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Psychology, technology and clinical procedures in education: The cases of Luella W. Cole and Sidney L. Pressey, 1917-1934

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Abstract (summary)

This research is centered at the intersection of the history of education, psychology, and technology. Historical case studies of two **Anglo-American** psychologists, Luella W. Cole and Sidney L. Pressey, and their work during the years 1917-1934 are used as a focus. Cole and Pressey are treated individually and as a couple who often consolidated efforts. These psychologists' rhetoric and actions in education are described and analyzed. A framework of medical knowledge, clinical procedures, and a shared therapeutic mentality constitute the interpretive themes used for the research. Their cases are interpreted against current models of explanation for the testing movement.

Histories of their work in the Boston Psychopathic Hospital (1916-1917), and departments of psychology at Harvard (1912-1917), Indiana State (1917-1921), and The Ohio State (1921-1934) universities constitute narrative details. The hospital's culture of psychiatry, psychology and social work, is recognized for its significance in their training. Narrative emphasizes the hospital Directors Elmer E. Southard's and Mary C. Jarrett's notions of a "Kingdom of Evils" and "mental hygiene;" intelligence testing in Indiana; and, educational psychology and apparatus development at Ohio State.

These psychologists' use of apparatus is described within its historical context that includes the 1920s controversy over the "purity" of tests. Their practices in developing apparatus is detailed, and an overview of psychological apparatus use during the 1910s and 1920s given. Pressey's "intelligence testing machine," which was marketed as an "Automatic Testing Machine" by the W. M. Welch Manufacturing Company, is interpreted as a therapeutic apparatus. Behavioristic "laws of learning" manifested within the machine are made clear, along with Pressey's hopes of using these machines to therapeutically adjust students within a clinical program of instruction.

Cole and Pressey tailored their products and services to hygienic notions and market demands. They expanded psychiatric and psychological expertise into education, linking clinical procedures and therapeutics with scholastic reforms. Their "test-remediate-test" program of classroom instruction was charged with an ideology of mental hygiene, and reinforced the "hygienization" of American education. Given these psychologists' cases, historians should look into the clinic and dispensary for social roots of the modern classroom, an extension of the therapeutic state.

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