THE LATENT FUNCTION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS IN THE COUNSELING PROCESS

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Vast numbers of articles have been written on the proper use of tests in the counseling process. While most of these articles are good, as far as they go, they begin to get monotonous after a while. After you have read half a dozen, you pretty well know what the rest are going to say. This paper will discuss some of the latent functions of testing, some of the reasons behind the reasons that tests are given, and some of the usages of tests that do not turn up in conventional articles.

The functions discussed are not alternative explanations for the use of tests. Counselors are, by and large, well-intentioned people; they read the literature and take it seriously. They try to do the best for their clients as well as for themselves. But the use of tests changes the situation in a number of ways that the conventional articles do not explore. Whether or not the counselor is aware of these changes, he is likely to approve of the results. If tests did not give him the kind of answers that tests were supposed to give, the counselor would stop using them, regardless of any side benefits. But the situation is much more complicated and ambiguous than that. The tests do give answers, even if these answers are never entirely satisfactory. Here the side benefits of testing weigh heavily in the decision to use or not to use tests. Let us look at their latent functions.

Basically, tests serve to validate the status of the counselor. The counselor has a rather peculiar job in modern society. He is called on, in many cases, to make decisions for his clients, decisions which may affect the course of the client's life. Generally speaking, adults are expected to make their own decisions. Aside from the moral implications of this value, the value makes a certain kind of sense. In the ordinary course of events, it is the person himself who will bear the consequences of a bad choice. Children are exempt from this expectation, but society places on their parents the right and the responsibility to make decisions for them. The counselor, who is neither parent nor relative to his clients, is expected to do a job which in normal circumstances would be denounced as unwarranted interference in somebody else's private life.

Of course, interference with other people's lives has gone on, time out of mind. In all the thousands of years, however, in which interference has been practiced, the limited imagination of man has been able to come up with only two even reasonably satisfactory justifications. The first of these is authority, the legitimate use of force. Those of you who have had authority exercised over you will recognize that, while authority may yield results, it much more rarely leaves the recipient satisfied. The basic difficulty with authority is that it makes clear the extent of interference. The unambiguousness of the situation forces the authority to take responsibility for the results and leaves the recipient free to blame the authority for any real or imagined disadvantages. In the main, counselors have been wise enough to avoid the use of authority.

The other justification is expertise, the access of the interferer to knowledge or experience that the client lacks. This sort of interference is much more difficult to fight. The expert is able to sway the judgment of his client in a multitude of ways and yet have his client convinced that he has made his own decision. The client may still blame the expert for the unhappiness which follows from wrong decisions, but it is more difficult for him to avoid his share of the blame. The expert has the advantage of functioning by influence or persuasion rather than force. In order for an expert to be effective, it is necessary that he feel himself an expert. Doubts as to his own ability can paralyze the expert as rapidly as any of us. In an optimum situation, an expert should have a quiet confidence that he is able to do all that is humanly possible to solve the problem. In practice, this confidence is not easily achieved. The arrogance of experts in every field is a matter of common notoriety. That this arrogance has been the expert's way of coping with his own self-doubts has been frequently and reasonably hypothesized. While arrogance is likely to disturb the expert-client relationship, the effects are likely to be far less serious than more direct evidence of self-doubt. Any indication that the expert does not know what he is talking about menaces his status as an expert and undermines the relationship he is developing.

The expert's awareness of his own position is greatly facilitated if he can, for a period, segregate himself from the lay world to devote himself to the study of a discipline, a body of knowledge to which the lay world does not have access. In more primitive times, the disciplines are kept secret and guarded by horrendous taboos. In this stage of history, one may easily visualize Prometheus as the prototype of the dissatisfied client. In our more sophisticated times, we have come to realize that it is sufficient for a discipline to be complicated to protect its virtue from the layman. Most people will

not penetrate very deeply into any discipline which it takes hard work to study. The expert, further, has the psychological advantage of being able to invite his client to see for himself, in the full confidence that he will not do so.

Psychological tests lend themselves admirably to the development of discipline. One can use words like factor analysis, analysis of variance, discriminatory power, split-half reliability, test-retest reliability, and coefficient of validity. Still better, one can talk numbers. Testing has developed layer upon layer of experts, each of whom talks only to higher experts, until the top level experts who talk only to computers. Each stratum is, of course, convinced that the levels below him are misusing the test.

However refreshing it may be for the expert to invigorate himself in his academic retreat, he must bring back to his professional life something more than an appreciation of the subtleties of his discipline. His study should provide him with a technique, a series of actions he can perform, the repetition of which makes clear to him his status as a functioning member of his discipline. Psychological testing is, likewise, suited for this function. The expert is able to adminster a series of questions or tasks to his client, simple and apparently irrelevant, retreat to his sanctum for calculation, and emerge with a series of scores to interpret to the client. The counselor can become fairly rapidly adept at this process, and the techniques provide him with a series of images of himself functioning in a professional capacity which aid in dispelling any doubts as to his status.

In addtion to providing a welcome ritual, the tests provide answers. The counselor, without the aid of techniques, may be honestly doubtful about the best advice to give his client. If the answer were all that obvious, the client would very likely not be there. Were the expert left to his own judgment, he would, at least for the first few years, be constantly tempted to question his judgment. With the use of tests, he can fall back on the judgment of those still more expert than himself. There is considerably less temptation to question the ability of these, the leaders of the discipline. What lingering tendencies the expert has to doubt his experts is ordinarily suppressed in the process of his education. The expert is thus enabled simultaneously to be sure of having an opinion to give and to shift upward in the hierarchy of experts the responsibility for the opinion.

The delegation of responsibility is, in fact, a major advantage to the expert. An expert becomes soon aware that not all of his advice is productive of good results. Clients, being an ungrateful lot, are little likely to appreciate the efforts of an expert whose advice has had unpleasant consequences. It is no small consolation to the

expert to be able to say that he has done all the right things. He cannot, after all, hold himself personally accountable for the backward state of his discipline.

While all of these functions are psychological aids to the expert in building up his confidence in his status, it would be a mistake to consider the expert the ultimate beneficiary. The expert-client relationship is designed primarily to benefit the client, and it is the client's interest which structures the relationship. The dynamics of the relationship require, however, the self-assurance of the expert, if the client is to be benefited. For the expert's lack of confidence in himself not only prevents him from doing his job, but distracts the client as well from his part.

The client is seeing the expert because of his inability to solve his problems without aid. In societies in which people are expected to solve their own problems singlehandedly, the fact in itself is sufficient to leave the client prey to a host of gnawing doubts which interfere with his concentration on the problem. He is, moreover, confronted with the necessity to select from a range of possible experts to help him and has little knowledge as to which one of them is best suited. Thus his confidence in himself, shaken by his inability to solve his problem, is further menaced by his doubts as to his ability to find the right expert.

When the client enters the relationship, then, he still has not committed himself completely to the selection of the expert, but is watching the expert to find out if his choice was another mistake. To do this, the client must make some preliminary evaluation of the expert's performance. Here, too, the client is at a disadvantage. He does not really understand what the expert is doing. Yet, this understanding is precisely what he needs for the reassurance that he has selected an expert who is capable of aiding him in solving the problem. The client is thus forced back on evaluating the performance of the expert on the basis of the parts of his performances most comprehensible to him.

Of these aspects, the most prominent is the expert's manner. However little knowledge we may have of the particular discipline the expert is using, all of us have had considerable experience with the human being. The client is on more familiar ground here. The client is highly sensitive to any indication that the expert lacks confidence in his own ability to solve the problem. Any such indication will set the client to rethinking his own selection of an expert, and, almost inescapably, drop him once more into the whirlpool of questioning his own ability. Even if this does not terminate the relationship, the client is, for the nonce, much too preoccupied to pay

attention to the problem that brought him into the relationship. The expert's lack of assurance is then, distracting, if not completely disruptive of the relationship.

The client also has the expectation that the expert will be doing something, even if it is not too clear to him what. The expert may be thinking, but this is not a highly visible act. The client has no way of knowing whether the expert is thinking about his problem or what he is going to eat for supper. Even so simple a behavior as searching through the files can convey to the client the notion of an expert who knows what he is about and who has an interest in his problem.

Psychological tests are obviously highly useful in this capacity. They demonstrate the expert going about his business and force the client's participation in the process and commitment to the results. While the client is taking the test, he is distracted from his rumination and pressed to concentrate on the task at hand. Simultaneously, he is being reassured that something is being done on his behalf and that he is cooperating toward the production of an answer. The fact of giving the test is far more convincing to the client than any explanation of the expert's faith in his task.

It must be kept in mind that the modern world, in contrast to any of the previous epochs, is highly skeptical. There are strikingly few objects of veneration. Modern man recognizes few allegiances to creeds. Of this handful, perhaps only science can command his wholehearted enthusiasm. An expert with some claim to a scientific discipline has, by virtue of his claim, an inestimable advantage in dealing with clients. However willing a client may be to reject his expert or doubt his capacity, few have the effrontery to challenge the right of science to affect their decisions. Here again the expert, armed with tests, can count on the cooperation of his clients.

We have seen that the side effects of testing have been uniformly beneficial in that they set the proper tone for the expert-client relationship. Let us look now on the more direct consequences. The counselor has administered a series of tests and has calculated a series of scores reflecting the psychological characteristics, the abilities and skills, and the interests of the client. Using these as a guide, he is able to select a job or small series of jobs which he considers most appropriate to the client's situation. He presents his advice to the client.

The client's response to this suggestion depends largely on the client. Every client is unique, and there will be variations in response depending on the personality of the client, the kind of suggestion the counselor is making, and a host of other factors. How-

ever, we may delineate some general categories of results, depending on the client's initial orientation to the counseling process. In general, the counselor sees two groups of people: those who are completely confused about future plans and those who have some clear idea of their choice, but have come to the counselor for information about mechanics of implementing their careers.

The confused client is obviously in a much worse state. As we have indicated, his inability to make a decision is both indicative of his self-doubts and, probably, self-castigation and productive of further self-doubts. Dealing with confused clients requires of the counselor both patience and skill. Nevertheless, the confused client is likely to be much more receptive to the counselor's suggestion. As the legal profession has long noted, an answer, even if it be less than completely appropriate, is superior to no answer. Any suggestion has the virtue of concentrating the client's thought. This is highly preferable to a state of indecision. Even if the suggestion does not turn out to be the first step in the development of the client's career, it does put him in the position of actively testing an alternative. Time spent in trying out even those alternatives ultimately rejected is not wasted. It develops the client's ability to make his own decisions and gives him important experience in other jobs as well as the one he is trying.

This does not mean that the counselor's suggestion will be automatically accepted. Ultimately this will depend on whether the proposed career is compatible with the client's self-image. To the extent that the process of selecting an occupation has taken this self-concept into consideration, the suggestion is likely to be welcomed. While a suggestion is eventually accepted or rejected, the client does not approach the question in this either-or spirit. There are numbers of occupations which the client can imagine himself in, to varying degrees. If the client has any skills at all, he has enough for several alternative occupations. No one has only one position for which he can be trained. The fringe area of occupations which the client has not thought of but which are acceptable to him is generally pretty wide.

With initially confused clients, then, the counselor's suggestion will probably be greeted with doubt, but favorably. Here test scores are of inestimable value. They enable the counselor to present his advice not simply as an idea of his, but as a scientifically arrived at judgment. This increases considerably the client's predisposition to try the alternative suggested. Since, ordinarily, this alternative is at least as good as others, the client is well on his way to a solution of his problems. The tests have facilitated decision-making for a person whose problem is his lack of skill in making decisions.

With a client who has made up his mind about the occupation he wants, the process differs. This client does, indeed, enter the situation with an either/or mental set. He intends to accept the counselor's suggestion, if it agrees with his previous decision, and reject it, if it does not. This intention is usually quite open and above-board. He may very well enter the relationship saying: "My name is Fulano de Tal, and I want to be an engineer." The counselor is amply forewarned. The course of Fulano's relationship with his counselor will depend on what the counselor comes up with in his test scores. If the counselor recommends that Fulano continue his pursuit of engineering, Fulano will maintain the relationship, encouraged by the heady feeling that science has confirmed his intuitive knowledge of himself. Here, too, with the aid of testing, everything is proceeding favorably.

If, however, the tests indicate that Fulano would be better off as an insurance salesman or a lathe operator, the relationship is headed for a series of difficulties. Fulano is initially disposed to reject the recommendation out of hand. The counselor considers it his professional obligation to persuade Fulano to give the recommendation a try. Results at this stage are fairly unpredictable. If Fulano is intransigent, he begins shopping around for another expert or simply goes ahead on his own. In any event, the counselor has a number of advantages in his favor. His use of scientific testing enables him to present his recommendation as the demands of reality. Having followed standard procedures, he can assure Fulano that any other counselor will offer him only the same recommendation. It is difficult for Fulano to reject the collective wisdom of the experts.

Even if the counselor can persuade Fulano, his work has just begun. Fulano begins his new job, anything but wholeheartedly. In reality, he is but half convinced, and the first difficulty or unpleasantness he encounters will set him back to ruminating on the virtues of engineering. If the counselor expects a successful conclusion, he must stay with Fulano until he is finally reconciled to his occupation.

There are, of course, cases in which people's aspirations are totally at variance with their abilities or personalities, where it takes no great skill to predict that the client's attempt to persevere in the occupation of his choice can lead to nothing but frustration. These are far fewer than are usually supposed. While the stereotype for any particular occupation shows a man doing one particular kind of job, a more exhaustive analysis usually produces a wide variety of ways in which the occupation is practiced. The total task of the occupation is parceled out, with people tending to specialize in the

parts of the job they like best. Every occupation provides a home for people with a wide range of personalities and abilities. The world, in fact, is far more complicated and far freer than we give it credit for.

So the probabilities are that, if Fulano persists in his pursuit of engineering, he can find some niche in the engineering world that does not require the particular skill that the tests have shown him to lack. He does, moveover, have a sizable advantage; he is doing what he wants to do. He can bring to the job a degree of enthusiasm that he is unlikely to marshal for any other job in the world. In short, he is highly motivated to succeed.

Fulano's real difficulties are much more likely to crop up in getting into his occupation than in holding down a job, once he is in. The modern world has developed a series of gate-keepers to screen entrance into occupations. The complexity of these checks varies with the occupation; some of them get pretty involved. If the occupation is one with a high status in society, Fulano will be expected to have training in a wide variety of skills which he may never use once he begins his job. Without evidence of this training, however, he will not receive the certification which permits him to begin.

It is notorious that many of the outstanding practitioners of any occupation have managed to evade the training requirements or just squeaked through their training, while many of the trainees with the best records have turned into mediocre workers. Nevertheless, this will not help Fulano. If he is to enter an occupation, he will have to meet the formal requirements that the occupation demands. In many cases, in order to acquire the formal training, he will have to convince a counselor that he is able to do so, often a more difficult job than meeting the requirements. While the counselor is quite justified in advising his client against trying to enter a course of training where he has little hope of succeeding, the tests the counselor uses are highly likely to overestimate the degree of success necessary and underestimate the differential advantage that motivation gives.

Tests, then, if they often aid the counselor, also, at times, mislead him. Tests are reflections of the opinions of the people who design them, people who, for all their expertise, are not without their biases. The tests are based on a simplified picture, which must also be corrected in details when it is applied to a single person. They should be used with an understanding of the role of the expert in society and with some idea of the ideological baggage of the expert. Like his client, the expert, as an adult, is expected to make his own decisions; and he must justify any delegation of this responsibility.

While the situation we have described is generally the case for western culture, there are numerous individual and local differences. Within Puerto Rico, many of these generalizations hold with considerably less stringency, while there are numbers of local circumstances which make the expert's life more difficult.

To begin with, Puerto Rico is a much less individualistic society than the one we have pictured. The prototypic western society has gone through a period of industrializing itself, led by the entrepreneur, the inner-directed, highly individualistically oriented businessman. However, Puerto Rico, like most underdeveloped countries in the modern world, is being industrialized from above and, partially, from outside. The agents of industrialization are more likely to be bureaucrats than entrepreneurs.

As a result, the moral imperative that an adult make his decisions singlehandedly is considerably vitiated. A man is free to consult his family and friends and is expected to listen respectfully to their opinions. Consultation with someone about your decisions does not automatically lead others to suspect your ability or you to suspect your advisor of interference. Thus, at least some of the expectations that, in more developed countries, tend to generate an undercurrent of antagonism in the expert-client situation are absent.

The expert is thus under much less social constraint to justify his professional role. He is able to make do with less training and may be more casual in the use of his techniques. He need not necessarily make a point of demonstrating that his opinion represents the collective judgment of his discipline. Further. in a less task-oriented society, he is expected to have a more personal relationship with his client. He is thus able to make better use of his own personal influence than is possible in a more individualistic society. All of these factors tend to aid the expert in maintaining the confidence he needs to function successfully.

However, the expert himself, in a society such as Puerto Rico, is likely to be a highly upwardly mobile person. As such, he is still unaccustomed to his present position and does not begin with the confidence that a man does who enjoys several generations of forebears in similar statuses.

These middle class insecurities are considerably exacerbated by the fact that Puerto Rico has but recently emerged from the traditional society. A traditional society is rigidly hierarchical, and the dividing lines between classes are clear. The social distance between classes is correspondingly greater. Within a traditional society, people find it inconceivable to imagine themselves members of a different class. Within the frame of reference they use, such things are impossible.

With increasing industrialization, the criterion for allocation of status has shifted from lineage to training. The shift, however, is by no means complete, and persons who have a status validated by training but invalidated by birth remain in a somewhat ambiguous position. Thus, the expert in Puerto Rico, while under less of an onus to justify his task, is under a greater burden to justify himself. Since his claim to status is based on his training, his justification is, perforce, a justification of his training.

While the justification is designed to demonstrate qualifications as an expert rather than as an authority, the distinction is apt to be blurred in a society still used to traditional ways. Occupation, income, status, and authority are all highly intercorrelated in a traditional culture. The appropriate attitude of the poor man is respect. He is little disposed to analyze the dimension to be honored in a person who differs from him in every respect. Where the more industrialized sectors have developed new status levels, the more traditional-minded have assimilated these to the old pattern. Many a client views his expert as he views the rich people on the hill. The modern subtleties of status differentiation are beyond his ken. The expert, like other people above the client's status, is one to be deferred to.

At first blush, this would seem to put the expert in an enviable position. The client will listen respectfully to his recommendations and will warmly assure the expert of his intention to follow them. In short, he will treat the expert's suggestions as an order.

This, however, is more than the expert has bargained for. He does not see himself as the inheritor of the upper classes' position, and being treated like a member of the upper class makes him uneasy and encourages him to doubt himself. Hesitancy on his part, however, is likely to lead his client to redouble his efforts to appear deferential. In this circular process, the client's problem is apt to get lost, with the expert trying to demonstrate his expertise and the client trying to reassure him of his respect for authority.

Serious as this may be, there are yet more pitfalls in the relationship of authority into which the expert is willy-nilly precipitated by the client's construction of the situation in terms of the traditional model. The client is not so all-fired enthusiastic about authority as he appears to be. If the expert takes his client's protestations at their face value, he is in for some surprises.

The Puerto Ricans have had several centuries of dealing with autocratic Spanish rule and several decades of arbitrary American rule, and they have survived. This is no mean achievement. It is comparable to lasting through the concentration camps or through

the life of a slave in the southern United States. Those who do not have the wit or the good fortune to learn appropriate techniques do not make it. So the techniques the Puerto Rican sees used in his community are the techniques with survival value.

The most conspicuous of these is outward respect. In autocratic situations, those who do not maintain the appropriate appearance live short, if happy, lives. Safest are those who overlearn this lesson. Human beings, fortunately, have an almost irrepressible ability to get their kicks under the most impossible circumstances. If there is nothing else, they learn to parody themselves and be amused at people being taken in by their performance. In situations in which there is little to bolster one's ego, it does one good to see one's supposed superiors falling for a performance patently false. An occasional flirtation with danger gives one the courage to face the long grind.

The lower class has cooperated with the upper in developing a stereotype of themselves. It has not all been for the sake of merriment. If one is thought to be stupid, one can misunderstand what one prefers not to understand and get away with it. There are a hundred ways to frustrate the man giving the orders, without his ever being sure that you are doing it deliberately. Four hundred and fifty years of practice produces virtuosos. In the southern United States, this was called the Sambo technique. In Puerto Rico, it is called jaiberia. It may be defined as the art of looking innocent when your boss falls on his face. It is a kind of psychological jui-jitsu. It can be amazingly effective.

However, like any other overlearned technique, it has its price. Its users develop a self-image consistent with their practice of their technique, and, like other specialists, extend the practice to situations in which it is unnecessary and even harmful. The jaiba, like the expert, find it more difficult to unlearn a pattern than to learn it.

Thus, in Puerto Rico, the client and the expert face each other with refined techniques developed for different circumstances. They talk right past each other. While the jaiba's subtle technique protects him from the ministrations of an over-zealous expert, it may protect as well from any benefit an expert can bring. While the situation, presented schematically, looks rather unsolvable, the reality is not nearly so grim. Both expert and client are human beings, with the eminently human ability to surmount one's past and recognize the good will of the person one meets. Patterns of conduct, however overlearned, are subject to the control of the actor. No one is forced to continue the use of a technique which is not bringing the desired results.

It would be rash to predict the future of the expert-client rela-

tionship in Puerto Rico. Although today the relationship is going through hard times, there is no inevitability to their continuing. It is quite conceivable that a new form of expert-client relationship will emerge from the present difficulties which will yield a higher return than the type used in more developed countries. Such an outcome will require a patience and an understanding on the part of both participants which human beings are capable of, but rarely exercise. The challenge is worthy of the participants. Indeed, they have a rare opportunity to begin a fresh chapter in the history of human relationships if they are but willing to try.

ABSTRACT

The functions of psychological tests in the counseling process are discussed from the point of view of the expert-client relationship. The focus is on the subtle ways psychological testing influences the perception the client has of his counselor (expert).

The relationships between counselors and clients in Puerto Rico are discussed, with attention being given to the cultural context in which this relationship occurs. The situation in Puerto Rico can serve as a model for expert-client relationships in other developing countries.

RESUMEN

Las funciones de los tests psicológicos en el proceso de asesoramiento se discuten desde el punto de vista de la relación experto-cliente. Se enfocan los modos sutiles en que el testing psicológico influencía la percepción que el cliente tiene del consejero (experto).

Se discuten las relaciones entre los consejeros y los clientes en Puerto Rico, con atención al contexto cultural en el cual tiene lugar esta relación. La situación en Puerto Rico puede servir de modelo para una relación experto-cliente en otros países en proceso de desarrollo.

RESUMO

As funções dos testes psicológicos no processo de aconselhamento são discutidas do ponto de vista da relação perito-cliente. Focaliza-se atenção nas maneiras sútis em que os testes psicológicos influenciam a percepção que o cliente forma de seu aconselhador.

As relações entre aconselhadores e clientes em Pôrto Rico são discutidas, com atenção dada ao contexto cultural em que ocorre esta relação. A situação em Pôrto Rico pode servir como modêlo para relações aconselhador-cliente em outros países em processo de desenvolvimento.