

CANADIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (CPA) POSITION ON PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS ¹

August 4, 2009. The recent publication of psychological test items and some common responses on Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rorschach_test has some significant implications for the assessment of psychological problems and disorders.

"The CPA's concern is not with the publication of the cards and responses to the Rorschach test per se, for which there is some controversy in the psychological literature and disagreement among experts, but with the larger issue of the publication and dissemination of psychological test content" says Dr. Martin Antony, CPA President.

Publishing the questions and answers to any psychological test compromises its usefulness. Psychological tests are used to inform diagnosis, select treatment, measure treatment effects, and inform decisions such as school or job placement. If psychological tests, their questions and answers, are made common public knowledge, the results obtained when someone is tested no longer reflect only ability and achievement – they reflect what a person thinks he or she is supposed to say or was told is the right answer. The results obtained under these conditions compromise the psychologist's ability to accurately identify the kind of problem the person is experiencing and, more importantly, make it more difficult to match the treatment to the problem.

The validity (whether the test measures what it claims to measure) and reliability (whether the test measures what it claims to measure the same way over time and across assessors) of any test is critical to the meaningfulness of the results it yields. Establishing the reliability and validity of any test can take years and is dependent on the standardized procedures with which it is administered, scored and interpreted. The conditions under which someone completes a test, how questions are asked, how answers are queried, and how responses are scored will impact the results derived and their meaningfulness.

"Consider the impact of a psychological test, in the public domain, were it to be used by someone not trained or licensed to do so." states Dr. Karen Cohen, CPA's Executive Director. "Indeed, that is why health care practice in Canada is regulated; to ensure that health care providers (e.g. psychologists, nurses, physicians) are held accountable to the public for ethical and competent practice." An inaccurate reporting or accounting of a child's intelligence or cognitive ability can have profound impact on the life of the child in terms of experiences and opportunities offered and missed.

Publishing psychological tests is like publishing driving tests or professional licensing exams. We then risk measuring not what the person knows about the activity being evaluated but what the person believes will ensure a particular outcome. Keeping psychological tests out of the public domain is about preserving the usefulness of the tests themselves, delivered and evaluated by the professionals licensed and trained to do so.

Making the questions and answers to psychological tests publicly available compromises psychologists' abilities to assess the learning problem of a student, the memory problem of an older adult or the depression experienced by a teenager. What is lost by publishing the content of psychological tests far outweighs what is gained.

About the CPA

The Canadian Psychological Association was organized in 1939 to improve the health and welfare of all Canadians; promote excellence and innovation in psychological research, education, and practice; and promote the advancement, development, dissemination, and application of psychological knowledge.

For more information about the CPA and the Convention please visit our website at <http://www.cpa.ca>.

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¹ Parts of this position statement appeared in a letter from Dr. Cohen submitted to, and published by, the Editor of the Globe and Mail, on Saturday, August 1, 2009.

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