

TECHNICAL REPORT

Response to Flynn

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In *Tethering the Elephant: Capital Cases, IQ, and the Flynn Effect* (Flynn, 2006), Dr. Flynn states that the WAIS-III® standardization sample is substandard and a 2.34 point adjustment to the FSIQ score is required in post conviction capital murder cases. The only evidence Flynn provides for this statement is that WAIS-III scores do not fit expectations made based on the Flynn effect. However, the progress of science demands that theories be modified based on new data. Adjusting data to fit theory is an inappropriate scientific method, regardless of how well supported the theory may have been in previous studies.

After a decade of clinical and research use with the WAIS-III, there have been no published criticisms about the accuracy of FSIQ score or the adequacy of the standardization sample in the professional literature. In fact, many authors have positively reviewed the WAIS-III norms (Groth-Marnat, Gallagher, Hale, & Kaplan, 2000; Kaufman & Lichtenberger, 1999; Sattler & Ryan, 1999). In calling for an adjustment to WAIS-III scores, Flynn ignores these previous reviewers, as well as data provided in the WAIS-III Technical Manual (Wechsler, 1997) supporting the close match of the standardization sample to the U.S. census and extensive information provided therein about inclusion / exclusion criteria and the processes used by the test publisher to ensure a representative sample.

Flynn also ignores data presented in his own article showing that the average yearly difference between Stanford-Binet – 4 and Stanford-Binet – 5 scores is identical to the difference reported between WAIS-R and WAIS-III scores (see Table 1). For both SB-5 and WAIS-III, the average rise in IQ scores is precisely .17 points per year over almost the same time period. Although not reported in the Flynn article, the newly released version of the Differential Abilities Scales Second Edition (DAS-II) also

shows and average rise of .17 points per year between 1990 and 2006 (Elliott, 2007). Thus, the SB-5 and DAS-II normative data provide an independent cross validation of the WAIS-III norms criticized by Flynn.

There are many reasons why the WAIS-III, SB-5 and DAS-II tests do not show the .3 point per year rise in IQ scores predicted by Flynn including a possible slowing of the effect, better representation of low SES subjects in more recent standardization projects, and construct changes in the newer versions of these tests. As Flynn observes, his effect is not consistent across all subtests. As test developers add or delete subtests when revising existing intelligence test batteries based on newer theories of cognition and brain functioning, the pattern of IQ increases across time will vary from expectations based on Flynn's original data. Although such construct changes are necessary to advance the field of intellectual assessment, these same changes make it difficult to study changes in intelligence across the generations. Still, there is no scientific justification for adjusting data to fit theory. As the publisher of the Wechsler series of tests, Pearson Education does not endorse the recommendation made by Flynn to adjust WAIS-III scores.

References

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