

Assessment, Testing, and Understanding

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Autistic Identification Is Life Changing.

@littlepuddins.ie

Adult Amanda

- Understands herself
- Kind to herself
- Creates boundaries
- Learning her worth
- Part of a community
- Happy
- At peace
- Found



Young Amanda

- Confused
- Unsure
- Trying so hard
- Outsider
- Lonely
- Lost

“With great power comes great responsibility” — Stan Lee

Testing can be transformative. It can be incredibly validating and a life changing experience . . .

But we all know that too many times it is not . . .



To The Mom Crying In The Parking Lot

Why?



Who?



Where?

When?



What?



How?

calvin and hobbes by WATERSON



It begins with someone noticing something or asking a question . . .

WHY do we do assessment? We need more information to understand this person

Identify
support needs

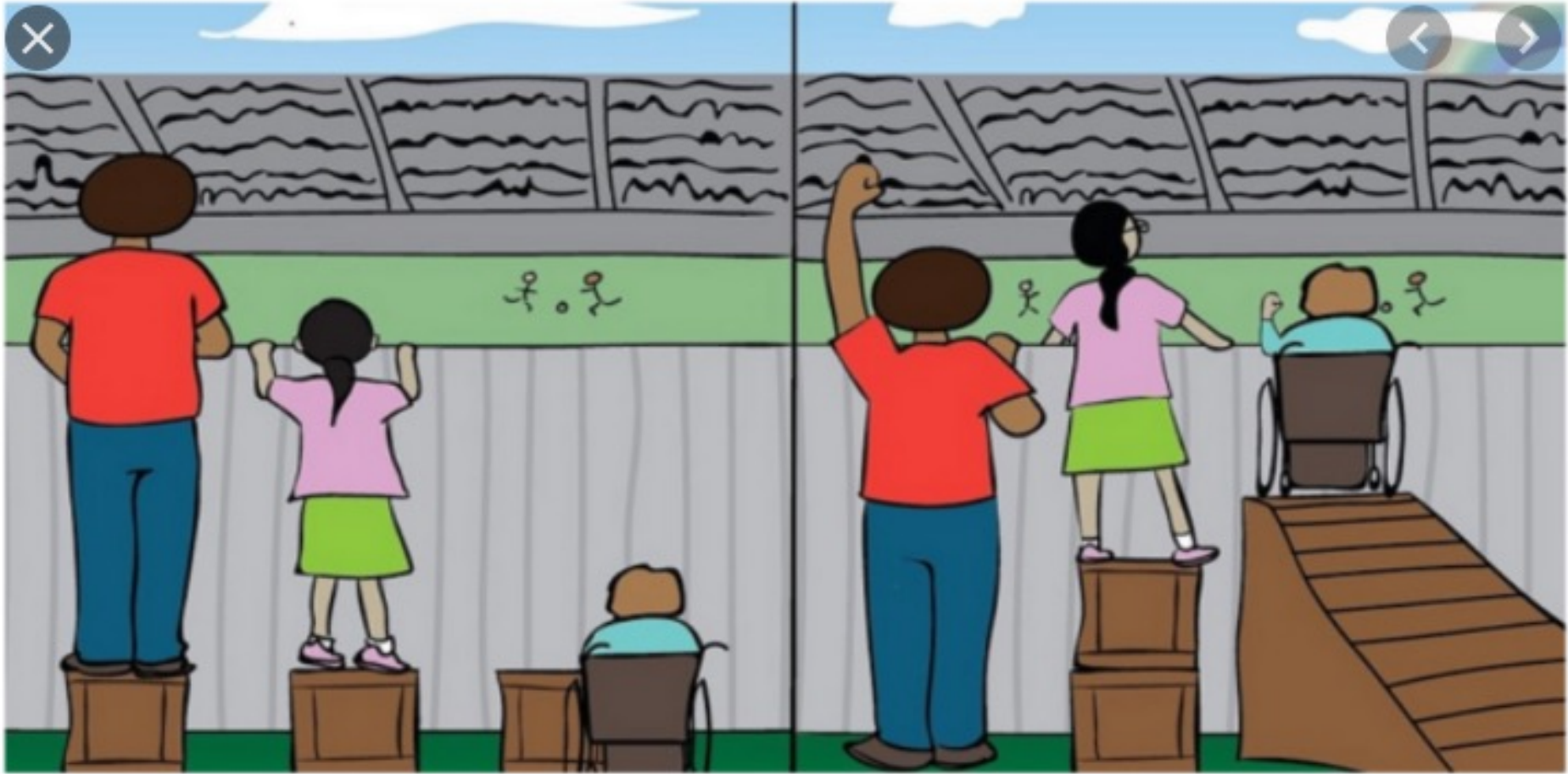
Determine
Eligibility

Establish a
baseline

Identify
strengths and
weaknesses

Diagnosis

Why? So you can access your civil rights!



Howardblas.com

Equality

Equity

Diagnosis vs Code vs Label



Diagnoses are made by a clinician for clinical communication—they describe concerns and should lead to interventions/treatments

Codes are eligibility determinations made by multidisciplinary teams for special education services

Labels are descriptions people make based on what they see—these are neither helpful nor based on data

WHO does psychological testing?

Neuropsychologist—
doctoral degree, license, 2
years post doctoral training
in neuropsychological
assessment, can diagnose
DSM/ICD disorders

Psychologist—doctoral
degree, license, can
diagnose DSM/ICD
disorders

School Psychologist—
masters or doctoral degree,
certificate, cannot practice
outside of an educational
setting, may/may not
diagnose

WHO can test specific areas of need?

SLP: Masters and License, Diagnose speech and language disorders

OT: Masters and License, Diagnose motor/motor integration disorders

PT: Masters and License, Diagnose disorders of coordination/movement

Audiologist: Masters/Doctorate, License, Hearing/Auditory processing

Special Educator: Masters, Certification, Test academic achievement

WHO can do *assessment* for diagnosis?

Developmental Pediatrician: MD, License, Assessment for Diagnosis

Psychiatrist: MD, License, Assessment for Diagnosis

Physicians Assistant: Masters, License, Assessment for Diagnosis

Nurse Practitioner: Masters, License/Certification, Assessment

WHO will be doing my child's/my testing?

Licensed/certified
clinician

Resident/Post Doc/
Psych Associate: Masters
or Doctorate, practices
under supervision of a
licensed clinician

A student: Pursuing a
degree, practices under
supervision of a licensed
clinician

A technician: BS or
higher, administers tests
under supervision

WHEN should we seek testing?

Whenever there is a need for more information to help a person reach his/her/their potential

When progress has stalled

When the person is struggling

At or after age 14 to inform transition

To identify support needs

To establish eligibility

Myths about WHEN . . .

Just wait and see
. . Trust us!

He's too young to
test

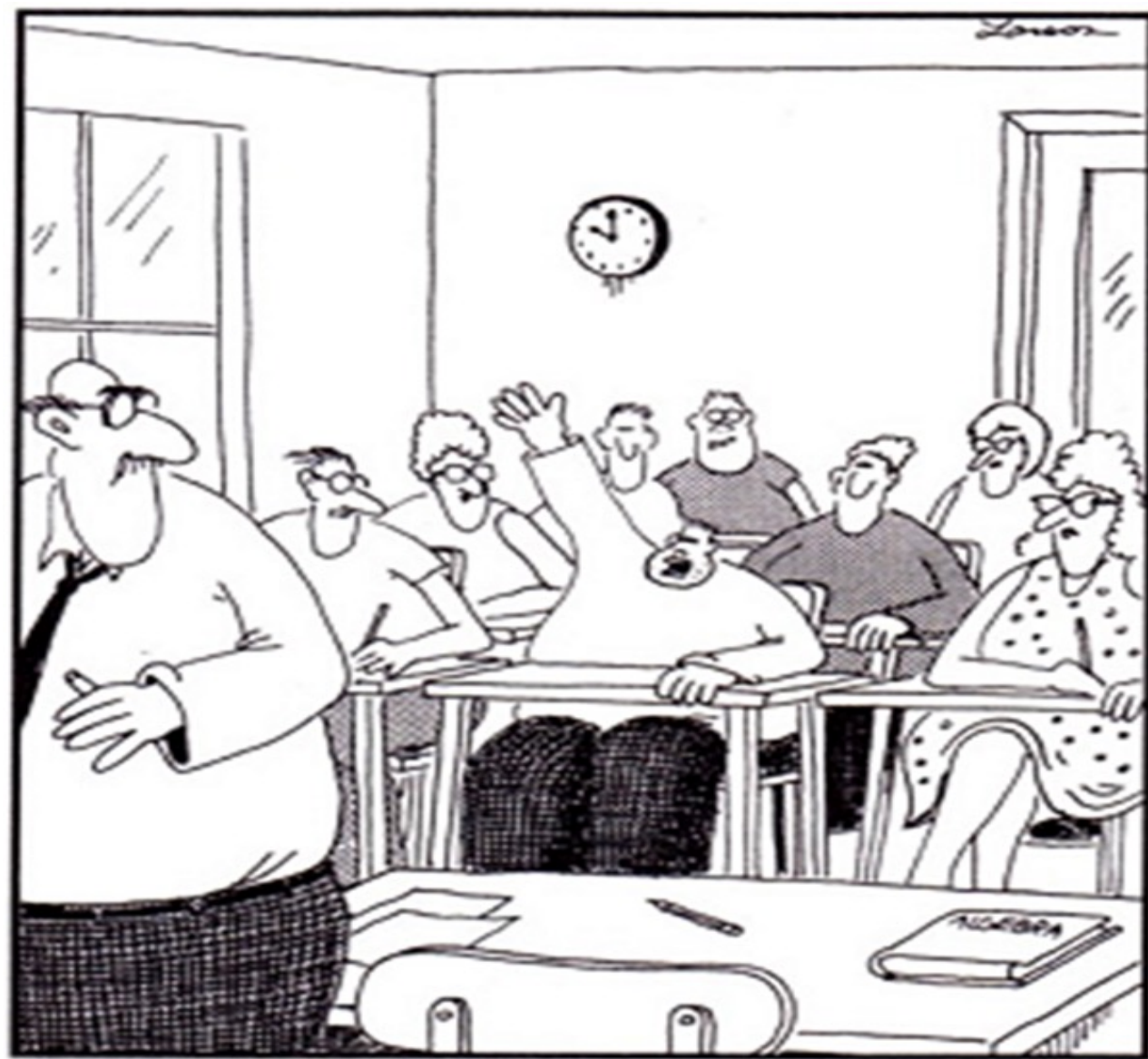
You can't test
until the child is 8

You must test
every 3 years

No testing if the
school is doing
RTI

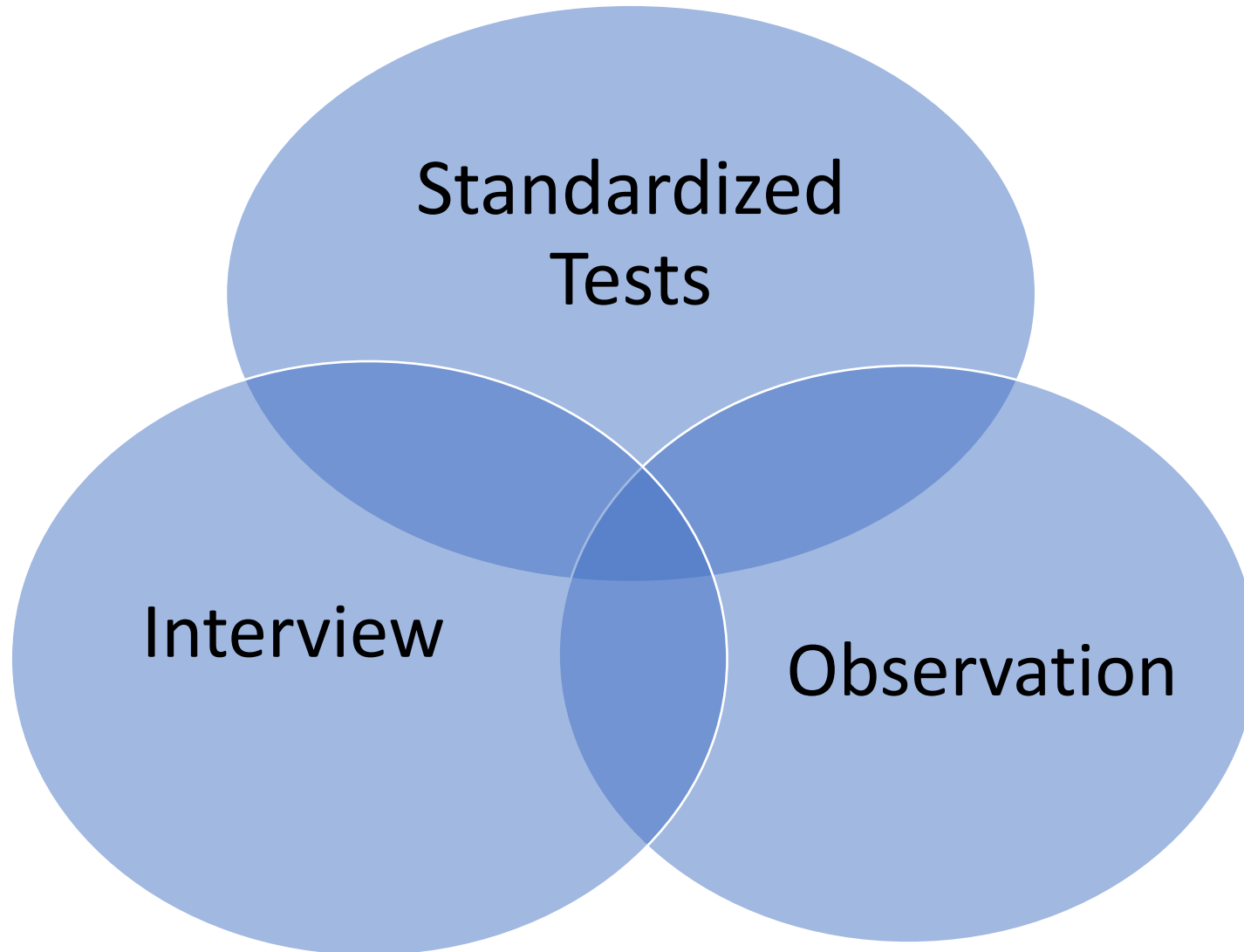
Can't test until
the child falls
below grade level





"Mr. Osborne, may I be excused? My brain is full."

WHAT is Testing? WHAT is Assessment?



WHAT testing/assessment is right for us?

Neuropsychological
Testing

Psychoeducational
Testing

“Autism Testing”

SL/OT/PT/Aud

Educational
Assessment

Devt
Ped/Psychiatrist
Assessment

WHAT gets assessed? *All* areas of need

Cognitive abilities
(IQ)

Attention/Executive
Functioning

Memory

Language

Social Functioning

Visual Motor
Integration

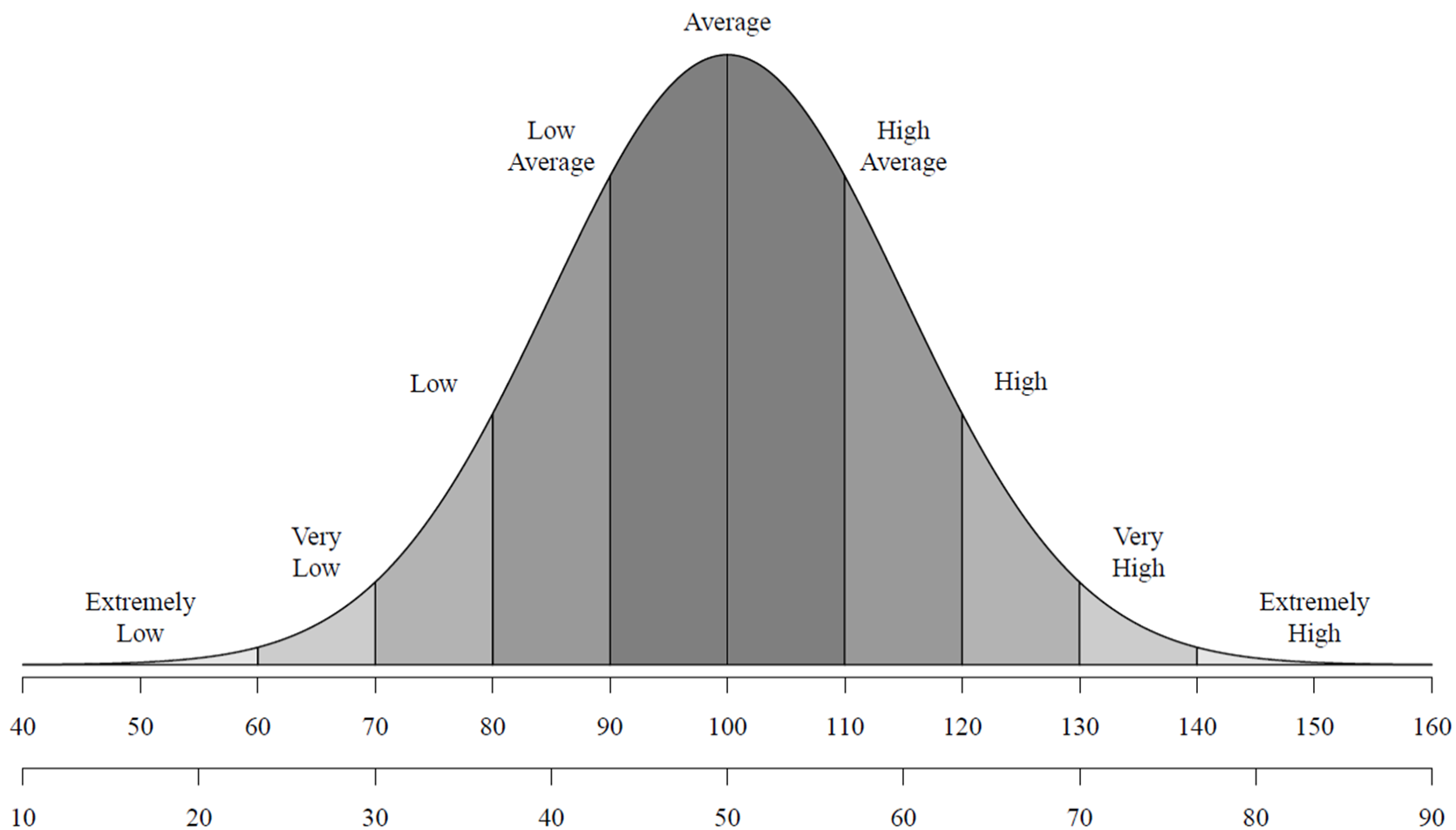
Developmental
progression

Academic
achievement

Adaptive
Functioning

Standardized test scores compare people to their peers

Standard Scores



WHAT are standardized measures?



To be reliable and valid, the assessor follows standardized procedures



Directions, prompts, and materials are the same for every test-taker



Standardized measures solicit behavior “on demand”



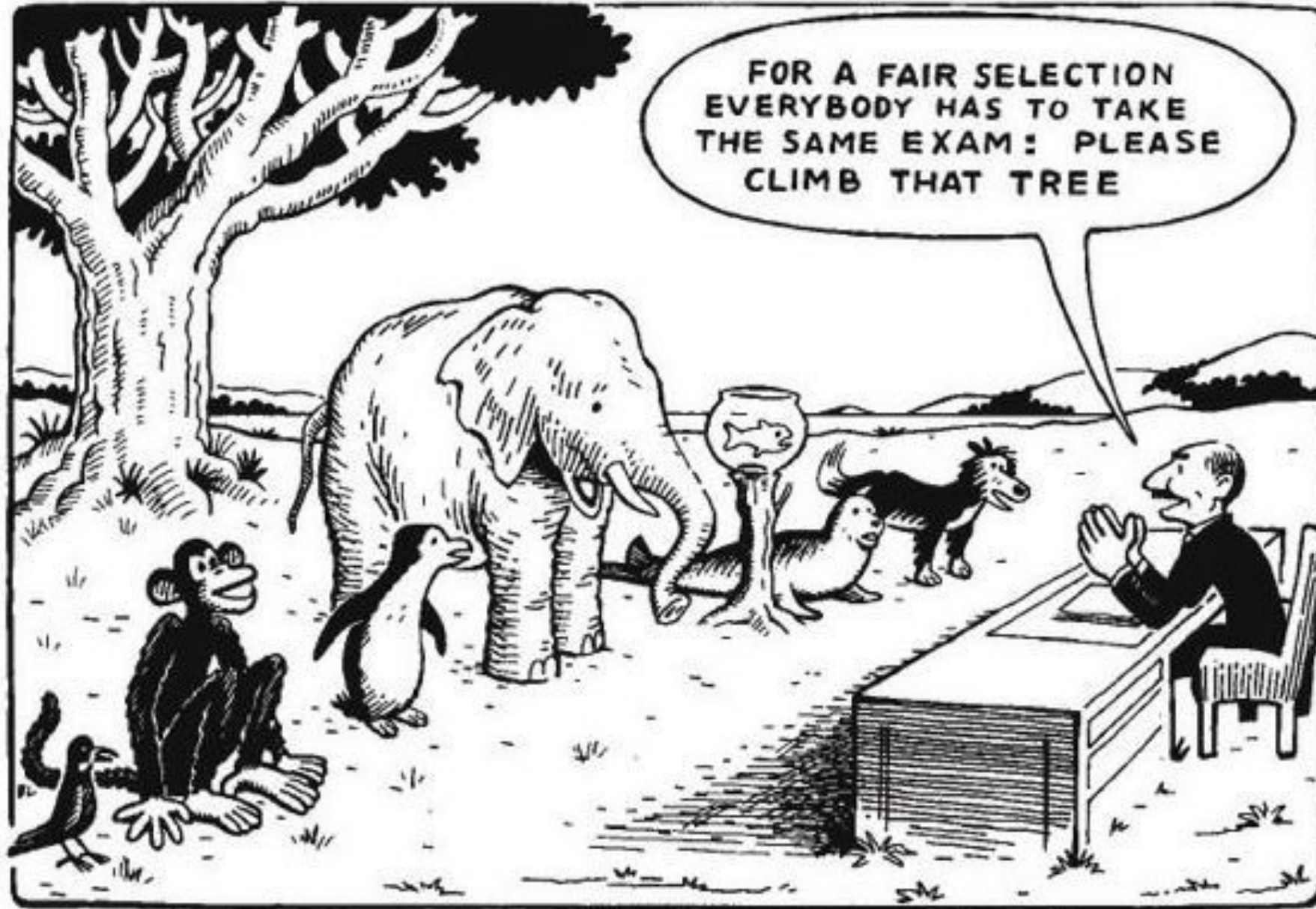
For them to be valid, a person must have similar characteristics to the “norm population” used to design the test

Myths about psychological tests

- There are “gold standard tests”
- Test data are not valid for people with disabilities, POC, or those from marginalized groups
- Low scores mean no progress
- IQ is meaningless
- Test scores are not the whole picture of a person’s potential



FOR A FAIR SELECTION
EVERYBODY HAS TO TAKE
THE SAME EXAM: PLEASE
CLIMB THAT TREE



But where does that
leave neurodiverse
people or those with
disabilities?

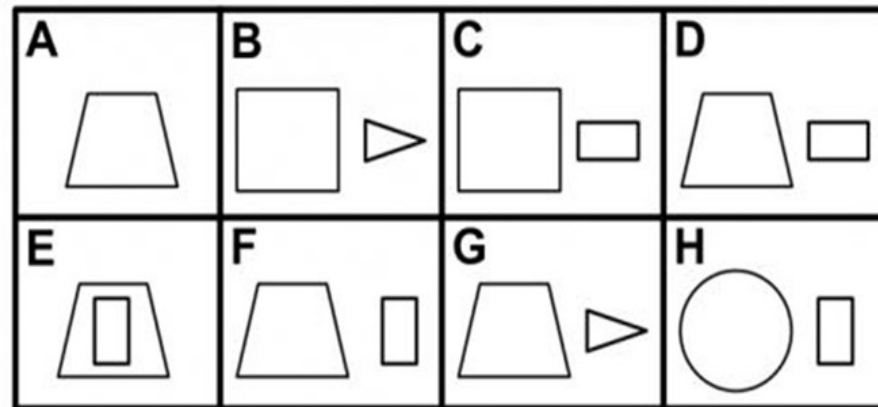
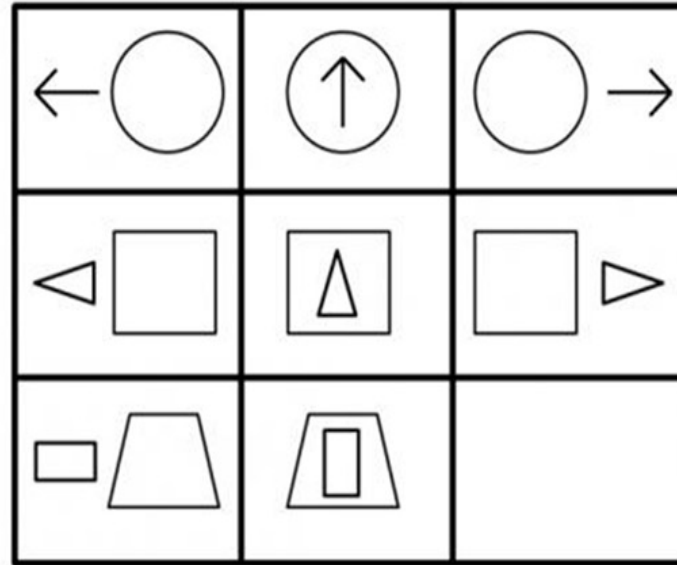
HOW do we create a useful testing experience for *all* patients?

- Psychologists have a strict ethical code
- First, do no harm!
- Select tests that can obtain valid results
- Be honest about the limitations of your data
- Focus on strengths *and* areas of need
- Keep up with the research!



HOW can
psychologists
assess
intellectual
ability?

Nonverbal
Measures



Psychologists also use Verbal Measures



Vocabulary:

What is a pocket?

What does hibernate mean?

What is collusion?

Analogies/Similarities:

How are Mars and Mercury alike?

Knife is to cut as pencil is to _____?

Poverty is to money as illness is to _____?

Background Knowledge:

What day comes after Monday?

Why shouldn't you talk to strangers?

Why do societies have laws?

“How is a raven like a writing desk?” – The Mad Hatter

HOW do we assess receptive and expressive language?

- Vocabulary Point to “excited”

What does “excited” mean?

- Morphology “Today I eat pancakes. Yesterday I ___ pancakes.”

- Syntax “Make a sentence with these words: Cat, mouse, hole, chased”

Do these mean the same? “The dog chased the boy. The boy chased the dog.”

- Social communication “It was easy as pie”

“How do you ask a teacher for help?”

How can you ask your friend to play 4-Square?



Nationalgeographic.com

HOW do we assess social skills?

Your friend accidentally spilled a drink on you. What would you say and how would you say it?”

Roy’s teacher said, “Cat got your tongue?” What did she mean?

Kim and Maria had an argument before school. They sat at different lunch tables. Why?

Pretend you are this girl, what are you thinking?



HOW do we assess reading?

- Receptive and Expressive Language development
- Phonological/Phonemic processing
- Letter/word recognition
- Decoding and decoding speed
- Reading word/text fluency
- Reading comprehension—literal *and* inferential



Note that assessing for a Fountas and Pinnell “Level” is not an evidence-based reading assessment!

HOW do we assess mathematics?

- Number sense
- Visual working memory
- Basic fact automaticity
- Concept development
- Applied problems
- Calculation skills
- Fluency



It is critical to discriminate between “skills gaps” and underlying cognitive problems impacting mathematics progress

HOW do we assess written expression?

- * Visual motor integration
- * Fine motor control
- * Letter formation automaticity
- * Spelling (encoding)
- * Letter and word writing fluency
- * Sentence composition
- * Sentence/text writing fluency
- * Text composition/organization
- * Ability to communicate effectively through writing



[Knowdownsyndrome.wordpress.com](http://knowdownsyndrome.wordpress.com)

Written expression is our most complicated area to assess

HOW can psychologists personalize testing?

- Motor free tests (multiple choice)
- Language free tests (multiple choice, selection response, pictorial directions)



Modifying Standardized Procedures

- Shorter assessment periods
- Movement or sensory breaks
- Extra explanations and modeling (“testing the limits”)
- Allowing a child to sit, stand, or use fidgets/sensory input devices
- Use of assistive technology (communication devices, magnifiers, hearing aides)
- Allowing a parent/support animal to be present



American Libraries Magazine

Testing in a sensory friendly environment

Sensory-Friendly Environment



**Dimmed
lighting**



Reduce noise



**Create quiet
zones**



**Offer
bathrooms**



Offer seating



Alleviate smells



Remove clutter

 Sensory Friendly Solutions

Ask about:

Parking garages

Elevators

Bathrooms with autoflush
toilets/hand dryers

Fluorescent/LED lighting

Waiting room/offices

Places to take breaks

HOW do you accommodate test takers with neurodiversity, special needs, or disabilities?

Who will be performing the testing? What are their qualifications?

What is the evaluator's level of training and experience with children like mine?

My child becomes overwhelmed when ___ happens, how will you accommodate him/her/them?

I'd like you to consider the following accommodation, is that something you are comfortable doing?

If my child/teen does not agree to participate, or becomes frustrated, how will we handle that?

Take Aways:

- Testing is all about understanding a unique human being
- Testing should focus on documenting support needs
- Testing should be focused on figuring out how to your child reach his/her/their potential
- Testing should focus BOTH on strengths *and* areas of need
- A disappointing or unexpected result does not mean the assessor did not do a good job
- Parents can, and should, advocate for a good testing experience that meets their child's needs
- Testing a child 14 or older MUST consider transition



Thank You for Having Me!

— Dr. Rebecca Resnik

