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TEST REVIEW

Critical Analysis of the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventories

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The Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventories (Culture-Free SEI; Battle, 1992) for Grades 1 and over was designed to assess children's and adults' levels of self-esteem. It consists of 4 self-esteem scores for children (general, social, academic, and parental), 3 self-esteem scores for adults (general, social, and personal), and takes 15 minutes for administration. The price is \$98.00 for the testing manual that is composed of Forms A, B, AD, a scoring template, and an audiocassette.

The Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventories (Culture-Free SEI) is designed to assess the construct of self-esteem for children and adults. The test manual reports that oral or individual administration is effective for children in first and second grade, for nonreaders, for visually impaired persons, and for other clients with handicaps (Battle, 1992). Older children (from Grade 3) and adults with average reading skills can take the written form of the test as a group or independently.

DIMENSIONS THAT THE TEST PURPORTS TO MEASURE

The Culture-Free SEI for children measures the individual's perception in the following four areas: (a) general self-esteem, (b) social and peer-related self-esteem, (c) academics and school-related self-esteem, and (d) parents and home-related self-esteem. For adults, the Culture-Free SEI measures the following areas: (a) general self-esteem,

(b) social self-esteem, and (c) personal self-esteem. For both groups, a Lie subscale is included to ascertain the person's defensiveness. The Lie items indicate whether the participant is trying to falsely project high self-esteem (a social desirability concern).

FORMS OF THE TEST

There are three forms of the Culture-Free SEI available. Form A for children contains 60 items and Form B has 30 items. Form A and B have five subscales measuring self-esteem in the previously mentioned areas. The items are divided into two groups: items that indicate high self-esteem and those that reveal low self-esteem. The child checks either yes or no for each item.

Form AD for adults contains 40 items that measure the person's general, personal, and social self-perception. The items are divided into two groups: items that indicate high self-esteem and those that indicate low self-esteem. The person checks either yes or no for each item.

A study, using 160 fifth- and sixth-grade students, correlated Forms A and B and found a total sample correlation of .86 (Grade 5 = .89, Grade 6 = .80).

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ADMINISTRATION

Generally, the Culture-Free SEI takes about 10 to 15 minutes to administer. The test can be administered individually or in groups with no limit on time. The author of the manual recommends that group administration of the test is not appropriate for children below grade 3. For young children (below Grade 3), nonreaders, visually impaired clients, and clients with other handicaps, individual and oral administration is required. For people who fall within these categories, each item should be read to them, and the administrator should record the participants' response on the answer sheet. Also, the test is recorded on a cassette tape for the examiner's convenience. Reliability values for the different methods of administration were not discussed.

The original test manual (Battle, 1981) states that the Culture-Free SEI can be administered in English, Spanish, or French. Although the manual is published only in English and the research was conducted using English versions of the test, the author claims that the protocols for French and Spanish can be administered, scored, and interpreted with the same assurance of reliability and validity. In the 1992 version of the test manual, the Spanish and French versions are not discussed. The author states that the Culture-Free SEI also has been informally translated into German, Italian, Japanese, and Vietnamese (Battle, 1992). Additionally, Battle claimed that "In no case have the practitioners involved raised objections concerning cultural bias, either to me or to the publisher of the first edition of the instrument" (p. 8).

SOURCE OF ITEMS

The manual reports that content validity was built into the test by developing a construct definition of

self-esteem and by writing items intended to cover all areas of the construct. The content definition is as follows:

Self-esteem refers to the perception that the individual possesses of his or her own worth. The self emerges and takes shape as the child develops. The self is initially a vague, poorly integrated, somewhat fragmented phenomenon but becomes increasingly more differentiated as the youngster matures and interacts with significant others. The self, therefore, represents the culmination of one's inherent makeup and life experiences. (Battle, 1992, p. 3)

Although no other methods for checking content (such as a test specification's table) were presented in the manual, the author did indicate the number of items in each of the categories.

The manual states that the 60 items for Form A were the most discriminating from a pool of 150, as indicated by factor analysis. From a pool of 85 items, 40 were selected as the most discriminating for Form AD.

Using Form A to investigate a sample of 891 children (446 boys and 345 girls), percentile ranks and *t* scores were generated for elementary students using form A. The scores were then segregated by sex for the four subscales: General, Social, Academic, and Parental. *T* scores and percentile ranks for junior high school students ($N = 224$; 128 boys and 96 girls) using Form A were produced in a similar manner. Tables for Form B present *t* scores and percentile ranks for elementary ($N = 212$) and junior high school ($N = 274$) for each of the subscales. Because no significant sex differences were found, separate tables were not presented for boys and girls (Battle, 1992).

A sample of 252 adults (90 men and 162 women), all of whom were enrolled in an introductory educational psychology course, was assessed using Form AD. The tables show scores for both sexes and for each of the subscales. Again, significant sex differences were not found.

The culture-free nature of the items is unclear. There is no mention in the

manual of how the items were designated as culture-free. The criteria for item selection, both for the subscale categories and for the culture-free nature, are not presented in the test manual. The manual provides no evidence that the test was free from cultural bias—only Battle's (1992) assertion that no complaints of cultural bias were received by either the publishing company or himself.

METHOD OF VALIDATION

Concurrent validity was established by comparing the Culture-Free SEI with Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory (1967). Correlations (.71 to .80) between the two instruments were significant for all grade levels and for both sexes (boys .72-.84, girls .66-.91). In addition, the manual reported a significant correlation at the .05 level for self-esteem scores and teacher ratings for combined sexes only. This relationship was not significant for girls. The relationship between teachers' ratings and school-related self-esteem was not significant. (It is not stated whether or not the teachers had knowledge of the student test scores.) The manual reports that this indicates that self-esteem is not dependent on any one factor (academic achievement), but on a combination of factors.

Some evidence for construct validity is presented. The manual reported no significant correlations between self-esteem and the Canadian Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test ($r = .15-.27$) in children. A study with adult participants was not presented.

To examine the validity that the Culture-Free SEI correlates with depression, Battle conducted two studies, which were referred to in the test manual. In 1978, Battle administered the Culture-Free SEI (Form AD) and Beck's Depression Inventory to 129 students enrolled in an introductory educational psychology class. The cor-

relation between self-esteem and depression for the total group was $-.55$; the value for men was $-.53$, for women $-.56$. Based on these results, Battle claimed that the moderate values indicate that the students who earned higher self-esteem scores tended to obtain lower depression scores. He stated that his research confirmed findings that indicate depression is associated with low self-esteem.

The second validity study examined 26 students referred to the school psychologist for assessment. Each student was administered the Culture-Free SEI and two tests to measure depression—Beck's Depression Inventory and the MMPI. Battle (1978) found that the correlations between self-esteem and depression were significant (.34 to .75) for both measures of depression. Personal self-esteem ($-.78$ [Beck] and $-.72$ [MMPI]) correlations with depression were higher than were social self-esteem correlations ($-.34$ and $-.42$). Based on this, Battle claimed that the personal facet of self-esteem is more closely related to depression.

Additional validity studies for the second edition provided strong evidence that low self-esteem is associated with depression, as measured by the North American Depression Inventories for Children and Adults (Battle, 1988). For elementary school students, junior high students, and adults, the correlations were $-.73$, $-.72$, and $-.74$. One reason that the author obtained a stronger correlation may be the use of his own test of depression. Battle (1992) also provided support for the relationship between anxiety and low self-esteem for elementary students ($-.68$), junior high students ($-.73$), and adults ($-.77$). Again, Battle used his own test for assessing anxiety, the Relative Anxiety Scales for Children and Adults (Battle, in press).

The 1992 manual also presented support from other researchers. Using two depression inventories, Paananen

(1983) found that the nondepressed group of children (Grades 4 through 6) earned higher self-esteem scores than did their most depressed counterparts. Yaniw (1983) found a linear correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement with 716 junior high school students. (The complete reference for Yaniw is not provided in the test manual.) Additionally, Battle (1992) claimed that "since first publication of these inventories, there have been over 800 master's theses and doctoral dissertations in which the inventories have been used successfully to assess the self-esteem of a wide range of subjects and clients" (pp. 1-2).

RELIABILITY

In a test-retest study of Form A, 198 elementary students (Grades 3 through 6) were evaluated. Although the time interval is not reported, the correlations for the total sample ranged from .81 to .89. Test-retest correlation for 117 junior high students (Grades 7, 8, and 9) was .91. Again, the time interval was not reported. The test-retest reliability for Form B ranged from .79 to .92 with a sample composed of 110 elementary school students (Grades 3 to 6). Additional studies by the author support these findings (Battle, 1976; 1977). Correlations between forms A and B were reported as .86. Test-retest reliability for Form AD was reported as .81 with a sample of 127 introductory education psychology students.

Although the test-retest reliabilities for the children and adult forms are high, internal consistency reliabilities are marginal. For instance, Form AD internal consistencies were reported as follows: General = .78, Social = .57, Personal = .72, and Lie = .54. The internal consistency of the Social and Lie subscales is questionable. For Form A (children's), the internal consistency velocities were reported as follows:

General = .71, Social = .66, Academics = .67, Parent = .76, and Lie = .70.

DESIRABLE AND UNDESIRABLE FEATURES

The Culture-Free SEI can be used with children, adults, and nonreaders. It does not require training, and it is easy to administer and score. It can be administered in group settings or individually. The test provides a breakdown of the different aspects of self-esteem.

The test is designed to be culture free; yet, no evidence was provided to support this claim. Furthermore, by looking at the items, this may not be the case. For instance, item 23 on Form AD asks, "Is it difficult for you to express your views or feelings?" An answer of yes to this question indicates low self-esteem. It would not be surprising for some Asian Americans to answer yes to this question because their culture explicitly dictates suppressing the expression of personal feelings and views (D. W. Sue & D. Sue, 1990). Expressing personal feelings, particularly for younger Asian Americans, can result in conflict with the family and ensuing feelings of shame.

For many Asian Americans, restraints are more internalized according to family values, so that arousing feelings of guilt or shame can act as a powerful means of social control. (S. Sue & Morishima, 1982, p. 71)

As indicated from this passage, self-esteem and identity are intricately tied to the family. Many young Asian Americans who are trying to acculturate to the United States face conflict with their families. Lack of obedience to family values results in low self-esteem (Bronstien & Quina, 1988). It is possible that the question, for Asian Americans, would indicate the degree to which they would avoid shame as opposed to indicating low self-esteem. This point raises the issue of the situational nature of the test. Although the

test manual states that self-esteem is a stable characteristic, this may not be the case. Level of acculturation and other situational variables may appreciable effect one's level of self-esteem.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The largest problem with the Culture-Free SEI is the lack of evidence to support the claim that the instrument is free of cultural bias. As noted in *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association [AERA], American Psychological Association [APA], & National Council on Measurement in Education [NCME], 1985), behavior that is judged negatively in one culture may be appropriate in another. The Culture-Free SEI does not consider this point, and Anastasi (1988) stated:

Since all behavior is thus affected by the cultural milieu in which the individual is reared and since psychological tests are but samples of behavior, cultural influences will and should be reflected in test performance. It is therefore futile to try to devise a test that is free from cultural influences . . . For this reason, such terms as "culture-common," "culture-fair," and "cross-cultural" have replaced the earlier "culture-free label." (p. 357)

Positively speaking, the adult form is correlated with depression in high school and college students. In addition, the children's form correlates moderately with school achievement and teacher ratings, but not intelligence. It is easy to administer and score; the test manual was clear, fairly accurate, yet it lacked evidence to support some of the primary inferences. Additionally, the second revision of the manual was more detailed and descriptive, and it provided additional validity evidence for the test.

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