

Race, Gender and IQ

In modern-day America, anyone arguing that the difference in average IQ between blacks and whites, or the difference in the distribution of IQ between men and women, at least partly explains the difference between average black and white income or between male and female numbers in fields such as mathematics, risks being accused of racism or sexism. Striking examples of the possible consequence of such an accusation are provided by the cases of James Watson and Lawrence Summers. Watson, who received a Nobel prize for his role in the discovery of the nature of DNA, arguably the most important biological breakthrough of the century, was so careless as to tell the *Times* that he was "inherently gloomy about the prospect of Africa" because "all our social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours - whereas all the testing says not really". He was attacked ferociously for the statement, accused of prejudice, stripped of titles and positions.

Prejudice is belief held without evidence. I now think that Watson's view was probably mistaken but there was evidence to support it — the average measured IQ in African countries was strikingly below that in European countries. His attackers, so far as I could tell, had no evidence in support of their view, were acting on pure prejudice.

Summers, then president of Harvard, commenting in an academic talk on the small numbers of women in elite academic positions in fields such as mathematics, offered several possible explanations. One of them was that although the average IQ of men and women was about the same, female IQ had a tighter distribution than male IQ. That would imply fewer women than men far out on the upper tail of the distribution, where Harvard math and physics professors are located. He was fiercely attacked for mentioning that possibility, forced out of his position at Harvard at least in part as a result. Again there was evidence for the claim, no evidence against.

The result of suppressing arguments for an unpopular view is that nobody honestly knows what conclusion would come out of an open debate, although many people may find it prudent to pretend to. Until very recently, the only convincing argument I had seen against the claim of lower African genetic IQ was Thomas Sowell's observation¹ that the average family income of immigrants to the U.S. from the West Indies reached the U.S. average in one generation. West Indians are blacker than Afro-Americans in both their genes and their skin color, so if Afro-Americans did badly because of their African genes, West Indian immigrants should do worse, and similarly if the reason was discrimination. Sowell offered instead an explanation based on the different cultures produced by differences between West Indian and North American slavery.²

I have now found more and better arguments against the hereditarian explanation of racial differences. Chanda Chisala is a Zambian immigrant who, like Sowell, is happy to engage in arguments on unfashionable subjects. His main topic is not Afro-American IQ but African IQ. He offers several independent lines of evidence to show that its low measured value, variously claimed to be 70 or 80, cannot be due to African genes.

One part of his evidence is the academic performance of African immigrants in first world countries, where they are exposed to a first world environment, physical and educational. U.K. data on student performance is available not merely for racial groups conventionally defined but

¹ In *Ethnic America*.

² Judging by Chisala's account, Sowell later modified the theory, still attributing the result to culture but with a different explanation of its origin.

for linguistic subgroups within those populations. Africans on average, many of them recent refugees with no prior experience of English, do not do particularly well, but a considerable number of the African subgroups, including the two largest Nigerian tribes, Igbo and Yoruba, substantially outperform the native English, in some cases East outperform Asians as well.

Chisala's U.S. evidence is more anecdotal. One year, a single college applicant in the U.S. was accepted by all eight Ivy League schools. He was a Nigerian immigrant. Another Nigerian immigrant is a serial entrepreneur who invented a computer application, founded a company, and sold it to Apple for an estimated billion dollars.³ Black students in elite universities are African or West Indian immigrants or their children in numbers far out of proportion to their share of the population.⁴ In at least one context where data happen to be available, black refugee immigrants, not native speakers of English, substantially outperformed in school Afro-Americans. That is the opposite of the result one would expect if Africans were genetically inferior in intelligence to whites, since Afro-Americans, unlike Africans, have significant white ancestry.

His second line of argument is that African performance in checkers and Scrabble competition would be impossible if African average IQ were anything like as low as the estimates. While success in Scrabble at low levels depends in large part on vocabulary, the critical skill in high level competition is the ability to do the mental arithmetic needed to decide which of alternative plays will give the player the most points and his opponent the fewest. Top white players have very high IQ; many are mathematicians. Yet a substantial fraction of the world's top players of checkers, including some at the very highest level, are African, and a substantial fraction of the top players of English language Scrabble, including at least one world champion, are from Nigeria.

In 2015, of the ten top players in the French Scrabble championship, three were from France, three from Gabon, three more from other African countries. Gabon is an ex-French colony with a population of 1.7 million. If one believes Richard Lynn's figures on its IQ average and standard deviation, there should not be a single person in the country close to the intelligence level of top Scrabble players. Similar arguments make it very nearly impossible that Nigeria could have as many of the world's top players of English Scrabble as it does if those estimates were close to correct.

Africans do not do nearly as well at chess. Chisala's explanation is that for chess, unlike Scrabble or checkers, playing at the highest level requires extensive instruction in the literature of the game, so much so that Bobby Fisher found it necessary to learn Russian in order to read the Russian chess literature. Few Africans have the opportunity for that sort of training. Russia has dominated modern chess competition at the highest level not because Russians are smarter than other people but because the Soviet Union chose to put a lot of resources into subsidizing the training of its chess players for purposes of international prestige. They put resources into checkers for the same reason, only to find their dominance challenged by players from Africa.

The evidence Chisala offers does not tell us whether the average African genetic IQ is 95, 100, or 105, but it is clearly not 70 or even 80. That conclusion is one that those skeptical of the

³ [Chinedu Echureo](#), the inventor of HopStop.

⁴ "While about 8 percent, or about 530, of Harvard's undergraduates were black, Lani Guinier, a Harvard law professor, and Henry Louis Gates Jr., the chairman of Harvard's African and African-American studies department, pointed out that the majority of them -- perhaps as many as two-thirds -- were West Indian and African immigrants or their children, or to a lesser extent, children of biracial couples." ([Top Colleges Take More Blacks, but Which Ones?](#), NYT June 24, 2004)

hereditarian position will be happy with. Other parts of his argument are not. In the process of arguing that Scrabble performance at the high end requires a high IQ, Chisala takes on the issue that got Lawrence Summers in trouble, the effect of the difference between male and female IQ distribution.

Explanations sometimes offered for why top physicists and mathematicians are almost all men are that women are culturally discouraged from entering such fields or discriminated against in them. That does not work for Scrabble, since more women than men play it and a large minority of the qualifiers to the North American Scrabble championships are women. Yet only about 5% of the highest rated players are women and no woman yet has won the world championship. As Chisala puts it, “This rising gender disparity as you go higher in expert Scrabble is a big win for the hereditarian corner of the gender-and-intelligence debate.”

He goes on to write:

However, as we have seen many times in this research, a big win for the hereditarian side comes with a hidden pact with the devil: a victory in the gender-and-intelligence debate logically implies a decisive loss in the race-and-intelligence debate (you truly can't have your cake and eat it in this world). How is it that black Africans, who (on average) are supposed to be about 30 IQ points below white women and supposedly have lower visuospatial or mathematical intelligence and even lower variance in their intelligence distribution, can achieve what has been accepted as statistically impossible for white women – outperforming white men – ...

Chisala's evidence that the genetic IQ of Africans is at least comparable to that of whites raises the puzzle of why Afro-American IQ apparently is not. One obvious possibility is that observed lower IQ is due to environment rather than genetics. Chisala rejects that explanation, in part on evidence that the children of wealthy American blacks do less well than the children of poor whites despite what one would expect to be a more favorable environment, as well as evidence that African refugees, from much less favorable environments, outperform American blacks. He offers instead a genetic explanation.⁵ He conjectures that a feature of African genetics makes Africans more vulnerable than whites to unfavorable mutations and that such mutations were imported into the Afro-American gene pool early on by crosses with poor whites. While that could be true, I find his arguments for that conjecture less convincing than his arguments against the genetic inferiority of Africans, which leaves the puzzle of Afro-America IQ, for me, still unsolved.

One possible explanation for at least part of it is vitamin D deficiency. The adaptation to a high sunlight environment by which blacks are commonly recognized, dark skin, results in less conversion of sunlight to vitamin D. Milk in the U.S. is vitamin D fortified, but a large fraction of Afro-Americans are glucose intolerant and so unlikely to drink milk. It follows that Afro-Americans are considerably more likely than whites to suffer from Vitamin D deficiency, and there is [evidence](#) linking vitamin D deficiency in pregnant women to lower IQ of their children.

How might one combine that speculation with Chisala's evidence on the academic performance of African immigrants to the U.K.? The answer may be that a large fraction of the immigrants in question were born in an environment where their mothers were exposed to the level of sunlight they were adapted to. If that is the whole story, it implies that the next generation may not do as

⁵ Curious readers will find it, and much else, in the series that starts with <https://www.unz.com/article/the-iq-gap-is-no-longer-a-black-and-white-issue/> and goes on through eight more essays.

well. Unlike most other high latitude western countries, the UK does not fortify any staple food items with vitamin D, aside from a small amount added to margarine.

Part of what I like about Chisala is that he has taught me something I did not know: Having read him I am now confident that African genetic IQ is not significantly lower than European. I also like his approach to arguing. He treats Lynn and Jensen, probably the two most prominent of the hereditarian scholars, not as wicked racists but as able scholars who have, for understandable reasons, reached mistaken conclusions. Even when he finds Jensen misstating evidence in a way that makes it appear to support his position, he treats it as a single mistake in the work of a generally careful and competent scholar.

Part of what makes his work more persuasive than that of other critics of the hereditarian view of racial IQ is that he takes the other side's arguments seriously. Too many of the attacks on the hereditarian position are on the level of the claim that some races cannot have a lower IQ than others because there is no such thing as race, which is true in some technical sense but irrelevant to questions about the average IQ of races as conventionally defined, or the claim that what IQ tests measure doesn't matter, demonstrably false given its correlation with a variety of things that do matter.⁶ The best arguments offer evidence against the position, but evidence that might or might not stand up to serious criticism.⁷ That is the consequence of arguing in an environment where critics of the hereditarian position can be confident that most of their audience will never see the other side's arguments.

Each of Chisala's webbed essays is followed by a long thread of comments, many trying to explain away his evidence. He responds, in the comments or the next essay, by carefully examining the explanation and showing why it cannot be adequate. The result is a more convincing job of rebutting hereditarian arguments on race than is offered by other critics.

His rebuttals are entertaining as well as convincing. Responding to the argument that Africans who decide to migrate to the U.K. are a select group, much more intelligent than the African average, he offers statistics showing that many are poor, few have high end careers. He also writes, responding to one critic:

I do not really know how it works in Jamaica, but I am quite confident that realizing that life is better in a very rich country than in your poor country is never exactly the most g-loaded epiphany among Africans.

Nature vs Nurture: A Natural Experiment

One of the issues underlying arguments about race or gender and IQ, as well as related issues, is the question of to what degree the characteristics of an individual are due to his genetic inheritance, to what degree to the environment he was reared in. Children of well off and well-educated parents tend to end up richer and better educated than children of parents with the opposite characteristics. Is that because of a superior environment or superior genes?

⁶ For data on the subject see *The Bell Curve*, Part II.

⁷ One that I have seen used data on the illegitimate children of Afro-American servicemen stationed in Germany after the end of WWII, ignoring the fact that the fathers were not a random sample of Afro-American males. Another observed that differences in school performance between white and black students could be eliminated by a regression that controlled for differences in parental income, home environment, and the like — all to some degree proxies for parental IQ.

From 1970-1980, a large number of Korean-American children were placed for adoption by an agency which assigned them at random to adoptive families.⁸ That meant that any correlation between characteristics of the families, such as maternal education, socio-economic status, or income, and characteristics of the children as adults would be due to environment not genetics. By comparing the strength of the relation between characteristics of parents and adoptive children with the corresponding figure for parents and biological children raised by those parents, one can get at least some estimate of how much of the relation comes from which cause.

The conclusion is striking. An increase of one year in maternal education produces an increase of only .07 years in the education of an adoptive child but an effect four times as large on the education of a biological child. Similar results apply to a variety of other characteristics. It looks as though being brought up by well off or well-educated parents is indeed an advantage, but a considerably smaller advantage than being the biological child of such parents.

One important qualification to that result is to note that all of the adoptive families had to be certified by the adoption agency as suitable to adopt. That would presumably cut off some of the lower tail of the distribution—an alcoholic unmarried mother would be unlikely to qualify. And they had to be families that wanted to adopt, which again would eliminate some. But at least over the range of environments in the sample, nurture seems to be a good deal less important than nature.

The study, as so far described, is limited to particular readily measured characteristics of the adoptive parents. Having a well-educated adoptive mother doesn't have much effect on how much education you get, but having an adoptive mother who cares a lot about her children and pays them a lot of attention might.

To test that possibility the author of the paper looked at the relation between characteristics of siblings. Adoptive siblings, like biological siblings, are brought up in the same household, but, unlike biological siblings, are not genetically related. If some households are much better places to be brought up in than others, one would expect the result to show up in the relation between (say) years of education of adoptive siblings.

There is such a relation, but it is only a little stronger, relative to the corresponding relation between biological siblings, than in the parent/child case. An extra year of education by an adoptive sibling predicts, on average, an extra .09 years of education, for a biological sibling an extra .29. The effect is stronger for income: .16 vs .29.

A further limitation in the study is that it does not distinguish a relation due to shared genetics from one due to pre-natal environment. Arguably, better educated and higher income mothers are in better condition during pregnancy, which could result in better children for (pre-natal) environmental reasons rather than genetic reasons. That does not affect the absolute level of the effect for adoptive children but might make the genetic contribution to the difference between adoptive and biological look larger than it really is.

Ethnic Cleansing, Other Horrors, and the Racial IQ Controversy

"It is never too much to remember how much ethnic cleansing was made in the past based on "scientific evidence" that some races were "not as intelligent as ours"..."

⁸ My source for this section is Bruce Sacerdote, ["What Happens When We Randomly Assign Children to Families?"](#)

(from a comment on my blog)

It is a common claim, but I do not think there is much evidence for it. Ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia, where the term originated, had nothing to do with any scientific evidence, real or bogus, about the relative intelligence of races. In some cases, the cleansers and their victims differed only in whether their ancestors had or had not converted to Islam in the distant past. In others, the justification offered for the cleansing was "they have taken over our land by immigrating and having more babies than we did, and we want it back."

What about the Holocaust? Some Nazis made claims about Jewish inferiority, but the basis for their anti-semitism was the idea that Jews were race enemies, in which case the more intelligent they were, the more dangerous. One can see that pretty clearly in Henry Ford's less malevolent version of anti-semitism. In the post-war period, the largest scale race killing so far has been the Hutu/Tutsi conflicts in southern Africa. It is hard to believe that any significant amount of it was motivated by evidence of IQ differences between the two groups, and the killing has gone in both directions.

If we shift the subject from killing to enslaving, the case becomes a little stronger. One argument used against freeing black slaves was that they were less intelligent, so unable to run their lives themselves, although it is hard to see that as a plausible argument for enslaving them in the first place. One justification offered for that was that it exposed them to Christianity, which presumes that they are at least sufficiently equal to have souls worth saving. But the main justification I have seen offered, insofar as any was needed beyond the usefulness of slavery to slave owners, was biblical, the "sons of Ham" argument. And, of course, black slavery, in the New World and earlier in the Islamic world, long predates the invention of IQ. In classical antiquity, slaves were frequently of the same ethnic stock as the slave owners.⁹

Readers are invited to submit any historical example of genocide, ethnic cleansing, or slavery where either the main reason or the main justification offered was scientific or pseudo-scientific evidence that the victims were, on average, less intelligent than the perpetrators. When I put that question on my blog, the best answer I got was the case of the Nazis killing Slavs on the grounds that they were in some sense inferior to the Germans. But the main reason, pretty clearly, was that the Germans needed *lebensraum* and Slavs were occupying the real estate they wanted.

⁹ Aristotle argued that some people were natural slaves, hence slavery was not always unnatural, but not that that provided a justification for all actual slavery.