

DOCUMENT SUMMARY This textbook chapter provides a clear and concise overview of the eugenics movement and its deep, inextricable links to the discipline of psychology. It explains how eugenic ideology—the "improvement" of humanity through selective breeding—drove early research into cognitive abilities and led to psychologists creating the mental tests used to enforce racist and ableist policies. This document is essential for understanding the historical context of standardized testing and the pathologizing of human difference.

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FORMATTED CONTENT

Eugenics and Psychology

Why This Matters to Enliten

This chapter is a perfect educational tool that breaks down the historical and ideological foundations of the system we are working to change. It methodically explains the eugenics movement and demonstrates, with clear examples, how the early discipline of psychology was not merely influenced by it but was actively complicit and instrumental in its execution.

This content is invaluable for training, for creating client-facing educational materials, and for substantiating our claims about the biased origins of standardized testing. It explicitly links the creation of gifted programs and the SAT to eugenic goals. It provides a less academic, more accessible companion to the Yakushko paper, allowing us to explain these critical concepts to a broader audience. The chapter's directness about psychology's role in developing the tools for eugenics is precisely the kind of evidence we need to build our case for a new paradigm of assessment.

Critical Statistics and Facts for Our Work

- **Origin of Eugenics:** Sir Francis Galton began publishing formative articles on eugenics as early as 1865.
- **Compulsory Sterilization:** Compulsory sterilization laws were adopted by over 30 U.S. states and resulted in approximately 60,000 forced sterilizations.
- **Psychology Leadership:** 31 presidents of the American Psychological Association (APA) between 1892 and 1947 were affiliated with or leaders in eugenics societies.
- **Psychology's Complicity:** The early discipline of psychology was complicit in eugenics, with large numbers of psychologists identifying as eugenicists. Psychologists were

instrumental in creating and deploying the tests of human ability (like intelligence tests) used in eugenics campaigns.

- **Canadian Residential Schools:** These schools, which were part of Canada's eugenics policies, were in mandatory operation from 1894 to 1947, with the last one closing in 1996. Thousands of children's remains have been discovered in unmarked graves at these sites.
- **Institutional Reckoning:** The American Psychological Association (APA) issued a formal apology to People of Color for its role in promoting racism and human hierarchy on October 29, 2021. Planned Parenthood has also begun publicly acknowledging its founder's eugenicist past.

Findings That Challenge the System

Core Ideology of Eugenics

- **The Central Idea:** Eugenics was based on the idea that society's problems could be solved by selectively breeding humans, similar to how animals are bred.
- **Inherited Traits:** Eugenicians assumed that traits they considered desirable (e.g., "intelligence") and undesirable (e.g., "feeble-mindedness") were inherited from parents.
- **Goal of a "Supreme Race":** Galton's plan was to create a new "scientific religion" capable of engineering a supreme human race over generations by controlling human reproduction.
- **Fear as a Motivator:** Galton and other eugenicians feared that "natural selection" would allow "inferior, low-quality and uncivilized people" to reproduce, polluting the gene pool and leading to the destruction of the human race. This fear was used to promote their agenda.
- **Dehumanization:** Eugenics differentiated people based on "desirable" or "undesirable" characteristics, labeling them "high-quality" or "superior" versus "low-quality" or "inferior". This dehumanization was a key aspect of the ideology.

Psychology's Foundational Role in Eugenics

- **A Complicit Relationship:** The rise of the eugenics movement is inextricably intertwined with the history of psychology. The early discipline was complicit, and many psychologists were eugenicians.
- **Creating the Tools:** The eugenics movement needed "scientific" methods to measure human qualities. Psychologists created and used tests of human ability (e.g., intelligence tests) to carry out eugenics campaigns.
- **Shared Timeline:** The growth of psychology as an academic discipline occurred in tandem with the popularization of eugenics, which was more than a coincidence.
- **Psychometrics for Eugenics:** Psychology established whole domains, such as psychometrics, specifically to measure individual differences in human qualities that were of interest to eugenics.

The Lasting Impact of Eugenic Policies

- **Mental Health:** Eugenics ideology shaped the history of mental health treatment. People with mental illness were considered genetically inferior. Policies included

institutionalizing patients in distant locations to prevent breeding and forcibly sterilizing them against their will.

- **Racism:** Eugenics reinforced existing racism. In America, eugenicists supported segregation and anti-miscegenation laws to prevent the "white race" from mixing with "inferior" non-white races. They fabricated scientific evidence to show white people were superior in traits like intelligence.
- **Fertility Control:** Eugenics was deeply concerned with fertility control. Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, was a eugenicist who promoted her views to white supremacy groups. Abortion was seen as a tool to terminate pregnancies of "defective" offspring.
- **Education:**
 - **Gifted Programs:** These programs were born out of positive eugenics initiatives designed to develop "eugenically 'superior' children".
 - **Standardized Testing:** The creation and spread of standardized tests in education were driven by psychologists committed to eugenics. Carl Brigham, a eugenicist psychologist, was hired by the College Board to create the SAT.
 - **Educational Psychology:** Edward Thorndike, often called the father of educational psychology, was a prominent eugenicist.
- **Genocide:** The German eugenics movement, known as "racial hygiene," aimed to create a purified white race and acted on these goals by committing the Holocaust. The methods used by the Nazis were based on precursors already established by eugenicists in other countries, such as Karl Pearson's "scientific" methods for identifying "inferior" Jews.

Populations Discussed

The eugenics movement systematically created fear of and targeted marginalized groups, including:

- People with physical and mental disabilities.
- Immigrants.
- People with different skin colors, particularly in majority-white countries like Britain, Germany, Canada, and the United States, where eugenics forwarded a white supremacy agenda.
- Non-white citizens, who were deemed inferior.
- Jewish people, who were targeted for exclusion and genocide.
- Homosexuals, who were among the groups subjected to mass killing by the Nazi regime.
- Indigenous children in Canada, who were separated from their parents and subjected to abuse, forced assimilation, and involuntary sterilization in the residential school system.

Quotes We Might Use

- **On the core principle:** "A basic idea in eugenics was that society could be improved and its problems solved by selectively breeding humans, just like other animals."
- **On psychology's complicity:** "The early discipline of psychology was complicit in eugenics and large numbers of psychologists were eugenicists."
- **On creating the tools of oppression:** "Psychologists helped create and deploy the tests of human ability (e.g., intelligence tests, see next chapter) that would be used to carry out eugenics campaigns on society."

- **Galton's vision:** Galton coined the term "eugenics" to "express the science of improving stock, which is by no means confined to questions of judicious mating, but which... takes cognizance of all influences that tend... to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable..."
- **On the goals of "Negative" and "Positive" eugenics:** "Positive eugenics were ostensibly methods that would increase or encourage reproduction between high quality people... Negative eugenics involved methods for decreasing reproduction between low quality people..."
- **The logic of eugenic propaganda:** "Inferior people are inferior because they have inferior genes. Inferior people pass on their inferior genes to their offspring... Society is deteriorating as we speak because so many inferior people are breeding... unless we follow eugenics solutions to the problem."

Clinical Implications

The chapter outlines the direct impact of eugenics on the mental health field, providing a historical context for the trauma and mistrust many communities feel towards the system.

- **Pathologizing Mental Illness:** People with mental illness were explicitly labeled as genetically inferior by the eugenics movement.
- **Control and Elimination:** Negative eugenics was used to prevent people with mental illness from reproducing.
- **Institutionalization as a Eugenic Tool:** One strategy was to physically isolate patients in distant mental hospitals to prevent them from "breeding with the general public".
- **Forced Sterilization:** Another strategy was the forced, involuntary sterilization of patients to ensure they could never reproduce. Over 30 U.S. states passed compulsory sterilization laws for "defectives".