

## **Ethics in Psychological Assessments Paper**

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Assessment, Tests, and Measurements

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Psychological tests and assessments are two separate, but equally important aspects of a psychological evaluation. The purpose of a psychological test is to measure a client's ability in a particular field. This can include reasoning, creative thinking, problem solving, and intelligence. Assessments are used to identify the client's feelings, behaviors, and reactions. Common assessments are mental health, adaptive behavior, and personality assessments (Cohen, 2017). One of the most important aspects to psychological testing and assessment is culture and diversity. If a counselor lacks cultural sensitivity and awareness, it could hinder the client-counselor relationship and impact the course of therapy. This composition will examine ethical issues associated with psychological testing and specific strategies to avoid ethical violations. It will also highlight how counselors assess behaviors from a multicultural standpoint and how a client's development can influence assessment choice.

### **Ethical Issues**

When a patient goes to the hospital and is showing physical symptoms, the doctor will perform tests such as X-Rays, blood tests, or an MRI to determine what is causing their symptoms. The doctors performing those tests must have extensive knowledge, training, and experience before administering those tests in order to ensure the patient's safety. Psychological evaluations work in a similar way. "Psychologists use tests and other assessment tools to measure and observe a client's behavior to arrive at a diagnosis and guide treatment" (American Psychological Association, 2013, para. 3). When a tester does not have the proper qualifications this could lead to inaccurate test results and misdiagnosing. A treatment plan is determined based on the counselor's diagnosis. So, if the diagnosis is inaccurate, the counselor could unintentionally be guiding the client down a harmful treatment plan (Cohen, 2017). The ACA

Ethics Code states that counselors may only administer tests if they are appropriately trained and competent. This entails being trained on the specific instruments being used in the tests and ensuring the testees are using the assessment techniques properly (American Counseling Association, 2014, Section E.2.a).

Another way a counselor could potentially misdiagnose a client is by failing to examine and factor in their culture, ethnicity, background, and religion. For example, a counselor has a Latin American client whose family is from a collectivist culture. Collective cultures focus on the needs, goals, and desires of the group versus the needs of the individual (Cohen, 2017). This means that each individual within a collective culture plays an important role in a person's identity. A culturally incompetent counselor might assess their Latin American client and diagnose them with Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD). This is because symptoms of DPD can fall in line with behaviors an individual in a collective culture might possess. Counselors must be cautious of test and assessment techniques they use and recognize how age, color, culture, disability, ethnic group, gender, race, language preference, religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status can affect the outcome of a psychological evaluation (American Counseling Association, 2014, Section E.8).

Effective communication is essential during the psychological evaluation. Verbal communication is crucial and counselors must decipher nonverbal communication with culturally diverse clients. It is important for the tester and testee to speak the same language. This ensures that directions for the test are provided correctly to the client and the tester's assessment can be accurate. In addition, if the test is in a written format, the testee must be able to read and comprehend the questions and directions (Cohen, 2017). For example, a counselor is aware that their new client's first language is Spanish, however the client was able to have an effortless

conversation with them in English, so they failed to ask the client if they are capable of reading and writing in English adequately. The counselor provides them a psychological test and the client struggles to understand some of the questions but is uncomfortable asking for help. The counselor's perception is they answered the questions sincerely and honestly, when in reality the client's answers were inaccurate (Cohen, 2017).

Every person communicates through nonverbal means including body language, facial expressions, hand gestures, and eye contact. However, the message they are trying to relay through nonverbal means can vary depending on an individual's culture (Cohen, 2017). For example, eye contact is known to be a sign of respect in some cultures, but a sign of deceit or disrespect in others. In some Native American cultures, it is believed direct eye contact can result in the loss of their soul. So, eye contact is avoided or seen as disrespectful. If a culturally incompetent counselor tries to assess the client, they might believe the client is anxious, embarrassed, or ashamed. This can lead to a misdiagnosis.

### **Avoiding Ethical Issues**

In order to avoid potential harm to the client, the American Psychological Association (APA) has limited the use of psychological tests to qualified individuals. This means each counselor must have specific education, training, and supervision experience to administer psychological tests and assessments. Every counselor would benefit in overviewing The Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education which highlights how to develop and select tests, interpret scores, strive for fairness, and properly inform test takers about the tests. Pearson also provides many resources to train counselors in psychological testing. They provide test-specific training that goes over how to properly administer test, scoring, interpretation. This is accomplished via webinars, online courses, tutorials, and workshops. (Pearson, 2022)

One way a counselor can ensure they are being culturally sensitive is by asking themselves questions such as: “How long has the client been assimilated in the culture?” “How appropriate are the norms based upon that culture?” and “How intelligent is the client?” (Cohen, 2017) When a counselor asks questions instead of taking their current observations and assessments at face value, they might notice unconscious bias and can avoid a flawed assessments.

If a tester and testee do not speak the same language, the most beneficial option is to refer the testee to a tester who speaks the same language to avoid miscommunication (Cohen, 2017). For example, on some occasions when a translator is used, the translator might reword or summarize what is said. This might result in directions being interpreted incorrectly, which leads to the client's tests answers being inaccurate. If there is not a way to get a tester who speaks the same language as the client, then obtaining a translator is obligated. However, it is important to advise the translator to relay your sentences “word for word” to avoid as much miscommunication as possible. Another option is to have the client’s family member who speaks the same language come translate for them and provide them the same instructions. In order for a counselor to accurately interpret nonverbal communication, it is important for them to educate themselves on different cultural norms (Cohen, 2017).

### **Assessing Behaviors**

Cultural competence and awareness is vital when assessing behavioral patterns. This is because certain behaviors that are seen as problematic or eccentric in our own culture, may be normal in other cultures. In addition, when a counselor increases their cultural competence, they decrease the chances of imposing their own cultural beliefs, values, and morals onto the client (Fong et al, 2016). So, one of the first steps a counselor should implement before assessing

behaviors is to be self-aware of their own cultural system. This will prevent any conscious or unconscious biases from obstructing assessments on diverse clients. When assessing culturally diverse clients, in order to accurately identify cultural variables, it's best to "focus on functional relations and behavioral principles rather than topography" (Fong et al, 2016, para. 19).

### **Impacts on Assessment Choice**

There are several types of assessments including: educational, career, behavioral, personality, neuropsychological, and assessment of organizational culture. It is the responsibility of the counselor to determine which assessment is going to be beneficial for the client. The counselor does this by reviewing the client's academic, career, personal, and social development and assesses which areas need improvement (Popoola & Oluwatosin, 2018). For example, a counselor starts seeing a 17-year-old client and the parents inform the counselor "he has always struggled in school and has trouble making friends." When the counselor meets the patient, they notice the client does not make much eye contact and they rock back and forth. This counselor would most likely choose a neuropsychological and/or educational assessment.

### **Conclusion**

Psychological tests and assessments are two of the most important aspects of the counseling process. They are essentially the genesis of the counseling process and the start to determining the root of a client's problem. Making sure the psychological evaluation process is accomplished accurately and ethically should be the primary focus for a counselor.

## References

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