

Ethics in Psychological Assessments

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Introduction

Ethical, culturally sensitive, and developmentally informed assessment practices are essential in counseling, as they ensure accurate, respectful, and effective evaluation of clients. By following the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics, 2014, and integrating knowledge of cultural identity, personal values, and developmental stages, counselors can select and administer assessments that truly serve the diverse needs of their clients.

Ethical Issues

Counselors often face important ethical issues, including working within their areas of expertise, avoiding value imposition, and cultural sensitivity. These professionals must only work with issues they are qualified to address and should seek additional training or supervision when working with unfamiliar populations or diagnoses. Per the ACA Code of Ethics, 2014, section C.2.a, counselors should only work in areas where they have the right education, training, experience, and professional credentials. The ethics code, section A.4.b, also states that therapists should avoid imposing their beliefs onto clients, which can hinder the therapeutic process and violate the client's autonomy, especially when the counselor's beliefs conflict with the client's goals (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014). Additionally, section E.5.b. of the ethics code dictates that practitioners demonstrate cultural humility by acknowledging the race, culture, gender, religion, and income level of clients. Failure to do so can result in biased assessments, misdiagnoses, or culturally insensitive interventions. This could ultimately harm the client and breach the ethical guidelines set forth by the ACA.

Avoiding Ethical Issues in Psychological Assessments

Counselors need the right mix of knowledge, skills, and ethics. While some groups try to limit who can use psychological tests, the ACA believes the key is competence. Counselors are

qualified to use tests if they have a master's degree or higher, along with proper training and experience in assessment (ACA, 2003). With extra training, practitioners can also use more advanced tools like projective tests, intelligence tests, and diagnostic tests. This training can happen during graduate school, through professional development, or with supervised practice. Counselors need the skills and knowledge to choose, use, understand, explain, and apply test results correctly (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). This includes understanding how tests are made, how accurate they are, and how to use statistics. Per the ACA ethics code, 2014, section E.2.a., counselors should only use tests and tools they are trained to use and feel confident with. If using computer-based assessments, practitioners must be trained in both the tool and what it measures. They also ensure that anyone they supervise uses assessments correctly.

Professionals should be aware of their personal values and how these might affect their work with clients (Aulia et al. 2024). Following ethical guidelines helps protect client rights and prevent value imposition. Supervision can support professionals in handling value conflicts. Staying neutral and focusing on the client's goals exclusively helps maintain ethical care. Clients should also be fully informed about the purpose of assessments and know their participation is voluntary. Furthermore, counselors doing forensic evaluations must get written consent from the person or their legal representative, unless a court says the evaluation can be done without it (ACA, 2014, E.13.b.). Finally, counselors always have an ethical duty to treat those they assess with care and respect (ACA, 2014, E.9.c.).

Counselors must be aware of their personal cultural biases and lack of awareness (Ahmed et al., 2025). They should try to understand their clients' different worldviews and be inquisitive about each person's unique background, avoiding assumptions. Section E.8. of the ACA Code of

Ethics, 2014, instructs counselors to be careful when using tests that were created for groups other than their clients. Counselors should consider how things like age, culture, race, gender, language, and income can affect how tests are given and understood. They look at test results along with other important information about the client. Additionally, test developers today work harder to make sure tests are fair for everyone (Cohen et al., 2022). They test early versions on people from different cultural backgrounds to look for confusing or biased questions. Test administrators also give feedback on how test-takers respond. Experts review the test to spot any bias, and the test is given to a large group that reflects the U.S. population in terms of age, race, gender, and income. The results help improve the test and remove any unfair parts.

Cultural Behavioral Assessment

Counselors evaluate behaviors shaped by clients' cultures by applying cultural competence throughout the assessment and treatment process. This involves understanding that behaviors are learned and expressed within specific cultural contexts (Pederson, 2023). Therefore, test users must consider how a client's cultural background may influence how assessments are administered and interpreted (Cohen et al., 2022). Counselors must also consider the client's values and norms, ensuring that interpretations are not biased by the counselor's own cultural framework in order to accurately assess such behaviors (ACA, 2014, E.5.b). One culturally sensitive assessment is the [Cultural Formulation Interview \(CFI\)](#), established by the APA and Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM-5). The CFI includes 16 questions and helps counselors learn how culture affects the client's problems and experiences (Salandanan, 2025). This interview defines culture as shared values, beliefs, and practices passed down through generations and constantly evolving.

Education, Career, Personal, and Social Development Impacts on Assessment

A client's academic, career, personal, and social development plays a key role in choosing appropriate assessments in counseling. For example, a client's academic level can influence the use of cognitive or learning assessments, particularly when identifying learning challenges or strengths (Zhao et al., 2024). Career development influences the use of vocational tools like interest inventories or self-regulation scales, especially for clients traversing transitions or uncertain career paths (Rezaiee & Kareshki, 2024). Personal development like emotional maturity and self-awareness may call for assessments focused on personality, emotional intelligence, or self-efficacy. Meanwhile, social development informs the use of tools measuring peer relationships, support systems, and social adjustment. According to Brewington and Kushner (2020), comprehensive counseling must integrate these areas, as academic, career, and personal-social development are deeply interconnected. By aligning assessments with a client's developmental stage, counselors can gather more accurate information and offer customized, effective support.

Conclusion

Counselors must uphold high ethical standards when conducting psychological assessments, working within their scope of competence, avoiding personal bias, and respecting cultural differences. Ethical assessment involves proper training and supervision as well as thoughtful consideration of each client's unique background and developmental stage. Culturally responsive tools like the CFI and careful test selection based on educational, career, personal, and social development enhance both accuracy and trust in the counseling process. Ultimately, a comprehensive and ethically grounded approach to assessment leads to more meaningful outcomes and equitable support for all clients.

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