

PSYCHOLOGY IN INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF DIVISION 33

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Volume 34, Number 1

Summer 2008

Message from the President

Steven F. Warren¹

University of Kansas - Lawrence



If, as you read this, it's still mid-August, or more precisely not yet August 14th, you still have time to enrich your professional

and personal life and make your way to the APA Convention in Boston. For those who have already made plans to attend, rest assured you've made the right decision. The Division 33 program alone is well worth the price of admission. Congratulations to Program Chair and President-Elect Warren Zigman for a job very well done. The Division's scientific program includes six outstanding symposia, two contributed paper sessions, two poster sessions, two award talks and a "not to be missed" Division business meeting and social hour. Program details were presented in the previous newsletter.

On the topic of kudos – two very important awards will be presented at the conference.

• Mike Guralnick, Director of the Center for Human Development at the University of Washington in Seattle, will receive the annual Edgar A. Doll Award. This award was established in 1980. It serves as the division's highest recognition of outstanding scientific contribution to the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities. It carries a \$1,000 honorarium. Dr. Guralnick's award address at the convention will be published in an upcoming newsletter.

• Luc Lecavalier, an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the Ohio State University, will receive the division's first ever Early Career Research Award. This award is to be given bi-annually to an individual who has made substantial contributions to the understanding of intellectual and developmental disabilities as reflected in his or her published and presented works. It also carries a \$1,000 honorarium

and requires the winner to present a talk at the conference, which will then be published in the newsletter.

The Boston convention also serves as the setting for the Division's annual business meeting. One important item at this meeting will be the consideration of changes to our constitution. All members should have received a copy of our present constitution with the amendments clearly indicated via snail mail in July. These changes

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Division 33 Election Results:

President-Elect-Designate: Len J. Abbeduto, PhD


Member-at-Large: Anna Esbensen, PhD

Congratulations to Len and Anna!



involve clarifying our procedures for adding student members to the Executive Committee and provisions for awarding our bi-annual Early Career Award. Fortunately, it's hard to imagine these will generate any controversy. Thanks go to Stan Lunde, our semi-permanent chair of our Constitution and By-Laws Committee, for keeping us legal (constitutionally speaking) as we evolve and change.

This is my third and last column as Division 33 President. I'm glad to report that as I depart office the Division seems to be in reasonably good shape. Leading indicators include a) modest membership growth, b) enhanced emphasis on students and early career professionals, c) a strong slate of candidates for our recent officer elections, and d) a truly great convention program. These and other factors provide a strong rationale for members to keep

paying dues, attend the meetings, and participate in the field. I take no credit for any of these indicators, but like my predecessors have simply tried to keep things moving forward. I wish to thank those who contributed in a range of ways to the division over the past year and wish Warren Zigman the best of luck as he assumes the helm of our relatively small but active and engaged organization. I hope to see you in Boston. 

Linguistic Sensitivity Does Not Require One to Use Grossly Deficient Norms: Why US Norms Should Be Used With the Mexican WAIS-III in Capital Cases

Hoi K. Suen
Pennsylvania State University

and

Stephen Greenspan¹
University of Colorado

Sensitivity to the linguistic, ethnic and cultural background of people being evaluated for Intellectual Disabilities (ID, formerly mental retardation) has now become de rigueur in our field. Thus, when an exclusively or primarily Spanish-speaking defendant is being evaluated for ID in an "Atkins" (death penalty exemption) hearing, it is essential that a Spanish language intelligence test be utilized. One of the tests that is increasingly being used for such purposes is the Spanish language version of the WAIS-III-the "Escala Wechsler de Inteligencia Para Adultos-III" -normed in Mexico (Manual Moderno, 2003a). This test uses all of the items on the US WAIS-III, with minor changes in wording and slight changes of some item ordering, supposedly empirically justified, to make the test more sensitive to Mexican cultural and linguistic meanings.

The technical manual (Manual Moderno, 2003b) offers two sets of norms, the original U.S. norms (based on a sample of 2,450) and Mexican norms (based on a sample of 970). Because subjects with ID were excluded from the Mexican norms, and because of acknowledged problems in comprising a sample representative of the Mexican population, the test publishers suggest that one might wish to use the US norms when diagnosing ID.

In spite of that caveat, psychologists using the Mexican WAIS-III (particularly those hired by the prosecution) will often use the Mexican norms, which routinely produce full-scale IQ scores that average 12 points higher than those produced on the same subjects using the U.S. norms. This is even done on occasion when the defendant is from a Spanish-speaking

country other than Mexico. The justification for use of the Mexican rather than the US norms is basically a race-norming one, similar to the one put forward by Mercer (1988) to reduce false positives in special education assignment, and by Heaton, Taylor and Manly (2001) to reduce false positives in dementia diagnosis in African-Americans. This argument basically goes that for an individual who is poor and minority, using a more culturally similar reference population will be more likely to show his or her true (i.e., higher) level of functioning. Defense psychologists and attorneys obviously prefer to use the much lower score-producing U.S. norms, and they justify it on two grounds: (a) if a crime is committed in the U.S., then the norming reference group to use should be the population of the U.S. rather than that of a country

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(Mexico) which lacks either the death penalty or, apparently, any official definition of MR; and (b) that race-norming is a controversial and generally not-accepted practice, which may even be in violation of U.S. Civil Rights laws, and that the effect of using race-norming (originally intended to protect minority individuals) would be to make it virtually impossible to find in favor of an Atkins petition from any disadvantaged minority defendant.

The arguments described above are based on the assumption that the U.S. and Mexican WAIS-III norms are generally equivalent in terms of their reliability and validity. In other words, regardless of what one feels about the suitability of using the Mexican norms with a Mexican (or other Spanish-speaking) defendant facing the death penalty in the U.S., if the Mexican norms are found to be grossly technically flawed, then it would be a violation of the APA ethics code for any psychologist to use them. This issue became a concern to us when we served as defense consultants in an Atkins hearing in which the defendant was an illegal immigrant from Mexico with limited English skills who was about to go on trial for the murder of his girlfriend. Two psychologists used the Mexican WAIS-III and produced similar results (the court-appointed psychologist tested second, and the practice effect likely explains why his scores were slightly higher). These scores, and associated confidence intervals,

are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1 - WAIS-III Scores and Confidence Intervals Using US or Mexican Norms in a Capital Case²

<i>IQ scores reported by the defense psychologist:</i>	
Using U.S. norms = 66 (95% confidence interval = 63-71)	
Using Mexican norms = 79 (95% confidence interval = 65-103)	
<i>IQ scores reported by the court-appointed psychologist:</i>	
Using U.S. norms = 70 (95% confidence interval = 67-75)	
Using Mexican norms = 81 (95% confidence interval = 67-104)	

The particular concern was that the scores resulting from the Mexican norms produce extraordinarily large confidence intervals (38 and 37), which are furthermore very heavily asymmetrical, with the skew suggesting that any error would be likely to favor a diagnosis of non-ID. This apparent gross lack of reliability caused the first author to undertake an in-depth analysis intended to better understand the sources of such unreliability. In the course of this analysis, numerous serious problems were found in the procedures used to generate the Mexican norms. Our conclusion is that the Mexican norms for the WAIS-III are so deficient that they should not be used for any purpose, let alone one as serious as determining ID in a capital case. An in-depth discussion of the results of

the analysis (taken from a declaration by the first author for the court) can be found in a longer article by Suen and Greenspan (2008). In the current paper, we summarize the major points made in the longer article. Readers wishing to see the longer article can receive a copy from one of the authors.

Technical Problems With the Mexican WAIS-III Norms

In the longer paper, we identified seven serious problems with the Mexican WAIS-III, with six of them reflecting technical mistakes, and the seventh being a more conceptual problem, reflecting the lack of a consensually-grounded definition of ID in the country (Mexico) where the norms were generated. In the following paragraphs, we shall limit our brief summary to the six technical problems.

Problem one - Poor or Uninterpretable Reliability

The manual for the Mexican WAIS-III reports Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients that are quite acceptable (in the vicinity of .86) and are not much lower than those obtained from the US norms, but the confidence intervals suggest standard error of measurement (SEM) many times higher than those obtained from the US norms. We reviewed the relationship between these two forms of reliability and found that none of the three established "true score

² In the case of Table 1, and in virtually all of the cases with which we are familiar, psychologists have obtained lower IQ scores with the U.S. norms by taking the raw score obtained from administration of the Spanish-translated items and plugging them directly into the U.S. norms. This is done typically through use of the "Scoring Assistant" software provided by the publisher of the WAIS-III. One resourceful prosecution-hired psychologist, faced with the possibility that a judge would order use of the U.S. norms, came up with the clever but wrong tactic of first calculating (standardized) sub-scale scores through the Mexican norm tables, and then converting them to IQ and other summary standardized scores through the U.S. norms. This had the effect of actually raising full-scale IQ by about four points rather than lowering it by about 12 points. Even assuming that the Mexican test developers used the correct statistical formulae for calculating scale scores (which we show in "problem five" was not the case), this "mixed method" seems an evasion of the option, offered by the Mexican publisher, of using the U.S. norms, and seems a highly improper method for calculating IQ scores using the U.S. norms.



confidence interval methods” (see Glutting, McDermott & Stanley, 1987) could reconcile such a high Cronbach alpha with such a poor SEM. (The Mexican manual does not report which of the true-score confidence interval methods was used.) In fact, a Cronbach alpha of .56-unacceptably low for use in a high stakes purpose-is the highest one could obtain for the reported confidence intervals. Obviously, there was some problem in the manner in which reliability was calculated for the Mexican norms. The best case scenario is that the score reliabilities are unknown, and the worst is that they are unacceptably low. Either scenario argues against using the Mexican WAIS-III norms.

Problem two - The lack of a meaningful reference population

IQ scores are norm-referenced, and the group they reference is the population of the country where the norms were generated. The reference group for the US WAIS-III is the 1995 census of the United States. Great care and expense went into comprising a reference group that accurately reflected that census in terms of gender, ethnicity, education and geographic region. It is because this is so difficult a process that the WAIS-III is so expensive and only a small number of IQ tests have been deemed adequate for use in diagnosing ID. The technical manual for the Mexican WAIS-III gives no information about any census or national reference group, and the methods they describe for putting the sample together suggest that it could not be representative of the national census, even if we knew what that was. Basically, they used an a priori method, driven apparently by limited resources, in which

they sampled equal numbers of males and females from different age groups, and equal numbers of individuals from four regions of the country and from two levels of education. Such a method seems very unlikely to reflect the national population, even if we had more information about that population. As it is, the authors admit to deficiencies in the sample, including the exclusion of various geographical zones and disability groups, and the absence of sufficient low-educated subjects. Given the ill-defined nature of the Mexican standardization sample, one is not able to have any confidence that scores obtained from the Mexican WAIS-III are meaningful, especially for any serious purpose.

Problem three - The lack of Score Normalization

There is no indication that the distribution of Mexican scores in the standardization sample conform to the normal curve. Nor is there any evidence that attempts have been made to ensure such a normal score distribution through score “normalization.” From the manual, it appears that the method used to generate scale scores from raw scores was a z-transformation, an unusual method that produces a linear standard score that keeps the same distribution as the original raw scores. If the original raw scores were not normally distributed, one would not be able to relate a resulting IQ score to a known percentile of the population. If neither the distribution of the raw scores of the Mexican standardization sample nor that of the final scaled IQ scores in the norm tables has a normal distribution, then any IQ score obtained from the test is not interpretable.

Problem four - Lack of Representation of Certain Groups

The developer of the Mexican norms is aware of many of the limitations of the Mexican standardization sample used to establish the Mexican norms. In the “Conclusion” section of Chapter 6 in the Mexican WAIS-III technical manual, it was stated that certain groups, such as many people with ID, high ability, senior citizens, people with physical impairments, etc. , are not adequately represented, and in some cases were excluded, from the standardization sample. They specifically state that for the purpose of diagnosing ID, “perhaps it would be more convenient to utilize the original [i.e., US] norms.”

Problem five - Use of incorrect statistics and calculations

A rather amazing short-coming of the Mexican technical manual is the reporting of glaringly incorrect formulas and statistical statements. Following are three examples. The first involves an incorrect calculation or reporting of the very simple chi-square statistic. The second involves an incorrect formula for calculating scale scores. The reported formula was:

$$\text{Equivalente escalar} = DE \times \left(PE - \frac{10}{3} \right) + \mu$$

while the correct formula is

$$\text{Equivalente escalar} = DE \times \left(\frac{PE - 10}{3} \right) + \mu$$

This difference is far from trivial. For example, for a person with a standard subscale score of, say, 4, the IQ score would have been calculated as 110 (i.e., above average) through the erroneous equation, when it should have been 70 (mentally

retarded) when calculated correctly. A third mistake was attributing the high SEM of the Mexican IQ scores to the smaller size of the Mexican standardization sample. This is an erroneous statement, as there is no relationship between standard error of measurement and standardization sample size. The size of a standard error of measurement is determined exclusively by the value of the reliability coefficient and the standard deviation of the sample or population (the latter having been scaled to equal a constant value of 15 for IQ scores) and is not related to sample size or anything else. Given these very glaring and elemental mistakes in comprising the Mexican norms, it is impossible for one to have any confidence in IQ scores generated from those norms.

Problem six- Inappropriate use of the true score confidence interval method

The vast majority of psychological and educational tests use the traditional confidence interval method based on the observed scores. This method produces confidence intervals that are symmetrical around the obtained standardized score. The US WAIS-III is one of the few tests that uses an alternative approach, known as the “true score confidence interval,” which produces asymmetrical confidence intervals. Because the US version of the WAIS-III has quite high reliability, the skew is relatively minimal (for the scores reported in Table 1, three points below the obtained score and five points above, a difference of only two points). Because the Mexican WAIS-III has so much higher a SEM, the asymmetry is much greater, with relatively small potential error on the low (ID) side and tremendously big


potential error on the high (non-ID) side. This means that the Mexican norms are much more likely to result in a false negative (i.e., that a person with ID will be found to not have MR) than it is to result in a false positive (i.e., that a person without ID will be found to have ID). For this reason alone, it is probably undesirable to use the Mexican WAIS-III norms to diagnose ID, especially in a capital case. Additionally, the developers of the asymmetrical true score confidence interval method, Glutting et al (1987), specifically cautioned that the method is inappropriate for the determination of what they termed “mental deficiency”.

Conclusion

It is a basic ethical and professional obligation of any psychologist to ensure that any test they are using meets basic standards for reliability and validity. Given the multiple, and in some cases glaring, problems with the norms for the Mexican version of the WAIS-III, it is an absolute obligation of any licensed psychologist to avoid using the Mexican norms when diagnosing ID in a capital case. Feelings about ethnic and cultural sensitivity in no way justify the use of uninterpretable and (we regret to say) incompetently constructed norms. The average clinical psychologist lacks the psychometric skills to delve into the technical manual in the manner that we did. However, any qualified psychologist should have raised a red flag about the grossly large and skewed confidence intervals. The standard practice among psychologists is to assume that test publishers know what they are doing and produce norms in which one can have confidence. This obviously was not the case with the publisher of the Mexican version of the WAIS-III. It behooves them to withdraw

their deeply flawed norms from the market, and it behooves the Psychological Corporation to assume some responsibility for correcting this gross misuse of their widely-respected WAIS-III imprint.

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CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR FELLOW

If you know of a member of Division 33 who is not a Fellow of the division, and you believe that he or she has demonstrated significant “evidence of unusual and outstanding contributions” to the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities, then please submit that name to:

Wayne Silverman, Ph.D.
Chair, Division 33 Fellows Committee
Director, Intellectual Disabilities Research
Kennedy Krieger Institute
707 North Broadway
Baltimore, MD 21205
silvermanw@kennedykrieger.org

Please note that, in addition to “outstanding and unusual contributions,” the nominee must also: (a) have been a member of Division 33 for at least 1 year, (b) have at least 5 years of post-doctoral experience in the area, (c) be actively engaged in the advancement of psychology, (d) have a doctoral degree based in part on a psychological dissertation, (e) ultimately be sponsored and supported by at least 3 APA Fellows, at least one of whom is a Division 33 Fellow.

At this point, all you have to do is submit the name. Of course you are welcome to nominate yourself.

For additional information, please contact Dr. Silverman at the above address. **Note that completed applications are due by OCTOBER 31, 2008.** It is highly recommended that interested people submit names as early as possible to allow for sufficient time to complete the application process.

PSYCHOLOGY IN INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

APA DIVISION 33

SUMMER 2008

VOLUME 34, NUMBER 1

Editorial Policy

Psychology in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities is an official publication of Division 33 of the American Psychological Association. It is devoted to keeping members informed about the activities of Division 33 and to news and comment concerning all aspects of service, research, dissemination, and teaching in psychology and intellectual disabilities. Brief articles about policy issues as well as descriptions of service programs and preliminary research summaries are invited. We are especially interested in articles inviting the reaction and comment of colleagues in future issues. Comments and letters will be published as space allows. Manuscripts of between 500-1000 words must conform

to APA style and should be submitted by email attachment in Word format. Articles, comments, and announcements should be sent to Samuel J. Thios, Ph.D., Editor, *Psychology in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, Department of Psychology, Denison University, Granville, OH 43023 . Books, films, videotapes, and other material also may be submitted for possible review to the Editor.

Unless stated otherwise, opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent official positions of Division 33 .

Deadlines are September 15, Fall, March 1, Spring, June 1, Summer.

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION DIVISION 33

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APA Division 33 Convention Program Schedule

August 13 - 17, 2008

Boston, MA

	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
TIME	8/13/2008	8/14/2008	8/15/2008	8/16/2008	8/17/2008
8:00-8:30			Symposium: Intellectual Disability and the Death Penalty - Current and Future Contributions of Psychologists in Atkins Cases <i>Convention Center, Mtg. Room 254B</i>		
8:30-9:00					
9:00-9:30		Paper Session: Current Trends in Autism <i>Convention Center, Mtg. Room 156A</i>		Symposium: Adaptive Behavior - Understanding the Construct and Its Measurement <i>Convention Center, Mtg. Room 157B</i>	Paper Session: Functional Assessment in Sex Offenders with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities <i>Convention Center, Mtg. Room 208</i>
9:30-10:00					
10:00-10:30		Symposium: Contributions of Correlational Designs in Evidence-Based Practice in IDD <i>Convention Center, Mtg. Room 212</i>			Symposium: Who Is the Self in Self-Determination? <i>Convention Center, Mtg. Room 253B</i>
10:30-11:00					
11:00-11:30					
11:30-noon					
noon-12:30				Symposium: Characteristics of Children with ASD - Early Identification and Behavioral Intervention <i>Convention Center, Mtg. Room 209</i>	
12:30-1:00					
1:00-1:30		Symposium: Early Autism Epidemiology, Diagnosis and Subtyping - Findings From Record Reviews <i>Convention Center, Mtg. Room 153B</i>			
1:30-2:00					
2:00-2:30				Invited Address: Early Career Award <i>Sheraton Boston Hotel, Back Bay Ballroom B</i>	
2:30-3:00					
3:00-3:30		Poster Session: Autism and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities <i>Convention Center, Exhibit Halls A & B1</i>	Discussion: Internship and Postdoctoral Training Opportunities in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities <i>Convention Center, Mtg. Room 104A</i>	Invited Address: Doll Award <i>Sheraton Boston Hotel, Back Bay Ballroom B</i>	
3:30-4:00					
4:00-4:30			Poster Session: Current Trends in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities <i>Convention Center, Exhibit Halls A & B1</i>	Presidential Address and Business Meeting <i>Sheraton Boston Hotel, Back Bay Ballroom B</i>	
4:30-5:00					
5:00-5:30	Division 33 Executive Committee Meeting <i>Boston Marriot Copley Place Hotel, Orleans Room</i>			Social Hour <i>Sheraton Boston Hotel, Back Bay Ballroom B</i>	
5:30-6:00					
6:00-6:30					
6:30-7:00					



**AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL
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**Division 33
Psychology in Intellectual and
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Syracuse University
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Membership is open to Student Members of
APA in good standing.**

Name: _____

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Affiliation: _____

Telephone: _____

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Work (_____) _____

Student Member of APA: () Yes () No

Faculty Endorsement: The student named
above is enrolled as a student in a course
of study which is primarily psychological in
nature.

Signature: _____

Affiliation: _____

Please return the completed form with a check
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