

Review of: "Facing the Facts About Test Score Gaps"

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The article is interesting. It poses an issue that, perhaps, some scholars who studied international differences in IQ have wondered about. There are, moreover, some cases of scholars who have been penalised for publicly claiming that racial differences in IQ have, in part, genetic causes. I will dwell briefly on some of the articles' statements and then I focus on the question it raises that, essentially, concerns the ethics of research.

Section 2.1. After sixty years of aggressive policy measures in the US to address the gap, a very substantial US black-white test score gap stubbornly remains.

For the sake of completeness, it should be added that policies in the US have not eliminated the economic and social differences between Blacks and Whites. On the contrary, in the US socio-economic differences between social groups are in many respects increasing. The incidence of poverty remains notably greater among blacks than whites, the schools and colleges attended by blacks are generally of lower quality than those attended by whites, and there are huge differences between the social and family backgrounds of the black and white population. Until these differences are eliminated, it will be impossible to say with certainty that the causes of racial differences in IQ in the US, as in other countries, have genetic roots. The same applies to the alleged regional differences in IQ within some countries, such as Italy or Spain (a thesis supported, for example, by R. Lynn).

Section 2.2. "Cross-national comparisons of average cognitive ability".

School tests, such as PISA, are not designed to measure IQ, even though across nations average IQ and academic test scores are significantly correlated. This correlation, in my opinion, does not support the validity of school tests such as PISA as a measure of intelligence but, on the contrary, casts doubt on the validity of IQ tests as a measure of general intelligence (g) across nations/populations. Differences in school test scores depend on both socioeconomic factors and the quality of education systems. Given the magnitude of international differences in these factors, it is not possible to attribute the differences in average school tests between students in developed countries and students in poor countries to genetic factors. The differences in social, economic, and cultural contexts and education systems between poor and rich countries are, in fact, enormous and can be hardly controlled by statistical regressions.

Section 2.4. "Differences in IQ between individuals depend on genetic factors; shared environment; unshared environment".

This is certainly the case. These three factors do not act independently, but interact with each other: the role of genetics is

meaningless if it is not considered in relationship with the environment (G x E). A good example is the differences in stature between individuals. So, to quantify the role of genetics in IQ differences you would have to have perfect equality in environmental conditions in different populations/groups. If so, the variance in environmental factors would then be zero (or close to zero) and differences between groups would depend solely on the environment. But the socioeconomic differences between populations and nations (and between races) are enormous. Consequently, based on international results in school tests, you cannot deduce what role genetics plays in explaining international differences in intelligence.

In addition, I note that the article does not recognise the role of epigenetic factors in the development of intelligence. Epigenetic factors could be very important in the context of international differences in IQ. We know that the average IQ increases with the socio-economic development of nations (Flynn effect). This may also be relevant from an epigenetic perspective.

Discussion. The article does not offer novel or convincing evidence on the role of genetic factors in racial differences in IQ but, after all, this is not its main objective.

Essentially, the article under review poses an ethical problem regarding the “freedom of research” and, therefore, could be submitted to a Philosophy journal.

The problem posed by the article is: should results that support genetic differences in IQ between human races be freely and openly discussed or, instead, ignored or elided from scientific debate? Is it right that scholars who support this thesis should be ostracised by the scientific community or, possibly, penalised?

Actually, I think the ethical problem could be reversed. Is it fair to claim that differences in IQ between races are partly genetic considering that there is no sound scientific evidence supporting this claim?

A claim that differences in IQ test scores between races are, in part, due to genetic factors is, at present *not supported* by sound evidence and is, above all, dangerous. The reason is quite obvious: intelligence is the most important characteristic of humans. Claiming that some human races are more intelligent than others inevitably would fuel social and political discrimination because it implicitly classifies human races according to an IQ scale. History has had tragic experiences stemming from racial classification.

So, the issue is twofold: there is an ethical problem concerning the freedom of research, and there is an ethical problem concerning the risks arising from claims about a genetic cause of IQ differences between human races. Ethics should be a guiding principle of scientific research, especially in areas that are so sensitive due to their human and social implications.

Claims that racial differences in IQ are genetic are scientifically questionable, are dangerous and are of no use to anyone. Consequently, the scientific community has made an ethical and political choice to avoid the possible harmful consequences that would arise from statements such as these. Since it is an ethical and moral choice, it is debatable. But it is a choice that has a noble social objective that clearly prevails over the others.

Best regards,



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