of intelligence. Many asked whether this was the intended result for writing the book. If not, it did the exact opposite.

Figure 11.17 An IQ Test Booklet

