

The **tests used** most frequently by **counseling psychologists** include objective and projective personality **tests**, individually administered **tests** of cognitive functioning, vocational interest **tests**, and brief scales to assess specific symptomology.

Counseling psychology is a developmentally oriented specialty that emphasizes the integration and informed application of principles derived from basic psychological sciences such as differential, vocational, developmental, and social psychology. The practice of counseling psychology overlaps with that of clinical, industrial-organizational, management, and school psychology, making it one of the broadest and most integrative specialties in psychology.

Scientific Foundations of Counseling Psychology

Differential psychology, the study of the nature and extent of individual and group variability, and of the factors that determine or affect these differences, is one of two formative progenitors of counseling psychology. The objectives of differential psychology are to document individual differences in human attributes such as intelligence, personality, interests, and values that occur as a function of age, gender, race, and social class, and to identify the factors that contribute to those differences. Counseling psychologists share differential psychology's philosophical belief in the uniqueness of each person and this provides the philosophical rationale that guides their use of assessment techniques. In practice, counseling psychologists try to gain an understanding of how each individual thinks, feels, and acts, and their assessment practices cover the entire range of human cognitive, conative, and affective attributes.

As an applied specialty, counseling psychology evolved from the vocational guidance movement that began in the early 1900s, and the study of the effects of work on the individual continues to be an important focus of counseling psychology. Plato's notion that people should be matched to occupational environments to achieve optimal work outcomes was elaborated by Frank Parsons (1909) during the first decade of the twentieth century, and further developed by the Minnesota Employment Stabilization Research Institute during the depression of the 1930s. The person-environment fit philosophy is expressed most completely in Lloyd H. Lofquist and Rene V. Dawis's (1969) theory of work adjustment, which explains how matching individuals and occupational environments leads to better productivity, more satisfied workers, and job stability.

Psychological tests

Definition

Psychological tests are written, visual, or verbal evaluations administered to assess the cognitive and emotional functioning of children and adults.

Purpose

Psychological tests are used to assess a variety of mental abilities and attributes, including achievement and ability, personality, and neurological functioning. For children, academic achievement, ability, and intelligence tests may be used as tools in school

placement, in determining the presence of a learning disability or a [developmental delay](#), in identifying giftedness, or in tracking intellectual development. Intelligence testing may also be used with teens and young adults to determine vocational ability (e.g., in career counseling).

Personality tests are administered for a wide variety of reasons, from diagnosing psychopathology (e.g., personality disorder, depressive disorder) to screening job candidates. They may be used in an educational setting to determine personality strengths and weaknesses.

Description

Psychological tests are formalized measures of mental functioning. Most are objective and quantifiable; however, certain projective tests may involve some level of subjective interpretation. Also known as inventories, measurements, questionnaires, and scales, psychological tests are administered in a variety of settings, including preschools, primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, outpatient healthcare settings, and social agencies. They come in a variety of formats, including written, verbal, and computer administered.

Achievement and ability tests

Achievement and ability tests are designed to measure the level of a child's intellectual functioning and cognitive ability. Most achievement and ability tests are standardized, meaning that norms were established during the design phase of the test by administering the test to a large representative sample of the test population. Achievement and ability tests follow a uniform testing protocol, or procedure (i.e., test instructions, test conditions, and scoring procedures) and their scores can be interpreted in relation to established norms. Common achievement and ability tests include the Wechsler intelligence scale for children (WISC-III) and the **Stanford-Binet intelligence scales**.

Personality tests

Personality tests and inventories evaluate the thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and behavioral traits that comprise personality. The results of these tests can help determine a child's personality strengths and weaknesses, and may identify certain disturbances in personality, or psychopathology. Tests such as the **Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory** for Adolescents (MMPI-A) and the Millon Pre-Adolescent Clinical Inventory III (M-PACI), are used to screen children for specific psychopathologies or emotional problems.

Another type of personality test is the projective personality [assessment](#). A projective test asks a child to interpret some ambiguous stimuli, such as a series of inkblots. The child's responses provide insight into his or her thought processes and personality traits. For example, the Holtzman Ink blot Test (HIT) uses a series of inkblots that the test subject is asked to identify. Another projective assessment, the **Thematic**

Apperception Test (TAT), asks the child to tell a story about a series of pictures. Some consider projective tests to be less reliable than objective personality tests. If the examiner is not well-trained in psychometric evaluation, subjective interpretations may affect the evaluation of these tests.

Neuropsychological tests

Children and adolescents who have experienced a traumatic brain injury, brain damage, or other organic neurological problems, are administered neuropsychological tests to assess their level of functioning and identify areas of mental impairment.

Neuropsychological tests may also be used to evaluate the progress of a patient who has undergone treatment or rehabilitation for a neurological injury or illness. In addition, certain neuropsychological measures may be used to screen children for developmental delays and/or learning disabilities.

Precautions

Psychological testing requires a clinically trained examiner. All psychological tests should be administered, scored, and interpreted by a trained professional, preferably a psychologist or psychiatrist with expertise in the appropriate area.

Psychological tests are only one element of a psychological assessment. They should never be used as the sole basis for a diagnosis. A detailed clinical and personal history of the child and a review of psychological, medical, educational, or other relevant records are required to lay the groundwork for interpreting the results of any psychological measurement.

Cultural and language differences among children may affect test performance and may result in inaccurate test results. The test administrator should be informed before psychological testing begins if the test taker is not fluent in English and/or belongs to a minority culture. In addition, the child's level of motivation may also affect test results.

Preparation

Prior to the administration of any psychological test, the administrator should provide the child and the child's parent with information on the nature of the test and its intended use, complete standardized instructions for taking the test (including any time limits and penalties for incorrect responses), and information on the confidentiality of the results. After these disclosures are made, informed consent should be obtained from the child (as appropriate) and the child's parent before testing begins.

Normal results

All psychological and neuropsychological assessments should be administered, scored, and interpreted by a trained professional. When interpreting test results, the test administrator will review with parents what the test evaluates, its precision in evaluation, any margins of error involved in scoring, and what the individual scores mean in the context of overall test norms and the specific background of the individual child.

Risks

There are no significant risks involved in psychological testing.

Parental concerns

Test anxiety can have an impact on a child's performance, so parents should not place undue emphasis on the importance of any psychological testing. They should speak with their child before any scheduled tests and reassure them that their best effort is all that is required. Parents can also ensure that their children are well-rested on the testing day and have a nutritious meal beforehand.

KEY TERMS

Norms —A fixed or ideal standard; a normative or mean score for a particular age group.

Psychopathology —The study of mental disorders or illnesses, such as schizophrenia, personality disorder, or major depressive disorder.

Quantifiable —A result or measurement that can be expressed as a number. The results of quantifiable psychological tests can be translated into numerical values, or scores.

Representative sample —A random sample of people that adequately represents the test-taking population in age, gender, race, and socioeconomic standing.

Standardization —The process of determining established norms and procedures for a test to act as a standard reference point for future test results.

Resources

BOOKS

The American Psychological Association. *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. Washington, DC: APA Press, 1999.

Braaten, Ellen and Gretchen Felopulos. *Straight Talk About Psychological Testing for Kids*. New York: Guilford Press, 2003.

The Buros Institute of Mental Measurements at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. *The Fifteenth Mental Measurements Yearbook* ed. Barbara S. Plake and James C. Impara. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.

ORGANIZATIONS

American Psychological Association. Testing and Assessment Office of the Science Directorate. 750 First St., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002-4242. (202)336-6000. Web site: <http://www.apa.org/science/testing.html>.

National Association of School Psychologists. 4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814. (301) 657-0270.

WEB SITES

Buros Institute Test Reviews Online. <http://www.buros.unl.edu/buros/jsp/search.jsp> (accessed September 1, 2004).

Paula Ford-Martin

Read more: <http://www.healthofchildren.com/P/Psychological-Tests.html#ixzz6KLXnMpgQ>

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