

SELF-REPORTS, A CAUTION: Although self-reports have their place and have some value, they share inherent and significant weaknesses:

1. THEY ALL RELY ON THE **HONESTY OF THE TEST-TAKER**. If the applicant lies or misrepresents themselves, the test results are useless.
2. THEY ALL RELY ON THE **SELF-UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEST-TAKER**. Many people have false beliefs about how their test results will be interpreted. Obviously if their self-perceptions are off, then the responses to the test questions are also inaccurate. The context in which the person finds themselves determines how they will respond to the test items.
3. THEY ALL RELY ON THE TEST-TAKER UNDERSTANDING THE test items. Many applicants guess or don't understand what being expected of them.
4. THEY ALL RELY ON THE TEST-TAKER TAKING THE MMPI-2 Test **SERIOUSLY**. Persons who take these tests often don't care about taking tests and give little attention to how they answer questions.
5. THEY ALL EVALUATE ONLY A PORTION OF THEIR PERSONALITY. Much still remains to be discovered about the person and how they live their lives.

The above list demonstrates why self-reports are called self-reports. How much weight and trust should be placed on the output which originated from the person themselves?

Piotrowski on the MMPI

Piotrowski writes, "Much of the popularity of the (MMPI) test can be explained by the psychology of the examiner. He does not have to make any decisions and thus has no responsibility for the results" (p. 80).

"Since the test pertains to **intimate** personal matters and since in many instances the subject can predict what interpretation is likely to be placed on his response, answers to the MMPI (or any questionnaire) are seldom completely frank, either because of conscious fear or unconscious defense against anxiety alleviation, which seems to be a condition of a frank and valid psychological self-evaluation. For this reason, the MMPI is not a dependable aid in neuropsychiatric diagnoses, especially in borderline cases, when a diagnostic aid is most helpful" (p. 80. Emphasis added).

"In about one out of five cases the MMPI significantly exaggerates the psychopathology of an individual, if information from other sources serves as a

criterion for judgment. Admissions of (personal) difficulties are not necessarily more valid than assertions of (personal) well-being” (p. 80-81).

“The assumption of the MMPI is that the accuracy of the subject’s self-ratings is not a condition of the test’s validity. The authors (Starke R. Hathaway and J. Charnley McKinley) believe that the test rests on what the patient says, not on the truth value of what he says” (81).

“What the patient says and what he thinks he does do not always coincide” (p. 80).

“Statements are made in the first person singular in the belief that this encourages self-identification and self-references. However, (this use of) the first person (pronoun) instead of the third person (pronoun) is incompatible with the anxiety-alleviating principle” (p. 81). The anxiety-alleviating principle rests upon directing the focus away from a subject’s awareness in order to reduce the conscious and unconscious evocation of anxiety. Test items written in the third person allow subjects responding to the test items to focus on the content of the item and not upon how the answer would make them look in the eyes of the individual who will interpret, or have access to, the test results.

“Many mental patients manage to produce normal MMPI profiles; that is, the peaks of all scales are within the middle range of T scores from 30 to 70. Only 10 to 15 percent of mental patients can deliberately simulate a normal profile. Those who fail in this attempt succeed only in making their MMPI look more abnormal. This shows that the lack of frankness and the pseudo-normality can be a function of unconscious defenses against anxiety as well as a deliberate effort of self-concealment” (p. 82).

“The test gives better results when the subject feels it is his advantage to be frank and to admit weaknesses; it is usually unreliable when he feels it is not to his advantage to be truthful and guileless” (p. 82).

“It may be that the MMPI has reached its highest level of perfection and cannot be improved upon. The paper-and-pencil personality inventories have definite limitations even when they are as sophisticated in structure as the MMPI” (p. 82).

Piotrowski, Z. A. (1972). Psychological Testing of Intelligence and Personality in A. M. Freedman and H. I. Kaplan (Eds.) *Diagnosing Mental Illness*, New York, N. Y.: Atheneum.

