Silk Purse or Sow's Ear? An MMPI Commonground

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This response to Velásquez et al., 1996 was written for Dr. Amado Padilla, Editor, Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, who subsequently decided not to publish these papers.

Running head: MMPI COMMONGROUND
Abstract

Velásquez et al allege that "rounding up the usual suspects" in my article on culturally competent MMPI assessment of Hispanics provides information that is inaccurate, raises unanswered questions, and can discourage assessors reluctant to take "extra precautions required with Hispanic clients". They contribute an overview of history and current research that leads to their own recommendations. Using the idiom of "usual" and "unusual" suspects, further investigation of all suspects appears necessary. Juxtaposition of two sets of assessment recommendations—theirs and mine—suggests that an ostensible battleground can become a common ground to better inform assessors of cultural competence issues.
Silk Purse or Sow's Ear? An MMPI Commonground

Introduction

A draft of a subsequently published paper (Dana, 1988) presented at the Seattle MMPI meeting resulted in the hurried departure of some attendees. I have waited for the other shoe to drop, believing that this might happen in a Contemporary Psychology review of my book (Dana, 1993), but gratified that an MMPI establishment reaction to my paper (Dana, 1995b) has finally been forthcoming (Velásquez, Butcher, Garrido, & Cabiya, ). Their paper not only provides access to literature not as yet published or presented when my paper was written, but also responds to several issues I have repeatedly presented that have never been publicly acknowledged. I will comment on all of their alleged "usual suspects", but there are also several infrequently acknowledged "unusual suspects". These new suspects assume overarching importance and include the cultural basis of MMPI assumptions/test construction, the invidious nature of group comparisons, and use of now controversial statistical methods. It should be noted that in the original scenario one of the "usual suspects" was indeed the guilty party.
"Usual Suspects"

The Original MMPI

The MMPI is a 50-odd year old "suspect" that is not fundamentally different than its offspring, the MMPI-2. The original small and unrepresentative criterion groups and item-keying have preserved an antiquated psychiatric diagnostic system as the implicit theoretical rationale for the clinical scales as noted by Cronbach (1990) and reiterated by Helmes and Reddon (1993). The MMPI-2 clinical scales remain linked to these derelict original criterion group samples with resulting limitations on their generality. Thus, the Minnesota culture bias in the 1940 sample representativeness remains in the item-keying to transcend the use of more recent norms (Helmes & Reddon, 1993). In addition, the MMPI-2 standardization underrepresents Hispanics in numbers and overrepresents their social, economic, and educational status.

While I do not prefer the MMPI over MMPI-2 for use with Hispanics, my comments on the documented persistence of MMPI-2 scores significantly inflated by cultural variance on L, K, 3 and 4 led to the conclusion that "the MMPI-2 is neither better nor worse...for Hispanics" (p. 309) with regard to a potential for pathologization. As quoted out-of-context by Velásquez et al, this...
MMPI vs. DSM-IV

The heart of my disagreement with Velasquez et al does lie in the use of both the MMPI/MMPI-2 and DSM-IV as if they were genuine ethical. The continuing use of standard psychological tests that are inherently discriminatory is precisely the reason for my paper. As a result, psychologists and consumers alike, must continue to foster research and dialogue to provide feasible "corrections" until tests appear that have cross-cultural validation histories to proclaim themselves as less discriminatory, less prejudicial, and less pathologizing than the MMPI/MMPI-2.

I take the literature seriously that indicts standard psychological tests as potentially pathologizing, caricaturing, and dehumanizing as a result of confounding culture with psychopathology or personality constructs. More useful tests are gradually replacing the MMPI/MMPI-2. Nonetheless, a vested interest represented by substantially more than 5000 publications means that these tests will continue to be with us for some time. There is an ethical imperative to render their continued usage less prejudicial for millions of potential assessesees.
MMPI "Corrections"

Velásquez et al. are accurate in stating that "corrections" can introduce error and empirically-based formulas have not been used to date. In the absence of such formulas, however, moderator variables do constitute a call for action by attempting to reduce surplus meaning in the term culture that can lead to more refined estimates of the variance in MMPI/MMPI-2 scale scores attributable to culture.

However, Velásquez et al apparently share the conservative view demonstrated by the APA Ethics Committee's negative reaction (Personal communication, Jones (2 December 1994) to my recommendation that acculturation scales such as the ARSMA/ARSMA-II be routinely applied in ethical multicultural assessment practice (Dana, 1994). These scales are referred to as "special scales" by Velásquez et al and their conservative approach to applications is acknowledged as a disagreement but not as a source of "confusion".

This plea for reconsideration of the need for special norms was not intended to void the use of the MMPI/MMPI-2, but to emphasize that "corrections" for cultural orientation status within each Hispanic subgroup can be accomplished in this manner (e.g., Arnold, Montgomery, Castenada, & Longoria, 1994).
I appreciated the highlighting of translation developments since my article was published. I certainly prefer to share information rather than make pejorative judgments about the absence of such awareness. My test interpretation discussion may be "shallow", but I choose to emphasize that constructive and important research is occurring in this critical and neglected area. Anglo assessors have not been adequately informed of the magnitude of within-group differences and a penchant of researchers has been to lump subjects into small, self-identified, or surname groups that overinclude or exclude ethnic minorities (Okazaki & Sue, 1995). The sources of relevant culture-and-subculture-specific information need to be available for assessors. This "usual suspect" is a familiar and formidable felon who routinely deprives assesses of dignity and humanity!

**Reconstructed/Restandardized Hispanic MMPI**

It becomes a matter of informed opinion whether or not new emic tests are indeed required for Hispanics and I respect others' views that differ from my own. I do not believe many new emic tests will be forthcoming, but I must reiterate that for traditional and bicultural persons from any non-Anglo cultural group, strong arguments for use of available emic measures can be
made. To argue that standardization and norms answer this question for Hispanics in the MMPI/MMPI-2 is absurd in view of their underinclusion in standardization samples.

Their documentation of the frequency of MMPI/MMPI-2 usage with Hispanics appears to reinforce my contention that these tests must be rendered as fair and non-discriminatory as feasible by our after-the-fact research and interpretation efforts. I applaud the recitation of accomplishments in assessment of Hispanics in their Tables 1 and 2 as well as the projections of future research efforts, although I wish the lists of studies yielding these tables were available. I recently asked one of these authors for a copy of one such unpublished compendium and it was not included with other unrequested reprints!

"Unusual Suspects"

Assumptions and Test Construction

Seemingly overlooked during the long life and successful worldwide marketing of a ubiquitous MMPI is the fact that it was constructed by psychologists who shared a Eurocentric world view and culture-specific beliefs regarding science and psychometrics. Of equal concern is a test construction format that has rendered cross-cultural construct validation extremely difficult
without resort to relating test scores to extra-test measures of behavior (e.g., Timbrook & Graham, 1994) or content measures (e.g., Wrobel & Lachar, 1995). As a result, translation adequacy became a primary focus of research attention, although even meticulous translations cannot ensure measurement equivalence (Ellis, 1989). Conceptual and metric issues must eventually assume equal importance in establishing equivalence of measures (Brislin, 1993). Conceptual equivalence requires similarity of meaning across cultural groups, and the distributions of scale items should be examined for range and outliers before factor analysis is done. Metric equivalence requires an identical metric across groups so that the meaning of the same test scores is invariant across groups.

Group Comparisons

The assessment of cultural groups in this country has been predicated on performance comparisons of these groups on standard psychological tests. Standard psychological tests, however, are emic in nature because they represent middle-class, Anglo-American culture primarily. Their method origins, their theoretical assumptions, if any, and their contents are Euro-American. To be sure, standardizations do reflect non-European origin populations in this country,
sometimes by representative sampling, but rarely by recognizing gross dissimilarities not only in social class, income, and education but also in the presence of culture-specific response sets in persons of color and Anglo-Americans. Attempts have been made to rectify this lack of fairness by careful matching on demographic variables assumed to affect whatever the particular test measures. For example, a drastic reduction of group difference MMPI items was obtained by carefully matching subjects (Dahlstrom, Lachar, & Dahlstrom, 1986). As members of other cultural groups become more like their Anglo contemporaries in standardization samples, the cultural variance on that test is diminished only for those persons rather than for the particular cultural group.

Unfortunately, there is no easy solution for standard psychological tests constructed without benefit of contemporary psychometric sophistication. It does not appear feasible to redesign these tests for each group separately in order to examine the appropriateness of test content. Nor is there professional enthusiasm for providing new, culture-specific norms, particularly because each cultural group has extreme within-group differences. A third option comparing scores of cultural orientation status groups to provide a
"correction" is feasible (Arnold et al., 1994). By definition, group comparisons are always invidious whenever the standard of comparison is emic. Hence the concern with cross-cultural validation research.

Statistics

Helms (1992) has indicated that cultural bias may compromise the assumptions undergirding conventional statistics. Furthermore, the interpretation of the null hypothesis has been questioned as being inappropriate for detecting cultural bias in assessment (Malgady, 1996). He suggests that a statement of bias in the form of cross-cultural variance as the null hypothesis should prevail until research demonstrations suggest otherwise.

Recommendations

In my MMPI paper, I did not attempt to present "a culturally-based framework for assessing Hispanics" but merely an annotated glossary of potential "corrections" and deliberately did not package this information in a recommendations section. Velasquez et al do provide MMPI-2/MMPI-A recommendations that may be compared with guidelines I prepared in another context for use of projective tests with Hispanics (Table 1) (Dana, 1995a).

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Insert Table 1 about here

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In comparing these recommendations, both sources include attention to the client's primary language, recognition and understanding of ethnicity/acculturation, relevant interpretation procedures, and awareness of the role of therapeutic assessment. In addition, Velásquez et al include careful attention to the assessment setting, referral questions, and use of results. Standard administration procedures and use of the complete MMPI-2 are also emphasized. I suggest, in addition, adherence to an acceptable service delivery style, informed concern with DSM limitations for this population and use of culturally relevant clinical inferences and personality conceptualizations.

Although the assessment instruments differ, these sets of recommendations are clearly complementary and are designed to serve client interests by recognizing cultural issues and providing a credible cultural context for the entire assessment process. I applaud the opportunity to juxtapose two perspectives which demonstrate integration of assessment and cultural knowledge into practice to dispel legitimate assessor concerns when venturing into areas their graduate training typically did not emphasize (Bernal & Castro, 1994). Finally, knowledge of Hispanic culture assumes equal importance with assessment technology, but
assessor recourse to technology alone without such contextual knowledge is a formidable obstacle to culturally competent assessment.

There is a common ground in this exchange that should not become a battleground because of "the selectivity of facts and the unsteadiness of observers" (Wyatt, 1967, p. 13). Professional psychologists and consumers of our services may all be losers when interpretations of research assumptions and findings are ridiculed or trivialized for ostensibly discouraging assessors by being "dated, fragmentary, and contradictory".

Both the "usual" and "unusual" suspects appear worthy of intense scrutiny and full investigation by the professional assessment community. I cannot believe that conveying information to practitioners is a turn-off, as suggested by Velasquez et al. To the contrary, there is a primary instructional role in facilitating culturally competent assessment services, providing support and reassurance that their own doubts may be countered by an informed caution in practice. I believe this exchange of viewpoints is valuable to professional assessors because Velázquez et al. and myself share the conviction that the cross-cultural use
of MMPI/MMPI-2 for Hispanics needs to be carefully and publicly examined.

Table 1

Guidelines for Use of Projective Tests With Hispanics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population diversity</td>
<td>Recognize huge intragroup differences among three major resident groups, immigrant refugees, and sojourners from 17 countries, often with biracial origins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Always use first language of client. Translators/interpreters create special problems. Be aware of frequent preference for services in Spanish; 90% are Spanish-speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
<td>Proper social etiquette mandatory. Simpatia includes respeto, personalismo, platicando. Confianza en confianza is expected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturation</td>
<td>Evaluation of acculturation status required before test selection/administration. Provide cues for subsequent test interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation: Clinical</td>
<td>Predicated on cultural experience/ knowledge: world view, values, group identity, self-concept, health/illness beliefs, language, Hispanic personality theory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation: Inference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric Diagnosis</td>
<td>Recognize DSM-IV limitations. Use culture-specific syndromes and cultural formulation for Hispanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality Theory</td>
<td>Use existing sources of personality theory/empirical data relevant to each Hispanic subgroup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Test Findings</td>
<td>Recognize cultural considerations in providing feedback to client/family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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RESPONSE TO VELASQUEZ ET AL

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References


