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General mental ability in South Asians: Data from three Roma (Gypsy) communities in Serbia

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Abstract

To examine whether the Roma (Gypsy) population of Serbia, like other South Asian population groups, average lower than Europeans on *g*, the general factor of intelligence, we tested 323 16- to 66-year-olds (111 males; 212 females) in three different communities over a two-year-period on the Raven's Colored and/or Standard Progressive Matrices and four measures of executive function. Out of the total of 60 Matrices, the Roma solved an average of 29, placing them at the 3rd percentile on 1993 U.S. norms, yielding an IQ equivalent of 70. On the executive function tests, the Roma averaged at about the level of Serbian 10-year-olds. The Matrices showed a small mean sex difference favoring males. External validity was demonstrated by correlating the scores on Matrices with measures such as cranial capacity ($r=0.13$, $P<0.01$), spousal similarity ($r=0.17$, $P<0.05$), age at birth of first child ($r=0.26$, $P<0.01$), number of offspring ($r=-0.20$, $P<0.01$), and responsible social attitudes ($r=0.10$, $P<0.05$). Comparisons with extant data showed that items found difficult or easy by the Roma were those found difficult or easy by White, Indian, Colored, and Black South African 14- to 16-year-olds and by Black South African undergraduates ($rs=0.90$). There was no evidence of any idiosyncratic cultural effect. Instead, Roma/non-Roma differences were found to be most pronounced on *g*. This was shown by item-total correlations (estimates of the item's *g* loading), which predicted the magnitude of Roma/non-Roma differences on those same items, regardless of from which sample the item-total correlations were calculated, and by confirmatory factor analysis. The results indicate the remarkable cross-cultural generalizability of item properties across South Asians, Europeans, and sub-Saharan Africans and that these reflect *g* more than culturally specific ways of thinking.

Keywords: General factor; Cross-cultural; Progressive matrices

As the trend toward a more global economy continues, mean group differences in cognitive performance are likely to become more salient, both within and across countries. Most studies have been local in focus. In the United States they have been largely concerned with Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, East Asians and Native American Indians. In Australia they have been concerned with the lower mean scores of the Aborigines, and in New Zealand of the Maoris. Although a few theorists (e.g., Lynn & Vanhanen, 2002; Rushton & Jensen, 2005) have taken a global perspective and posited genetic and evolutionary explanations (50% genetic–50% cultural) for differences among the three

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macro-races of East Asians, Europeans and Africans, most hypotheses about such differences have focused on local cultural factors such as poverty and racism.

In the US, group inequalities were examined in Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) *The Bell Curve*, which re-analyzed data on 11,878 youths (3022 of who were African American) from the 12-year National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). It found that most 17-year-olds with high scores on the Armed Forces Qualification Test, regardless of ethnicity, went on to occupational success by their late 20s and early 30s, while many of those with low scores went on to welfare dependence. It also showed that the average IQ for "African" Americans was lower than those for "Latino," "White," "East Asian," and "Jewish" Americans (IQs = 85, 89, 103, 106, and 115, respectively, pp. 273–278).

Internationally, Richard Lynn (2006) has gone beyond the traditional three macro-races and devoted a chapter to each of ten "genetic clusters" or population groups identified by Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi, and Piazza (1994) in their mammoth *History and Geography of Human Genes*. Lynn tabulated 620 studies of IQ scores in 113 different countries from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present (N = 813,778) and found the world average IQ is 90 (Fig. 1). The East Asians (Chinese, Japanese and Koreans) obtained the highest mean IQ at 105. Europeans followed with an IQ of 100. Some ways below these were the Inuit or Eskimos (IQ 91), South East Asians (IQ 87), Native American Indians (IQ 87), Pacific Islanders (IQ 85), and South Asians and North Africans (IQ 84). Well below these were the average scores for the sub-Saharan Africans (IQ 67) followed by the Australian Aborigines (IQ 62). The lowest mean scores were obtained for the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert and the Pygmies of the Congo rain forests (IQ 54).

The world's population groups are obviously not interchangeable. Some groups have proven so intractably below others in average test scores and concomitant differences in standards of living, educational outcome, and related phenomena that debates over potential remedial treatments have spanned generations. Regardless, long-standing group inequalities pose a problem in developing countries too such as India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, and South Africa as well as the United States (Klitgaard, 1986; Sowell, 2004).

Lynn and Vanhanen (2002, 2006) found that average national IQ scores correlated 0.68 with per capita income and proposed that national IQs helped to explain why some countries are rich and others poor. This was a bold claim. Most economists regard it as axiomatic that all peoples of the world have the same IQ (e.g., Hanushek & Kimko, 2000). Lynn and Vanhanen showed that the evidence belies this assumption. They found national differences in intelligence that ranged between averages of 67 in sub-Saharan Africa to 105 in the "Asian tiger" economies of the Pacific Rim. They calculated the IQs for 113 countries and estimated them for others (e.g.,

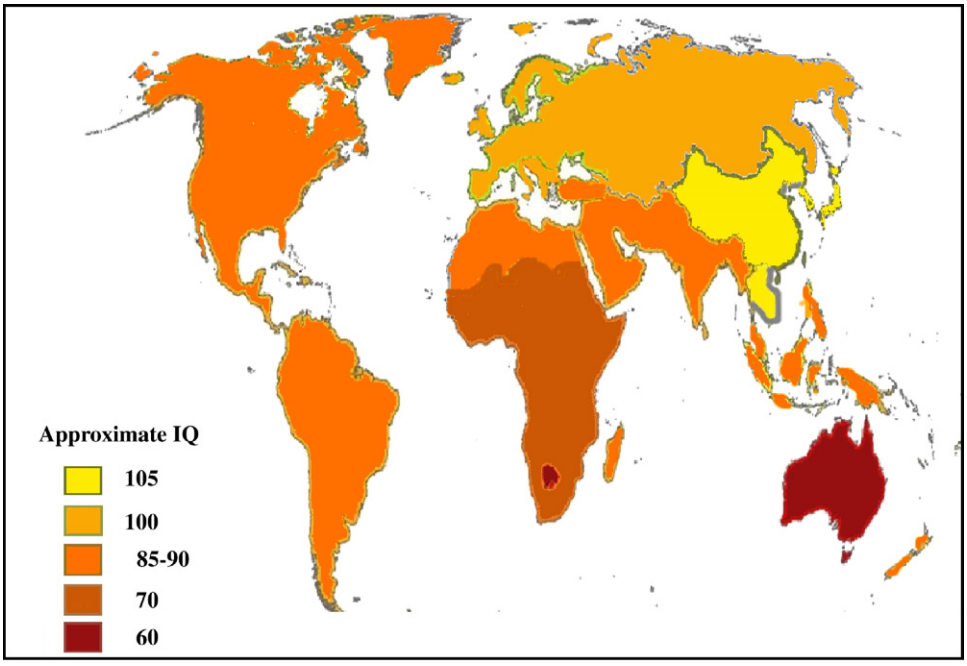

Fig. 1. World distribution of IQ scores of indigenous peoples (Adapted from Lynn, 2006).