

Balancing psychological testing and society essay

[Law](#), [Evidence](#)



1. One ethical concern associated with psychological testing is biases of researchers that may infiltrate the test in the form of leading or suggestive questions. Personal values or beliefs can influence psychologists when creating or administering tests. Corporate funding can also cause bias and restrictions among researchers, because the goals of corporations are often for profit more than for open-minded empirical results. For example, drug companies strive to develop newer drugs that can prove to have better results; but the drive for higher sales, or deadlines for results should not affect the efficacy of psychological testing.

Another ethical concern with psychological testing is whether the gain in knowledge is worth the potential harm to the participants. This is a more complex issue because it can be hard to measure psychological harm to an individual. Many tests easily meet these criteria and may even help participants if they are already suffering and need to be directed to appropriate treatments. However, so much harm has been done in the past through psychological research that almost all psychological tests must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board; whose purpose is to look out for the interests of participants.

2. An early legal issue with psychological testing was the way the federal government used it in its employment practices. Many government jobs required intensive psychological testing when hiring and promoting, and these tests may have required individuals to divulge personal information they should not have legally had to (Creech, 1966). The questions about whether these tests violated constitutional rights led the Senate to appoint a subcommittee to examine the issue. This investigation led to various reforms

in psychological testing for government employees (Creech, 1966). However, testing practices, especially personality tests, are still often used today by numerous companies during the hiring process.

A more recent legal issue involving psychological testing concerns admissibility as forensic evidence. Legal decisions have been made in consideration of expert testimonies based on the relevance of psychological tests (Heilbrun, 1992). In these cases the courts decide the relevance and accuracy of psychological evidence. However, analyzing and representing these tests subjectively and professionally is imperative for psychologists (Heilbrun, 1992). Misinterpretations as well as bias can reflect poorly on the efficacy of the test and psychologists in general.

3. *People v. Wells* had an incredible impact on psychological testing. Wells tried to plead not guilty by reasons of insanity, and during the time the plea was becoming more controversial and more popular (Louisell & Hazard, 1961). Many previous cases left doubt as to the true mental capacity of the accused. However, because of this influential case California set up specific procedures and rules for determining insanity, as well as adopted a test for insanity. *People v. Wells* also led to changes and additions to Penal Codes and legal ramifications that are still in effect (Louisell & Hazard, 1961). These guidelines have been used in several cases, and allowed the courts a systematic and unbiased method of dealing with the insanity plea.

Although new and improved tests have been created to measure an individual's mental health competence, this case made significant use of a psychological test. This set a precedent for judicial support and acceptance of psychological measures. *People v. Wells* was a landmark case that allowed

evidence about a defendant's state of mind to be used when determining guilt (Louisell & Hazard, 1961). The case showed that to deny a person's evidence of mental state was to deny due process (Louisell & Hazard, 1961), and this can be a testament to the acceptance of the field of psychology and its tests.

References

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