

Everything You Wanted to Know About the MMPI

The MMPI, MMPI-2, and MMPI-A in Court: A Practical Guide for Expert Witnesses and Attorneys. Kenneth S. Pope, James N. Butcher, and Joyce Seelen. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1993. 400 pp.

Reviewed by Marvin W. Acklin

Marvin W. Acklin, PhD, is a licensed psychologist in Honolulu, Hawaii, engaged in full time independent practice of clinical and forensic psychology. He is a Diplomate in Clinical Psychology, American Board of Professional Psychology, a Fellow of the Society for Personality Assessment, and is currently preparing for board certification in Forensic Psychology. A member of the editorial boards of the Journal of Personality Assessment and Psychological Assessment, Dr. Acklin has published widely in the area of psychological evaluation, especially Rorschach psychology.

The psychologist venturing into the legal arena faces numerous challenges and pitfalls. The assumptive, conceptual, and procedural differences between the worlds of law and psychology are massive and not easily bridged. Threats of liability—both ethical and legal—are nowhere more pronounced than in psycholegal work. The courts, vocal critics of the role of mental professionals notwithstanding, increasingly rely on psychological and psychiatric evidence in arriving at judicial determinations. Given the devaluation of insurance-based clinical work, it is likely that larger numbers of psychologists will look to forensic psychology as an extension of their vocational skills. The role of mental health professionals in the courts is not likely to wane. *The MMPI, MMPI-2, and MMPI-A in Court*, then, is a timely resource for the expert witness.

As became obvious in the recent televised evidentiary hearings in a celebrated California murder case, the quality of evidence is a critical matter in the overheated and methodologically skeptical legal area. Psychological evidence itself is, in the law's view, slippery and conceptually alien. Standards of practice in forensic psychology, in terms of procedure, documentation, and work product are considerably more stringent than in typical clinical practice. Sloppy or conceptually misdirected clinical work can at best lead to professional humiliation and at worst ethics or legal complaints.

This practically written handbook on the most frequently used psychological test covers all the bases on the MMPI. It covers many of the technical aspects of test development, norming, item selection, applications, and differences between the MMPI, MMPI-2, and MMPI-A. It is more than an MMPI mechanics manual, however. The book covers many basic issues related to expert witnessing, from accepting a referral, setting up consulting agreements, procedural matters related to gathering of forensic psychological evidence, assessment of malingering, computer-based test interpretation, forensic report writing, preparation for deposition and trial, and court testimony. The book is loaded with clearly presented tables making the information highly accessible. Most all of the material that an expert witness would need to defend the test's use in court is under one cover.

The book has several unique features that distinguish it from other texts in forensic psychology. First, it is eminently practical. Information is easily accessible. Second, the chapter on attorney preparation, although not likely to be enlightening to lawyers, helps the expert understand the broader context of trial preparation. The book should be of immense value to trial lawyers who wish to thoroughly cross-examine and potentially impeach the testimony of psychological experts using the MMPI. Finally, the heart of the book is the chapter entitled "Deposition and Cross-Examination of the Expert Witness: 80 Basic Questions"; in a mock trial question/response format, it is likely to raise the anxieties of any psychologist given the depth and technical detail that could be the focus of testimony. Though I have yet to encounter a trial lawyer with the degree of psychological knowledge or sophistication implied in the questions asked here, it becomes clear that the standards of knowledge and practice are high and only likely to become more stringent given the availability of books like this one. In short, aside from providing much useful information, the book raises practice standards in the field. This is not the sort of book that you want the cross-examining lawyer to have read before you have. The book's appendices amply document state and federal cases where the MMPI has been used as evidence, presents a plethora of normative profiles based on diagnostic groups, and closes with the latest ethical guidelines promulgated by the American Psychological Association.

This book, published by the American Psychological Association, is a winner. Its depth, breadth, practicality, and user-friendly format make it indispensable for the assessment psychologist whose work may end up in court or the seasoned forensic professional who daily toils in the halls of justice.