

## **Assignment #4: Psychology and your assessment**

### **Multicultural Counseling Inventory**

Sodowsky et al.'s (1994) Multicultural Counseling Inventory is a composite of skills, awareness, relationship factors, and knowledge. The inventory is a self-report assessment. The behavioral perspective is manifested in the particular answers that counselors provide from which we may attempt to draw inferences about the counselors' multicultural competency. From this we may attempt to gauge whether the counselors are "experts" or "novices" in regards to their multicultural competency, with the caveat that the assessments are first-person, subjective self-appraisals rather than third person, ostensibly objective appraisals of others. The trait perspective was eschewed by the test developers. They assume that multicultural competency will not be stable over time and thus they do not purport to measure an underlying trait that may reflect an individual difference between counselors, but rather an acquired state that can effectively result from counselor education. The situational effects could be assessed by administering the assessment at different times and places and then looking for differences in the counselors' responses. If, for instance, counselors systematically provide higher assessments of their competency at the end of the work day than at the beginning of the work day, then time of administration is a potential confounder or what Messick (1994) calls a contributor to construct-irrelevant variance. The cognitive effects on responses are not assessed because all of the responses are in Likert-scale and other forced choice formats that do not allow one to assess the thought processes that led to particular choice options.

The multifactorial nature of multicultural competency means that we need to look at many different factors that may contribute to this competency, e.g., counselor's attitude towards particular minorities, counselor's knowledge of minority cultures, counselor's involvement in minority-related activities inside and outside the counseling setting, and counselor's skills in dealing with issues related to the client's minority status and how his or her minority culture relates to other cultures in the his/her life. As if this was not challenging enough, the self-assessment faces another major hurdle: the demand of social desirability. Most counselors want to see themselves or at least want to project the image

of themselves as multiculturally competent. This is shown by research that has found scores on self-reported instruments to be associated with social desirability (Worthington et al, 2000). Thus, social desirability is an alternative explanation that needs to be discounted before one can make any valid inferences from the results of the self-assessment.

One way to rule out the social desirability demand confounder would be to survey the clients of the counselors. For instance, in school setting one could survey 30 white and 30 African American students of counselors. Without specifically mentioning multicultural counseling (and thus reducing potential demand effects on the student responses as well), one could ask the students to rate the counselors in terms of how sensitive, knowledgeable, and helpful they were, as well as whether they would return to the counselor if they had problems again and if they would recommend the counselor to schoolmates. If the students' assessments correlate in a significant, positive direction with the counselors' self-assessments, then those self-assessments appear more credible. On the other hand, if the students' assessments weakly correlate or do not correlate at all with the counselors' self-assessments, then it may be likely that social desirability has created a positive bias in counselors' self-assessments, calling into question the validity of the assessment.

This construct irrelevant variance would state that the results of the self-assessment do not explain what the construct purports that they do, namely, multicultural competency. Instead, an alternative explanation is needed to explain what the self-assessment really measures: counselors' desires to see themselves and/or to have the experimenter or others with knowledge of the results of the self-assessment see them as multiculturally competent in the counseling context. The demand of how others see them could be reduced by making the self-assessments anonymous, but that reduces the self assessment's utility to research purposes only, precluding its practical use for evaluating counselors in a real life setting. The demand of how they see themselves may not be effectively reduced by an altering of procedure, because the social desirability inherent in seeing oneself as culturally competent counselor can naturally lead to self-deception on the subconscious level.

Thus, my examining of the psychological perspectives behind my assessment has led me to reexamine the comparative validity of self-assessment on sensitive topics such as multicultural competency that could create strong social desirability demand effects. I think that client assessments or third person assessments via videotaped sessions may be more valid in part because they could present less of this effect. Still, even a videotaped counseling session may introduce the construct-irrelevant variance of social desirability demand, particularly if counselors know they are being videotaped and know the purpose of the videotape is to assess their multicultural competency. In such a context, counselors may be atypically conscientious about being sensitivity and using their knowledge and skills about the minority client's culture to help the client. Thus, the videotape has the drawback of getting a counseling session that is not representative of the counselor's typical behavior with a minority client.

The only ways to bypass this social desirability demand in a videotaped interview would be either to secretly videotape the session or not tell the counselor of the purpose of the videotape. While this type of deception may enhance the validity of a third person's appraisal of the competency as observed from the tape, it creates ethical problems in that procedures have been conducted or intentions have not been revealed, which threaten the counselor's privacy and autonomy at the worksite.