

MINORITY REPORT

The Conference recommends that personality tests involving questions on topics such as religion, sexual tendencies and desires and personal feelings and relationships be prohibited, with the exception of a qualified psychologist with parental permission testing a disturbed child. Reasons for the prohibition are that the tests violate the person's privacy, the administrators of the test "are often inadequately trained," "the validity of the test itself is doubtful," and "administration of these tests is not essential."

To the first point, it must be admitted that the questions are of a highly personal nature. However, the answers to specific questions are strictly confidential and probably are not read by most test administrators since most tests are corrected from an answer sheet listing question number and answer letter (usually tabulated by machine). Violations of the utter confidentiality of the answers have not been brought before the Conference, and, had any been found, the solution is to bring suit against each violator.

The second point concerns those who administer the tests. It should be recognized that the tests administer themselves in that all a test monitor need do is hand out the tests and later have them tabulated and interpreted according to packaged instructions. However, a problem does exist in that some human interpreters of the test's results may not be sufficiently trained to make valid conclusions.

This is a problem with only some of the interpreters, not all, and thus a blanket prohibition on this count is irresponsible.

The third point concerned the validity of the test itself. Here one finds the psychologists themselves supporting a well-designed and researched test's validity. In Introduction to Psychology, by Ernest R. Hilgard and Richard C. Atkinson, the authors discuss the personality test in general. While recognizing that there are tests now in use which have serious problems, the authors write that "they (the tests in general) have been successful enough to be genuinely useful." In addition, "Personality inventories... can be used successfully to pick from a larger population those likely to become neuropsychiatric casualties. The tests can then be supplemented by interviews." (page 492) Even the Conference report admits that the test is useful for mentally disturbed children. They are useful also for mentally disturbed adults. In general the tests can be very useful, and the questions proscribed by this suggested prohibition, especially the sexual and personal feelings ones, are at the heart of personality testing.

Finally, the Conference claimed that administration of the tests is not essential. Alternatives for jobs where the mental health of the employee is critical to his performance (such as is the case with air traffic controllers) or where the individual freely consents to a test for his own information were suggested to be such other tests as Rorschach tests and psychological interviews. However, the former is a highly subjective test, which few

psychologists know how to use correctly (Psychology Today, article by Loren J. and Jean Chapman in the November 1971 issue, p. 107), and which reveals as much or more about a person's sexual tendencies and personal feelings than personality tests do (Introduction to Psychology, p. 495). Psychological interviews employ both expensive psychologist time and questions more penetrating and privacy-invading than personality tests do.

To simply prohibit personality testing is reckless and irresponsible in that it condemns all such tests, even if useful and well-designed. Were such a prohibition passed, it would prove very difficult to get it off the books for even now excellent personality tests exist to counter all of the arguments except the privacy-invasion one, and that can be met by vigilance in making sure the answers on the tests are kept confidential. The minority report advises that the recommendation prohibiting most personality testing be rejected.

submitted January 3, 1972

by James Kevin Burns