

THE I.Q. TEST

BY

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ONE

I remember back when I was starting out as a child psychologist in 1994. I had only occupied that new downtown office for a few weeks when Maggie Swanson brought her two sons to see me. I recall that encounter as if it were yesterday. It was to change my outlook on intelligence forever.

During the interview, Maggie was going on and on about Frank, her older son by one year, the 'smart one' as she put it. Joshua, the younger one, in spite of his 16 years of age, had simply come because she was worried about leaving him alone at home.

A mid-afternoon Summer sun was dancing around my office playing hide-and-seek with all the knick-knacks on my shelves. As I was taking notes, Maggie was comfortably sitting inches from my desk in her elegant indigo dress, her right hand on Frank's shoulder, so as to include him in the conversation. Joshua was quietly sitting on his own near my psychology books, he looked captivated, focusing on every title.

Maggie was explaining how bright Frank was. He was a straight-A student, his teachers were very proud of him, his memory was tremendous, especially in the areas he was passionate about, he was very witty, he was very knowledgeable. When, intrigued, I inquired about Joshua, she waved her hands as if to dismiss him entirely. She explained how goofy he was, always day-dreaming, always believing stupid things. He didn't seem to have any real friends, whereas Frank, in spite of a somewhat haughty demeanor and harsh humor, was very popular.

Maggie was quite the successful woman, she had built her own business, was well respected in the community, and according to her, boasted an I.Q. of 120 which put her among the individuals of superior intellect. She needed to establish whether Frank was in that range or maybe even above her, in all probability to tell all her jealous friends about it, I anticipated, amused.

I agreed to subject Frank to an I.Q. test the next week, but as she seemed worried about Joshua, I convinced her to get him tested too so as to help him get a more fulfilled life in case he turned out to be neurologically deficient.

TWO

On the day of the test, I opened with a talk with both boys individually without their mother, which resulted challenging until Maggie decided to run some errands outside.

I first met with Frank, who was pretty confident about his intellectual prowess. He explained to me how most people he met were stupid, how little culture they exhibited, how he was involved with the right crowd of clever people whose parents were affluent, how people who didn't see eye to eye with him and his privileged cronies were idiots or evil. On a lighter note, I remember him being impressed with a person he knew who was able to speak several languages, something he wish he could accomplish. I suspected he might have the brains for it but was actually too lazy and worried about sounding stupid if he tried. He confessed to playing tricks on his little brother so as to 'improve him'. I sensed he had ulterior motives he refused to share. I recall him mentioning how daft his younger brother was because he didn't subscribe to all the points of view held by 'smart people' on TV, he was also supposed to be a coward because he didn't enjoy violent shows or the harsh humor he would subject him to. When I asked what his brother's accomplishments were, Frank answered that his French was good but added jokingly that his English was terrible. I detected some sibling rivalry behind that humorous remark.

Joshua, on the other hand, appeared shy at first glance, his downcast eyes were very mobile, curious even, he looked a bit nervous, twisting his fingers constantly. I prodded him about his relationship with his brother whom he idolized. He sheepishly replied he loved his brother but would often feel emotionally wounded by him, he would even feel betrayed when ridiculed in front of his peers. He remarked it was only natural for him to be the target of derision since he was strange and awkward. He appeared saddened at the idea of not having many friends which justified why he would stay in his brother's shadow in the hope of being sheltered from nasty people. He was articulate and his vocabulary was almost as complex as his older brother's. I noticed he had good grades overall, except in History, which he clarified by adding he wasn't interested in that subject because only facts and dates were given with, actually, very little to understand.

That last quip raised my suspicions, nonetheless, I assumed he was simply a reserved kid too young to fend for himself. The real interesting part of the meeting started when I asked him what he liked to do. Suddenly animated, Joshua replied he enjoyed reading very much, mainly books about astrophysics for he was mesmerized by our universe, or detective novels, most of them in French because he was fascinated by Paris. He added his brother thought that was stupid because he assumed French people didn't even have running water and would generally eat weird stuff. Joshua was actually at the top of his French class, way ahead of his peers, almost fluent, uncanny for a high-school student who's never left the country. He was also interested in Spanish and German, two of the most widely spoken languages he alleged. When I inquired about why his parents didn't know about his intellectual abilities he just responded they didn't care, they thought it was strange, so he never talked about his passions. My conclusion was Joshua felt rejected for being too smart which he accepted as part of his life burden.

THREE

The test itself consisted of discovering many numerical, geometrical and letter patterns within a time limit. I was to use the adult version since the boys were at least 16. Frank started as if his very life depended on the results, faking self-assurance he was commenting his work with 'too easy' or 'piece of cake' every now and then. Joshua's behavior was more subdued as if he was surprised to be able to solve anything. When time was up he looked apologetic he had been unable to answer every single question.

As I was calculating the brothers' results, something hit me. Frank was really intelligent as both he and his mother suspected. His verbal I.Q. was the highest with 140 which accounted for his conversational ease. However, in spite of his good math grades, his numerical ability was 'only' 130, and his spatial ability was not that impressive either with 120. Overall he boasted a global I.Q. of 130, 30 points above the mean (conventionally held at 100), very impressive but not worth feeling superior to nearly everyone. He was within gifted range, but barely. His over-confidence was to be attributed to something else, probably his mother's unabashed admiration.

On the contrary, Joshua's performance was higher than what I had ever witnessed. Almost all of his indexes were in the 3rd or 4th standard deviation, so 45 or 60 points above the mean. His Verbal IQ was the lowest with 140, the same as his brother's. In addition, Joshua was nearly fluent in French which could have artificially lowered his vocabulary level since a lot of what he usually read was in a foreign language. He had confessed to often having English words on the tip of his tongue when emotionally disturbed. His numerical skill reached nearly 150, with very good pattern recognition, but most importantly, his spatial proficiency was through the roof with 165. Sadly, with such subtests scatter his global I.Q. would be meaningless, the indexes being too far apart. I surmised his verbal achievements would have been higher were he monolingual and decided to favor the most accurate grades. Wow, Joshua's I.Q. was at genius level with a number probably ranging from 150 to 160. Incredible, he was smarter than 99.9 % of the general population.

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