



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on May 23, 2019

Dumb and Dumber: Many Developed Countries Are Imperiled by Falling IQ

If people seem dumber than ever, as curmudgeons might complain, it may not be just your imagination. For studies show that in a number of Western countries, IQ scores are dropping notably.

As *Science Alert* [reports](#), “A defining trend in human intelligence tests that saw people steadily obtaining higher [IQ scores](#) through the 20th century has abruptly ended, a new study shows.”



“The [Flynn effect](#) — named after the work of New Zealand intelligence researcher James Flynn — observed rapid rises in [intelligence quotient](#) at a rate of about 3 IQ points per decade in the 20th century, but new research suggests these heady boom days are long gone,” the site continues.

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“An analysis of some 730,000 IQ test results by researchers from the Ragnar Frisch Centre for Economic Research in Norway reveals the Flynn effect hit its peak for people born during the mid-1970s, and has significantly declined ever since.”

Of course, there are legitimate questions about IQ tests (and also many illegitimate questions designed to rationalize away unwelcome realities. For example, the same people who’ll dismiss such tests as “culturally biased” in one situation may use them to buttress a point in a different situation. They’ll also usually take pride in their own high IQs — in the rare instances in which they actually possess such).

Nonetheless, “[IQ tests in use](#) throughout the world today really do seem to capture something meaningful and durable,” [writes](#) Evan Horowitz, of financial think tank FCLT Global, at NBC News. “Decades of research have shown that individual IQ scores predict things such as [educational achievement](#) and [longevity](#). More broadly, the average IQ score of a country is linked to [economic growth](#) and [scientific innovation](#).”

Thus, this dumbing-down phenomenon “could not only mean 15 more seasons of the Kardashians,” Horowitz quips, “but also the potential end of progress on all these other fronts, ultimately leading to fewer scientific breakthroughs, stagnant economies and a general dimming of our collective future.”

While Horowitz states that average IQ hasn’t yet dropped in the United States (take that, supercilious America haters!), unfortunately, declining IQs are not limited to just Norway. In fact, “A range of studies using a variety of well-established [IQ tests and metrics](#) have found declining scores across Scandinavia, Britain, Germany, France and Australia,” Horowitz also tells us.

So it does appear that “the IQ gains of the 20th century have faltered,” as researcher Flynn himself admits — and this reversal began around the turn of the millennium (video on the Norwegian study below).

What’s the reason? “One potential explanation was [quasi-eugenic](#),” Horowitz relates. “As in [the movie](#)



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[‘Idiocracy,’](#) it was suggested that average intelligence is being pulled down because lower-IQ families are having more children (‘dysgenic fertility’ is the technical term). Alternatively, widening immigration might be bringing less-intelligent newcomers to societies with otherwise higher IQs.”

Note, this is a good example of the aforementioned phenomenon of reflexively uttering IQ truths when convenient (or when it costs nothing). Via left-wing NBC, Horowitz has suggested that not only do different nations have different average IQs (and [world IQ statistics](#) do show profound variance), but also that the “average IQ score of a country is linked to [economic growth](#) and [scientific innovation](#).” Hmm, I seem to remember careers being ended for rendering such opinions.

Yet while such factors would have to be relevant, there’s more to it. After all, in the Norwegian study, “the researchers observed IQ drops occurring within actual families, between brothers and sons — meaning the effect likely isn’t due to shifting demographic factors as [some have suggested](#), such as the [dysgenic](#) accumulation of disadvantageous genes across areas of society,” *Science Alert* also informs.

“Instead, it suggests changes in lifestyle could be what’s behind these lower IQs, perhaps due to the way children are educated, the way they’re brought up, and the things they spend time doing more and less (the types of play they engage in, whether they read books, and so on).”

As for the Norwegian study, its title [states flatly](#), “Flynn effect and its reversal are both environmentally caused.” And Horowitz relates that one “leading explanation is that the rise of lower-skill [service jobs](#) has made work [less intellectually demanding](#), leaving IQs to atrophy as people flex their brains less.”

He continues, “There are also other possibilities, largely untested, such as global warming [making food less nutritious](#) [sorry, but that’s dumb] or information-age devices [sapping our ability to focus](#) [that’s smart].”

The last point is significant, but more must be said. As I [wrote](#) last year:

It’s not the historical norm for children to be raised on electronic gadgets and a Twitter, 280-character culture, and with politically correct teaching models. After all, it has long been said that “exercising the brain” is necessary for intellectual health. When human interaction and the reading of books — the classics in particular — are cast aside in favor of mindless screen addiction, hedonism, and leftist indoctrination, how much meaningful exercise is the brain getting?

In fact, it’s logical to assume that the bizarre, unprecedented exposure to electronic devices may influence the physical development of the brain, an organ quite malleable in childhood. Studies have shown the significance of environment, after all, that it can influence even gene expression. And given that an individual’s IQ may vary by up to 21 points in just several years, we should be concerned that our arid-intellectual-desert society may be crippling the young — between the ears.

In other words, children’s brains exhibit great [neuroplasticity](#), and screen addiction [may affect cognitive development](#).

Yet there’s one more possible factor warranting mention. I often point out that increasing numbers of moderns deny the existence of Truth (absolute and above man, by definition) and descend into relativism; this engenders emotion-based decision-making and the “If it feels good, do it” mentality. After all, if everything is relative, why not just do what feels right?

This can lead to, to use a G.K. Chesterton characterization, “the suicide of thought.” In other words, perhaps nothing eliminates the desire to think — and the exercise it provides the brain — more than the belief that there’s nothing to think about because there are no answers (Truth) to be found. And



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operating on emotion doesn't require much smarts.

Whatever the case, Horowitz also quips that with IQ's significance to civilization, we'd better "pin down the precise reason IQ scores are dropping before we're too stupid to figure it out." That's for sure — unless we want to end up being an exhibit in a Chinese zoo.



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