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Introduction to Psychological Assessment in the South African context. Book Review.

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The realm of psychological assessment in South Africa has undergone significant changes since the demise of apartheid. In addition to the changing socio-political arena in South Africa, global developments within psychometric test development are constantly undergoing revision and renewal. Modern technological advances in computerised testing and application of psychometric theory to real-world problems are of increasing importance in the modern world. The most noticeable feature of the third edition of this well written and tightly constructed book is its appreciation of these factors within the local South African context. It is a highly readable and engaging text for both undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled for an introductory psychometrics course and includes chapters written by 18 South African experts in the field.

The text is divided into three major zones which aids readers as they navigate the text from the foundation zone, through the first assessment practice zone, onwards through the types of measure zone and concludes with the second assessment practice zone. South African psychometrists and research psychologists have a vast research heritage on which to leverage future growth in this somewhat contested area within psychological practice. The Editors have accomplished a difficult task of merging varying writing styles into a seamless text, consistent in style and approach. The various critical thinking challenges are interspersed within the text at appropriate points and the text highlights the important aspects within each chapter and so brings attention to the key aspect. The core function of the book is to allow the reader access to the world of best practice psychometrics conducted within the new guidelines and frameworks now currently accepted world-wide. It is not a book on psychometric theory but it does cover rudimentary psychometric concepts in the foundation zone. South Africa's robust psychometric heritage is enviable and a seminal text such as this is a welcome addition to local and international psychometric literature. A refreshing and cogent overview is given of the historical development of the discipline in South Africa.

Events of the most recent past (migration of psychometrists from the HSRC) are not glossed over but receive attention due to the subsequent impact of these events on the future growth of test development in South Africa which is now largely being spearheaded by private companies. Ethics and the consequent deployment of fair practices permeate the text from beginning to end and

emphasis is placed on local ethical issues. Basic measurement and scaling concepts, reliability and validity are discussed in enough detail to whet the appreciative student's appetite. Advanced texts are recommended along with the way and as such the reader is never at a loss as to which direction to follow should certain aspects need further explanation. The guide to developing a psychological measure is ordered and detailed enough so as to equip the novice with a useable framework according to which measures can be developed. It is timely and welcome to see the introduction of Item Response Theory in an undergraduate text in South African psychometric literature. It comes as no surprise that the issue of cross-cultural applicability looms large in the text in comparison to other introductory texts. Cross-cultural issues pepper the text in addition to being the focus of one chapter. Another highlight of the book is the attention paid to the role of psychologists and psychometrists as mandated and outlined by the Health Professions Council of South Africa and the latest international best practices regarding the administration, scoring and interpretation of various types of psychological assessments. South Africa has a progressive framework in place regarding the legalisation of test development and practitioner development and the Editors have done an admirable job in explaining a potentially complicated system and presenting it in a readable format. Unlike many texts in this area, the book dedicates a chapter to the discussion of administering psychological assessment measures which are pertinent to the South African context, which is important given the country's multilingual population. Four chapters deal with the basic types of measures and include the assessment of cognitive functioning, measures of affective behaviour, adjustment and well-being measures, personality assessment and career counselling assessment. All four of these chapters include the latest international and local literature on both the norming and standardisation of international tests and well as locally developed and normed tests. Despite the popular belief that tests are no longer being developed in South Africa for South Africans, this text goes to great lengths to show the deficit in this argument. It is timely that dynamic assessment, for instance, has been mentioned in the cognitive functioning chapter along with the latest developments in the newly developed South African Personality Inventory (SAPI). The in-depth treatment of computer-based and internet delivered assessment is also a noteworthy contribution made by the Editors and evidences the up-to-date nature of the book.

In accordance with the above assertion concerning South Africa's robust test development past, the chapter dealing with computer-based assessment does justice to the early pioneering initiatives and actions of psychologists in the area of automated test development. It is somewhat sad that the initial impetus could not be sustained owing to varying contextual factors and the text highlights this issue. It is noteworthy that South African test developers helped lead the field internationally in this regard and still do today with tests such as the LPCAT and CPCAT which are locally-tailored computerised adaptive tests. Training needs to permeate downwards, however, if more psychologists in South African are to partake in internet-delivered tests and computer-based tests. Advantages and disadvantages associated with internet-delivered tests are given a thorough going-over and likewise so too are the various challenges of internet-delivered tests. The latest guidelines concerning good practice in this field are discussed succinctly with a view towards educating not only the novice reader but the trained and already-practicing psychologist; the latter for who this information may be timely as many may not be sufficiently well versed in the latest guidelines.

The text concludes with an extensive yet compact overview of the use of assessment in various applied contexts, where the latest literature pertaining to the burgeoning field of assessment centres is discussed in addition to cursory coverage of psychodiagnostic testing, educational assessment as well as a brief mention of psycholegal assessment; the interpretation and reporting of assessment results; factors affecting assessment results as well as the possible future directions of psychological assessment in South Africa. South Africa is unique regarding the melting pot of various cultures and as such this text highlights the necessity of considering multiple contextual issues when it comes to interpreting test results. A chapter is dedicated to mentioning numerous contextual concerns and includes, among others, the need to understand the roles played by differing biological, intrapsychic, social and methodological considerations. The fact that these issues receive a chapter's worth of attention attests to the importance of contextual factors in the South African context. No introductory text can ever be complete. The aim of this text is not to be a mammoth tome on psychometrics but to provide the reader with a contextual approach towards the theory and application of psychometry as it is currently practiced. As professionals in the field, psychologists would be remiss not to have a copy

of this book on their shelves. Although the future of psychometrics in South Africa still faces a somewhat uncertain future, it cannot be said that test development is not flourishing in small but expert quarters and the Editors should be congratulated on their efforts in disseminating a lot of information in a very readable format.