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## Psychological Testing and the Invasion of Privacy

Last June the House of Representatives Special Subcommittee on Invasion of Privacy and the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights held hearings on the threat to the right of privacy posed by the use of psychological tests. The committee hearings and the extensive report in the November 1965 issue of the *American Psychologist* provide a fascinating account of the discussion of this problem.

The tests in question are not those that measure ability or aptitude but the ones intended to assess emotional stability or personality characteristics. Some of the questions used in such tests are innocuous, but others deal with sex, family or interpersonal relations, religious beliefs, and other emotionally charged topics. The constructors of the tests consider such items to be essential. Nothing fundamental about a person is learned by asking whether he prefers Tuesdays or Wednesdays, but perhaps something fundamental can be learned by inquiring about such matters as whether he prefers being the life of the party or being alone with a member of the opposite sex. In short, if one is to learn about personality differences or emotional stability, one must probe emotionally important areas.

An individual, however, may object to being asked about intimate details of his life and beliefs, and may fear that, if the test forms remain in personnel files, his answers could be used against him. Thus, some of the committee members and some of the witnesses contended that the use of such tests constitutes an invasion of privacy that violates the fourth and other amendments to the Constitution.

On the other side of the case, it is necessary to learn some things about a prospective employee. Past experience and abilities are almost always relevant. For some positions, health is important. And for some positions it is desirable to learn about emotional stability or other aspects of personality. We do not want emotionally unstable persons serving in air-traffic control towers, representing the United States in sensitive overseas assignments, or sitting in various other positions of special responsibility.

There is no easy solution to the conflicting claims of the individual's right to privacy and the public's right to protection. It does not help to point out that wiretappers and snooping news photographers are guilty of greater invasions of privacy. Nor is the problem handled by contending, as some witnesses did, that the tests are of no value anyway, for, if the present ones are of doubtful validity, more effective methods are likely to be developed.

On the one side, as one witness said, we must seek those methods of protecting the public that are least intrusive on private rights. On the other side, if we want to protect society we must learn to ask the questions that will help us avoid creating dangerous situations. This is the dilemma highlighted by the congressional enquiry.

The constructors of the personality tests sometimes use "forced-choice" items in which the respondent is required to choose between two alternatives both of which may be attractive, but which are, they believe, differentially attractive to different kinds of people. The conflict between private and public rights is itself a kind of forced-choice situation. Both rights have their claim. Which we rate the higher will reveal something about our scale of values, about the kind of people we are.—DAEL WOLFLE