

3-30-2001

More Spy Games: A Problem with Credibility of Sources for Counterintelligence and Personnel Security

Editor

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2001) "More Spy Games: A Problem with Credibility of Sources for Counterintelligence and Personnel Security," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 11 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol10/iss11/2>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: More Spy Games: A Problem with Credibility of Sources for Counterintelligence and Personnel Security

Author: Editor

Volume: 10

Issue: 11

Date: 2001-03-30

Keywords: Counterintelligence, Personnel Security, Psychological Assessment

Abstract. This article identifies implications of recent meta-evaluations of psychological assessment methods for attempts at identifying individuals who are committing treason or otherwise violating security policies.

In 1996, the American Psychological Association (APA) established a working group that was intended to--among other things--assemble evidence on the efficacy and accuracy of psychological testing and assessment in clinical practice. An article that provides a systematic summary of the data has just been published in the *American Psychologist*. Of special relevance for counterintelligence and personnel security are two data tables in this article.

One table contains correlations between a large number of individual predictor variables and their respective criteria. It turns out that many variables thought to have extremely significant associations with respective criteria do not. And most of the associations between predictor variables and criteria have been researched and analyzed much more comprehensively over a longer period of time than assumed associations between various variables and criteria having general counterintelligence and personnel security relevance. (Any variable and criterion association may have relevance in a specific situation.)

The other table contains correlations between sources of data on the one hand and specific constructs on the other. It turns out that different sources often are weakly correlated relative to various constructs--even those sources on the one hand and sources and constructs on the other thought to be significantly associated. And most of these associations among sources and between sources and constructs have been researched and analyzed much more comprehensively over a longer period of time than those having general counterintelligence and personnel security relevance. (Any source and construct association or association between sources may have relevance in a specific situation.)

The authors of the *American Psychologist* article posit that a low association between sources may demonstrate that each source contributes uniquely and importantly to some construct, yet also admit that each source may not be "good" in terms of an adequate association with a construct. In fact, the sources may not even share some nonspecific and non-predictive variance including predictive error factors. As well, the meta-evaluative data involve predictions in a nomothetic mode (over a number of individuals) when in clinical and intelligence work the sine qua non of utility is idiographic (for a single individual). Finally, the correlations pertaining to meta-evaluative data involve psychological testing, not assessment--the latter also including a much higher number of sources including social, cultural, political, and historical information that might increase associations between predictors and criteria and between sources and constructs. However, the APA meta-evaluative research does not yet provide data to support this notion.

Although the *American Psychologist* article concludes in an upbeat fashion that much work remains to be done but much has been accomplished, counterintelligence and personnel security experts should be

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much less sanguine about their own work and what scientific psychology may be able to contribute at present. (See Campbell, D.T., & Fiske, D.W. (1959). Convergent and discriminant validation by the multitrait-multimethod matrix. *Psychological Bulletin*, 56, 81-105; Epstein, S. (1980). The stability of behavior: II. Implications for psychological research. *American Psychologist*, 35, 790-806; Menzel, D.C. (1999). The morally mute manager: Fact or fiction? *Public Personnel Management*, 28, 515-527; Meyer, G.J., Finn, S.E., Eyde, L.D., Kay, G.G., Moreland, K.L., Dies, R.R., Eisman, E.J., Kubiszyn, T.W., & Reed, G.M. (February, 2001). Psychological testing and psychological assessment: A review of evidence and Issues. *American Psychologist*, 56, 128-165; Stone, L.A. (1992). Canonical correlation between security clearance adjudication concerns and later motivational causes for espionage behavior. *Forensic Reports*, 5, 305-316.) (Keywords: Counterintelligence, Personnel Security, Psychological Assessment.)