

# From a rational standpoint: Analyzing nuances in the utility of Western psychological tests as assessment tools in the Philippines

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## ***Abstract***

The paper examines current pragmatic worth and considerations in the use of Western psychological tests by reviewing pertinent literature which encompasses definition of psychological testing and assessment, specific standards set by local and international standards with respect to administration, scoring and interpretation of psychological tests, emerging issues and challenges, and newer paradigms in the delivery of psychological assessment. It identifies explicit concerns and recommends directions in the utility of such psychological tests by counselors, psychologists, counselors-in-training and students.

***Keywords:*** assessment tools; Philippines; projective techniques; supervision; Western psychological tests

## **From a rational standpoint: Analyzing nuances in the utility of Western psychological tests as assessment tools in the Philippines**

### **1. Introduction**

Psychological assessment constitutes a decisive role of psychologists and counselors in Asian clinical and counseling settings (Chan, & Lee, 1995; Dai Zheng, Ryan, & Paolo, 1993; Higgins & Sun, 2002; Matsubara, 1984; Ogawa & Piotrowski, 1992; Tsoi & Sundberg, 1989; Zhang, 1988). Psychologists make use of psychological tests for diagnostic, evaluative and therapeutic decisions. However, objective tests are the frequently utilized assessment techniques due to its scientific validity. Adherence to scientific tools in gauging behavioral outcome improves the status of specific fields of endeavors, especially in developing countries. Western instruments appeared to be the most common evaluative devices that are being employed by psychologists such as Wechsler Intelligence Scales, Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, and many others. Translations and adaptations of such tests for use in various areas in the Asian region including China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam marked promising advances in the practice of assessment (Cheung, Leong, & Ben-Porath, 2003). It is very rampant how psychologists and counselors have relied on the utility of psychological tests as measurement media in measuring sample of behaviors. Yet, the pragmatic value of these psychological tests in the Asian context remained in question as exacerbated by the dearth of researchers in this area of assessment. Since practicality is a dimension of defining a good test (Anastasi, 1982), there is an urgent need to assess the applicability and practicality in using Western psychological tests in the Philippine context. As such, the current paper will differentiate psychological assessment from psychological testing, identify standards in the conduct of assessment in the Western context and in the Philippines, determine challenges in the practice of assessment in the Philippines and chart directions as regards to evidence-based assessment practices that will further enhance professional growth and excellence in the field of psychology and counseling.

### **2. Psychological assessment versus psychological tests**

As the foundation of demarcating best prognosis among the intended clientele, psychological assessment is most effective in understanding and evaluating problems of living (Groth-Marnat, 2003). Psychological assessment pertains to the battery of investigative processes aimed at obtaining an adequate picture of the client's psychological profile. It ventures to evaluate an individual in a problem situation so that information derived from the assessment can somehow help with the problem (Groth-Marnat, 2003). It includes intake interviewing, behavioral observations, psychological testing and other relevant tasks. Obviously, the function of assessment as a holistic dimension of a therapeutic encounter cannot be disregarded in view of the fact that it sets the tone of an effective treatment map. Though, it is frequently linked with psychological tests which are usual elements of a psychological assessment.

On the other hand, psychological test is an objective and standardized measure of a sample of behavior (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997). Objectivity and standardization implies consistency in the administration, scoring and interpretation of such tools in accordance with its manuals. Normally, psychological tests have been utilized in three different areas: (1) in occupational settings tests are employed in personnel selection and vocational guidance; (2) in education they are useful for selection through examinations and identification of learning difficulties; and (3) in clinical work psychological tests are used as adjuncts to clinical decision making. In terms of categorization, there are five types of psychological tests: (1) intelligence tests; (2) aptitude; (3) interest; (4) objective personality tests; and (5) projective tests. There are three characteristics that can define a good test namely validity, reliability and practicality (Anastasi, 1982). Firstly, validity pertains to the ability of the test to measure what purports to measure. Secondly, reliability implies dependability and consistency of the test items

(Groth-Marnat, 2003). Thirdly, practicality refers to the applicability of the test to the target clientele. Similarly, Groth-Marnat (2003) and Corcoran (2000) identified *theoretical orientation*, *practical considerations*, *standardization*, *reliability* and *validity* as principal indicators in evaluating the goodness and appropriateness of a psychological test.

### **3. Standards in assessment practices**

In the midst of rapid and persistent changes in global community's existing conditions, prolonged professionalization and regulation of assessment practices have been promoted by American Psychological Association (2002) and American Counseling Association (2005). Particularly, guidelines set by aforementioned professional organizations capitalized on beneficence, non-maleficence, competence to administer, score and interpret assessment instruments, diagnosis and communicating results. Licensure of psychologists and counselors are also mandated to reinforce professional responsibility and accountability. These guiding standards served as the framework for upholding the highest magnitude of professional and ethical practice in psychological assessment. It is pretty much evident how foreign professional associations have relied on the weight of promoting best endeavors in the practice of assessment, a trend that is quite incongruent with the conduct of assessment in Asian countries like Vietnam, Cambodia and Philippines among others.

In the Philippine context, licensure exam that would professionalize the practice of psychology is an issue that was not completely resolved yet by the concerned sectors even with the existence of the law that calls for its implementation (Psychology Act of 2008). As an alternative thrust, Psychological Association of the Philippines has established a way of credentialing psychologists through certification programs depending on their field of specialty like assessment psychology, clinical psychology, counseling psychology, developmental psychology, industrial/organizational psychology, social psychology and teaching psychology. Specifically, for a practicing psychologist to become certified in any of the previously mentioned specialties, he must have at least three (3) years of experience in the intended field. Apparently, the regulation of assessment practices in the Philippines is very distinct from its foreign counterparts.

Quite the opposite, the practice of guidance and counseling was professionally standardized with the realization of Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004. This law affirmed a mandatory licensure examination for all practicing counselors who have at least a Master of Arts degree in Guidance and Counseling and its equivalent degrees. On a positive note, psychological assessment was included in the subject matters of the board examinations. This appeared to be a major improvement in the conduct of assessment as it highlights the role of assessment in the duties and functions of a practicing counselor. However, supervised practicum was not specified as a requirement in taking the board exam. This would mean that some of the practicing counselors might be given a license without a rigorous academic and professional training which can be enhanced through a supervised practicum. In the same manner, literature has revealed that supervised practicum was not properly executed and readily available to counselor while they were undergoing practicum training (Mateo, 2010; Reyes 2001). Accordingly, it might pose a concern as to whether Filipino counselors are acquiring right apprenticeship in the practice of assessment and counseling which are critical spheres in their occupation.

### **4. Assessment practices' challenges in the Philippine context**

With reference to less rigid observance towards the professionalization of psychological practice, even the enterprise of psychological testing has been an issue that was not given due worth in the Philippines. For instance, no strict deterrent measures were prescribed to undergraduate Psychology students who are using individual psychological tests such as Wechsler Intelligence Scale, Wechsler Memory Scale, and many others, instruments that are suitable to graduate school students and qualified practitioners. Also, projective tests are heavily used by undergraduate practicum students in assessing the patients assigned to them in their clinical apprenticeship such as Draw a person test, House-tree-person test, Thematic Apperception Test, Bender Gestalt test, Rorschach inkblot test, and etcetera. Furthermore, practitioners who did not hold academic and professional

training in the administration, scoring and interpretation of such tests continue to train and require students to use such sophisticated psychological instruments. Remarkably, the natural fascination of practitioners and students in using Western instruments remained to be very evident.

Western psychological tests are the assessment tools of choice by majority of Filipino counselors, psychologists and students. For example, it is frequent to employ Raven's Progressive Matrices, SRA Tests, Multidimensional Aptitude Battery Test, and Culture Fair Intelligence Tests among others in getting a measure of the client's intellectual ability. Conversely, Sixteen Personality Factor Test, NEO-Personality Inventory Revised, Edwards Personal Preference Schedule, and Manchester Personality Questionnaire were the instruments that are commonly utilize in revealing the client's enduring personality characteristics. In terms of identifying occupational orientation, some of the tools being used are Strong Interest Inventory, Hall Occupational Inventory, Brainard Occupational Preference Inventory and the likes. Assessment practices have been anchored with these foreign instruments. In reality, employing such tools in the practice is costly, particularly on the case of individual psychological tests like Wechsler Intelligence Scale, Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test and Rorschach inkblot tests. Validity of these tests also remained questionable since the norms are coming from United States of America and other Western contexts.

## **5. Dealing with the challenges of psychological assessment in the Philippines**

There is an immediate need to examine the nuances in using Western-derived tools in the delivery of psychological assessment. Given that majority of proponents of the tests and its standardization procedures have been executed in dominant culture like United States of America and European countries, the validity and applicability of these instruments in the Asian context like the Philippines can be a scientific question that warrants serious interest. Cultural validity of the items and interpretative measures are quite debatable due to the biases that are intrinsic in such tests as a result of the proponents' cultural orientation. Even the efforts of local psychologists to translate the tests are not an assurance that culture fairness in the items can be observed. As a fact, Cheung, Leong, & Ben-Porath (2003) asserted that it is inadequate just to find a translated version of the popular objective instruments. Although many Western tests have been translated, the quality of the translation and adaptation varies (Fowler, 2002). In spite of the inclination to idiographic assessment, which is less sensitive to norm-based sources of error than nomothetic assessment, the issues of validity, cross-cultural validity, and generalizability of assumptions are still issues that are not easy to delve with (Haynes & O'Brien, 2000).

In the absence of cross-cultural comparisons, local standardization and validation studies, it is risky and dangerous to interpret test results according to the original tests. Even the scientific status of projective tests remains highly controversial as evidenced by small indexes of empirical support derived from Rorschach, Thematic Apperception Test and human figure drawing tests that are not empirically supported (Lilienfield, Wood, & Garb, 2000). An important point here is whether these Western psychological tests would really help practitioners in assessing Filipino clients, the same way as whether the clients would profit as well in taking such tests. It is crucial to cautiously analyze the paradox behind the utility of these tests as it is vital in defining clients' problem and designing sound and appropriate therapeutic plans. One more dilemma that could possibly occur is whether practicing psychologists and counselors are accurately getting clients' psychological dimensions that need to be addressed due to their problems at hand or worse, they are just creating labels on the clients' ends that might not be helpful in building an evidence-based therapeutic alliance. On top of these concerns, the expenses of using psychological tests in psychological assessment cannot be easily discounted given that Philippines is a third world country. Considering such issues, queries that enunciate validity and cost-efficiency of psychological tests in carrying out psychological assessment is still a concern that is relatively difficult to deal with. Noticeably, the potential and imminent danger of utilizing such instruments is well-recognizable but ignored most of the time.

As a response to such controversies that talks about non-advantageous aftermaths in the use of Western tests, Reyes (2012) shared an assessment template that is theoretically and practically grounded. In particular, he cited

four elements of psychological assessment that can be utilized in the practice: (1) center template; (2) theoretical orientation; (3) knowledge on psychology and human development; and (4) implicit formulations. Firstly, center template simply pertains to the intake interview forms that are usually given to clients, intake interview and behavioral observations that are salient in getting their psychological profile. Secondly, theoretical orientation talks about specific framework where that the counselor or the psychologist is using in case conceptualizations. Thirdly, knowledge on psychology and human development pertains to fund of theories and principles that have been acquired as a result of academic and professional training. Lastly, implicit formulations encompass awareness of specific biases of the practitioner that can influence the interpretation of the data at hand. This appeared to be a cost-efficient way of doing a psychological assessment as it doesn't require the psychologist or counselor to heavily rely on Western psychological tests.

Despite Reyes' (2012) model on assessing clients, it is of great essence to draft possible recommendations to address the valid use psychological tests. First of all, professional and regulatory policies that will ensure proper delivery of assessment roles should be strictly created and implemented by concerned sectors. In line with this, licensure exam for practicing psychologists and psychometricists is an issue that must be given corresponding weight. This will be an essential step toward strengthening professionalization and accountability in the utility of psychological tests. Next, supervised training in the use of such evaluative tools should be strictly observed by academic institutions. As mentioned earlier, though there is a mandatory board examination for practicing counselors, the lack of supervisory dimension in the apprenticeship process would pose a threat on the modes by which counselors are assessing their clients. This policy is encouraged to be applied as well in undergraduate courses like psychometrics and practicum in order to monitor their inclination to abide with the appropriate assessment practices. Without proper supervision practices in the conduct of assessment, there is no assurance the best services can be delivered to respective clientele. In addition, local validation studies of Western psychological tests and creation of culturally-sensitive tools are of great essence. This would ensure that appropriate norms can be applied to Filipino clients as opposed to the usual way interpretation of test is being done where individuals were being compared to a Western-based standardization group which increases the chance of Filipino clients being labeled with interpretations that were not grounded with culturally-sensitive evidences. Thus, efforts to contextualize Western psychological tests or even to come up with indigenous psychological tests are of great essence. Lastly, students who are utilizing psychological tests are encouraged to review the manual of such tools and be acquainted with its validity, reliability and practical considerations to ensure that proper use, administration, scoring and interpretation of such tools are being observed.

## **6. Conclusion**

The paper articulated issues that are significant in examining the methodological and practical worth of utilizing psychological tests as assessment tools in the Philippine context. By presenting literature that shed light on the status of assessment and testing in a non-dominant culture with reference to Western tests and relevant guidelines in the use of such instruments, specific problem areas were delineated in the Philippines' practice of psychological testing. Introduction of a theoretically-grounded and cost-efficient assessment template is another thrust that was elucidated as a response to disadvantages of using such instruments. Particular recommendations and directions for sustainable assessment practices have been cited to address the concerns that were identified regarding the hazards of psychological tests such as implementation of the Psychology law of 2008, supervised training and academic adjuncts. Notwithstanding the argumentative tone of the article, it is not purported to discourage students, professors, counselors and psychologists from employing psychological tests as a major element of their assessment templates. Instead, it endeavors to promote a sense of caution and responsibility in using Western psychological tests given that it is the role of helping professionals like psychologists and counselors to uphold psychological well-being among the intended clientele. Psychological tests users must not forget that still, the best assessment tool in a therapeutic encounter is no other than their selves. Hence, reforms in the conduct of testing should not just zero in on professional standards and policies but also on specific competencies that students, counselors and psychologists must possess and the practical values of such tests as

evaluative media. In that way, continued commitment to the highest standards of psychological and counseling practice through theoretically-sound yet cost-efficient assessment methods can be further enhanced without compromising the quality of professional services provided, a condition that will optimize opportunities for greater access to therapeutic modalities in a poverty-laden society.

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