Intersectional Analysis of Ethics in Psychological Assessments

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CNL-523 Assessments, Tests, and Measurements

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November 11, 2025

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Systemic biases and inequities in psychological assessment have permeated history. Historically, marginalized, neurodivergent, and culturally minoritized individuals have suffered because of harmful misdiagnoses and interventions (Kapp, 2020; Singh et al., 2021). It is our ethical imperative to truly advance equity. Counselors must embrace intersectional praxis and develop culturally humble and justice-oriented practices. This means rigorous training, validated instruments, transparent consent processes, and ongoing advocacy for marginalized groups and people. This essay will discuss the ethical commitment required of counselors and the call to dismantle oppressive structures through fostering inclusive psychological care.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Ethics Issues in Psychological Assessment

Cultural bias in standardized assessments persists as a systemic failure; instruments often reflect dominant cultural norms, resulting in inaccurate identification and misdiagnosis for individuals from marginalized groups (Singh et al., 2021). This is even more pronounced within the autism community. Kapp (2020) highlights this with the egregious misdiagnoses of autistic individuals in state hospitals, which led to harmful interventions and isolation. This problem is further compounded by the use of tests that have not been validated for diverse populations. This is a critical oversight documented by Cohen et al. (2022), Acevedo-Polakovich et al. (2007), and Kapp (2020). According to Kapp (2020), state schools often fabricated staffing data, which masked low staff-to-resident ratios and contributed to systemic neglect. A solution to this would be to raise the wages of assessors, school staff, state hospital staff, redefine “adequate” human rights training, perhaps modeling it after Arizona’s Article 9 training, and then continue to

expand on dignity-first training to protect the human rights of individuals with autism (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007; Kapp, 2020; Singh et al., 2021).

Informed consent is frequently undermined by language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and institutional power dynamics over nonacculturated groups. Both Singh et al. (2021) and Cohen et al. (2022) note that clients often do not fully grasp the implications of assessment procedures, especially those from linguistically and culturally minoritized communities. In Kapp (2020), parents reported pressure to seek interventions that conflicted with their own values and their child's best interests, revealing the coercive potential of assessment processes when transparency and respect for agency are lacking. To address this ethical concern, counselors must advocate for more justice-oriented reforms in clinical assessment and test development and administration (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007; Kapp, 2020; Singh et al., 2021).

Solutions for Avoiding Unethical Implications

Culturally competent assessment practices are essential in advancing equity and inclusion in psychological services. Formal training in multicultural competence and humility equips practitioners to recognize and critically address the implicit biases that influence the assessment process (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007; Singh et al., 2021). This fosters an ethical commitment to intersectional justice for clients. Counselors must prioritize the use of validated instruments appropriate for the cultural context of each client, disrupting patterns of systemic inequity and ensuring assessments accurately reflect the lived experiences of diverse populations (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007; Singh et al., 2021).

Integrating multiple assessment methods, including clinical interviews, behavioral observations, and assessments adapted to the individual, to meet them at their level, alongside

consultation with experts within the client's culture when necessary, are some ways to bolster adherence to intersectional ethical praxis (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007). For example, community-based participatory research offers a collaborative path for counselors and stakeholders to co-create meaningful, culturally relevant assessment protocols (Singh et al., 2021). This deepens collective understanding and acceptance. Ethical assessments could adopt something similar in its data gathering through mixed-method approaches (Singh et al., 2021). Counselors can practice ethical assessment work through sustained self-evaluation, transparent communication, and respect for the informed consent aspects of safeguarding client wellbeing in the face of linguistic, sensory, cultural, and systemic barriers (Cohen et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2021).

Clinician Assessment of Cultural/Subcultural Behaviors

Culturally informed assessment requires clinicians to move beyond the superficial demographic data and truly engage in sustained, intentional, empathetic learning about their client's cultural contexts, values, beliefs, and norms, all while maintaining a stance of humility and respect (Singh et al., 2021). For example, when working with a Latinx adolescent and their family, a clinician should employ validated tools such as the Brief Acculturation Scale for Hispanics or the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans, Second Edition, in order to formally assess acculturative status (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007). Doing so will aid in shedding light on complex influences that basic demographic data often cannot capture and communicate (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007). Incorporating contextual assessment alongside open dialogue empowers clients to share their stories about their identities and lived experiences, clarifying how cultures shape and make meaning (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007). When counselors resist cultural stereotypes and instead turn toward community leaders to understand

behavioral cues and nonverbal expressions during assessments, they can recognize more easily how some behaviors are rooted in cultural narratives often overlooked by white mental health paradigms (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007; Singh et al., 2021). This aims to foreground intersectional commitments to honor one another's unique experience within and across cultures.

Impacts of Client Education, Social, and Personal Development on Assessment Choice

An ethically and culturally attuned approach to psychological assessment recognizes the impact of academic, career, personal, and social development in client outcomes. Academic background deeply impacts clients' familiarity with testing formats and may demand tailored assessments (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 2016). Tailored assessments are especially important for clients with learning differences or neurodivergence, such as autistic clients. Similarly, career trajectories inform relevant assessment content (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 2016). For example, technical professionals may benefit more from skills-based measures, while artistically inclined clients may require evaluations emphasizing personality and innovation. Individuals whose backgrounds include childhood trauma and significant transitions require flexible, compassionate procedures that honor the client's emotional readiness and actively promote psychological safety (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 2016). Social support and interpersonal skills can be equally influential as well. This is especially so for clients with robust support networks, which can ease clients into the testing environment. Those who may experience social marginalization may require intentionally accommodating practices (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 2016). Ethical praxis enshrines the need for counselors to tailor approaches to the unique identity of the client.

A Matter of History in Adhering to the ACA Code of Ethics, Section E

Institutionalized autistic individuals have historically faced egregious misdiagnoses due largely to a lack of cultural and neurodiverse competencies. Section E.5 of the ACA Code of Ethics insists counselors recognize culture as not only central to how problems are defined and experienced by clients, but how assessments are selected, administered, and interpreted (ACA, 2014). In situations where autistic individuals were misdiagnosed, this reflects clear violations regarding the limits of competence (E.2.a.) and addressing historical and social prejudices in diagnosis (E.5.c.) (ACA, 2014). The ACA's codes counteract the pathologization of marginalized groups and ensure counselors address their own biases and systemic and historical inequities. Section E emphasizes assessment strategies tailored to the client's educational, career, personal, and social context (ACA, 2014). Standard methodologies risk misrepresenting abilities, needs, or potential if they actively neglect the client's various developmental, linguistic, or cultural factors (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007; Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 2016). Ethical counseling demands ongoing vigilance against cultural bias and the misuse of assessments, affirming each client's rights and wellbeing through anti-oppressive, intersectionality-informed praxis.

Conclusion

True equity and justice in psychological assessment require counselors to recognize and remedy systemic biases, especially for those impacting neurodivergent and marginalized communities. This means culturally validated tools, trauma-informed methods, transparent informed consent processes, and robust human rights training (most importantly as it applies to the differently abled) are proactively taught and enforced. When counselors uphold the ACA Code of Ethics, they are employing a dignity-first, intersectional practice that affirms every

client's autonomy and humanity, fostering deeper levels of inclusion and empowerment in true resistance to systemic oppression in assessment and testing.

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