



Your Committee on Ethics at Work: Research Ethics Boards and Standardized Psychological Tests

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One of the functions of the Association's Committee on Ethics is to respond to questions and consultation requests from CPA members. Occasionally, the focus of a consultation has broad applicability and involves a written response from the Committee. The following is an example of this type of consultation request. The Committee wishes to thank the parties involved for forwarding the important questions discussed below, and for agreeing to share the following summary.

Background

In the spring of 2013, Dr. Roelof Eikelboom, Chair and Professor of Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University, asked CPA for an opinion regarding two specific requests by the University's Research Ethics Board (REB): (1) the REB receive copies of and review standardized psychological tests to be used in a research study being submitted for REB approval; and (2) research consent forms inform participants that they are free not to answer any particular test item. Dr. Eikelboom noted that the REB's requests were based on the REB's understanding of the second edition of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*ⁱ. However, he also noted that the requests seemed to be in conflict with what the psychology faculty perceived to be their ethical responsibilities. Dr. Eikelboom asked for advice, letting CPA know that the University Ethics Committee was supportive of his request for consultation.

Response: REB Access to and Review of Standardized Psychological Tests

There are three main ethical expectations for psychologists regarding access to psychological tests: (a) avoiding the harm that occurs to persons when the tests are used by persons not competent to administer or interpret them; (b) being responsible to society by ensuring that the tests do not enter into the public domain and thereby lose their validity and future usability; and (c) respecting laws regarding copyright and intellectual property. The first two expectations are covered in the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists*ⁱⁱ and the ethics codes of many other countries.ⁱⁱⁱ The third expectation is covered under laws governing copyright and intellectual property.

Competence to administer and/or interpret standardized tests is not one of the concerns in the questions posed by Dr. Eikelboom. However, this issue is very important and CPA has been active in setting ethical standards as well as working with test publishers on policies and practices regarding test purchaser qualifications.^{iv v vi}

Concentrating on the other two ethical expectations (test security and respect for laws regarding copyright and intellectual property), the most relevant standards in the current *Canadian Code* include Standard III.17 (to honour all commitments in a written or verbal agreement); Standard IV.11 (to protect psychology from being misused, used incompetently, or made useless), and Standard IV.17 (to be familiar with and abide by democratically established law unless such law is in conflict with ethical principles).

Most test publishers require a written agreement from purchasers that test materials will be appropriately secured and that copyright will not be violated. For example, Pearson Canada in a document entitled "Purchasing Requirements"^{vii} states: ". . . tests and scoring keys must be kept in locked files or storage cabinets accessible only to authorized personnel." In addition, Multi-Health Systems in its *MHS Purchase Qualification Form*^{viii} (2012) requires the following commitment:

" . . . test users must adhere strictly to copyright law and under no circumstances photocopy, translate, alter, distribute, publish, or otherwise reproduce answer forms, test booklets, or manuals; access to test materials must be limited to qualified persons who agree to safeguard their use."

It is clear that purchasers of standardized tests face a dilemma when asked to provide test materials to unqualified persons.

The *TCPS2* is silent on whether any or all questions, tools, etc., must be seen as part of the REB process. However, a search through several universities' REB webpages indicates that most REBs ask that copies of interview questions or instruments be submitted to them. On the other hand, several REBs seem to be aware of the ethical issues involved and treat standardized tests and instruments differently. For instance, McGill asks that copies of questionnaires or draft interview guidelines be attached to the application but that any standardized tests simply be named. Mount Saint Vincent's application states: ". . .if you are using tools that are subject to test security regulations, please contact the Research Ethics Coordinator to discuss alternatives."^{ix} Windsor's states: "It is not necessary to describe standard tests or procedures (e.g., DNA analysis, MRI scans, Beck Depression Inventory).

There is little published literature exploring the dilemma as it relates to REBs. There is, however, a fairly extensive literature on disclosure of test materials in the litigation context. For example, CPA, in collaboration with leading Canadian test publishers, produced the document *Test Disclosure Policy*^{ix}, which recommends obtaining the following agreement (to the extent possible) when a court believes that direct access to test mate-

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Represent Canadian Psychology to the World

Call for Nominations for a Canadian Delegate To the General Assembly of the International Union of Psychological Science

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) is responsible for managing Canada's membership in the International Union of Psychological Science (www.iup-sys.org). IUPsyS is the international body dedicated to the advancement of psychology as a basic and applied science around the world. The Canadian National Committee for IUPsyS (CNC/IUPsyS) is the CPA committee charged with the work.

Among the members of the CNC/IUPsyS are two delegates to the General Assembly of IUPsyS. These are the individuals who attend the formal meetings of IUPsyS (held every two years) and who vote for Canada at these meetings. CPA and the National Research Council of Canada contribute to the travel costs for the delegates to attend these meetings. The next meeting will take place in Paris, France, in July 2014 (in conjunction with the International Congress of Applied Psychology).

Each delegate holds the position for an 8-year term (or four General Assembly meetings). At this time, we seek nominations for ONE delegate, to serve a term from 2014-2022.

Nominees must be Members/Fellows in good standing of CPA. Preference will be given to psychologists who have been involved in national or international organizations in psychology and whose major professional activity involves research and teaching, and whose CVs are judged by the CNC/IUPsyS to meet these criteria.

The name of the preferred nominee will be submitted to the CPA Board of Directors for approval and appointment. The term will begin at the CPA Convention in 2014.

Each nomination shall consist of:

- a letter from the nominator that states the position for which the candidate is being nominated, expresses support for the candidate, and contains a statement to the effect that the nominator has ascertained the candidate's willingness to stand for nomination;
- a current curriculum vitae of the candidate (including educational background, present and former positions, research and professional activities, organization membership and involvement, and international congress participation); and
- two supporting letters from individuals familiar with the nominee's contributions.

The deadline to submit nominations is **March 31, 2014**. For more information, or to submit nominations and supporting documents, send an e-mail to the Chair of the CNC/IUPsyS, Jennifer Veitch, at jennifer.veitch@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca.

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rials is necessary: (a) restricted access to the materials . . . to the most limited audience possible, preferably only to individuals who satisfy the test publisher's qualification policy (e.g., a psychologist); (b) restriction on copying of test materials; (c) assurance of return or destruction of the materials at the conclusion of the proceeding (and confirmation of such return or destruction); and (d) removal from the record any portion of test materials that are revealed (e.g., in minutes of discussions), not allowing them to become part of the public record. This kind of agreement could provide a framework for REB access that optimizes test security.

Response: Informing Research Participants they are Free Not to Answer any Question

The *TCPS2* is also silent on the specific issue of participants being free not to answer any particular question. However, the Committee agrees that research participants should always have the option, as this is consistent with the informed consent expectations of both the *TCPS2* and the *Canadian Code*. Rather than seeing this option as incompatible with the importance of test and scientific validity, Committee members believe the apparent conflict can be resolved in the informed consent process by informing participants that they are free not to answer any particular question, but that the participants' results for such a test cannot be scored or used in the research if they decide to exercise this option. The participants, as appropriate, could then be informed that, if they do not want to answer a particular question, they are free not to continue with the test or to withdraw from the study.

For a complete list of references, please go to www.cpa.ca/psynopsis