



Bob Uttl <uttlbob@gmail.com>

Regarding your Manuscript "Meta-analysis: On average, undergraduate students' intelligence is merely average"

Bob Uttl <uttlbob@gmail.com>

Thu, Feb 8, 2024 at 2:06 PM

To: Frontiers in Psychology - Peer Review <psychology.editorial.office@frontiersin.org>, sjaswal@cus.ac.in, axel cleeremans <axcleer@ulb.ac.be>, "psychology@frontiersin.org" <psychology@frontiersin.org>

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URGENT AND CRITICAL

Dear Catriona Leslie, Dr. Jaswal, Dr. Cleeremans, and the Leadership:

I have not received an acknowledgment nor response to my prior two emails in response to Frontiers in Psychology "rejecting" the already peer-reviewed and already accepted paper. I have also not received the refund of the APC charges (USD 3,295.00) that I paid on January 22, 2024.

Please attend to the matter with the urgency it requires.

Best regards,

Dr. Bob Uttl

On Tue, Feb 6, 2024 at 11:19 PM Bob Uttl <uttlbob@gmail.com> wrote:

URGENT CONCERNS ABOUT FRONTIERS CONDUCT

Dear Catriona Leslie (and Dr. Jaswal and Dr. Cleeramans)

I have copied the three reviewers on this communication so that they can make informed choices as to whether they want to spend their time reviewing anything for the Frontiers in the future.

Please escalate this complaint to **the highest level of the Frontiers Media**.

As I pointed out earlier (but did not receive any reply yet), **the Frontiers in Psychology already accepted our paper**, after THREE reviews, published the abstract on its website (racking up 1,600 Altmetrics score in a month), accepted corrected copy proofs, and still shows the paper as accepted on the Frontiers in Psychology website.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1309142/abstract>

You stated: "Following the abstract being published online, a number of overstated claims were brought to the attention of our Research Integrity team. These claims were raised to the Specialty Chief Editor, who has since highlighted issues with the reporting, methods and analysis and the scope fit for the journal that warrant rejection." Whatever the Specialty Chief Editor did is in breach of the Frontiers policies given that the paper was already accepted and could not be rejected post-acceptance. Specialty Chief Editors do not have a right to pull accepted papers at their whims.

If someone brought some concerns about "overstated claims", they are in breach of Frontiers "Comments and complaints policy" (<https://www.frontiersin.org/guidelines/comments-and-complaints-policy>) that states:

"A reader who would like to raise a concern or complaint regarding a published article [and presumably its published abstract] in a Frontiers journal should email the relevant Frontiers editorial office with a letter addressed to the specialty chief editor outlining the complaint. The letter must contain the following information:

...

- details of the complainant's previous contact with the author or authors of the article

...

We haven't heard from anyone about any concerns with our abstract as required by the Frontiers Policy.

Furthermore, the process as outlined in the Frontiers policies does not allow Frontiers to reject an article that Frontiers already accepted at someone's whim or because someone dislikes our paper. If someone has some criticism of our paper, they are free to write that criticism up, have it reviewed, and publish it.

The Frontiers has also misinformed tens of thousands of readers of our abstracts (54,535 readers as of now) and millions of readers who read about it on X and in the news with its rejection of our already accepted and abstract-published paper. You have also wasted everyone's time: ours, the three reviewers, the editorial staff, 50,000+ readers, millions of readers on X, etc.. The Frontiers has tarnished its reputation among researchers with this ill-considered rejection following acceptance with no opportunity for authors to even address whatever secret concerns someone may brought to the Frontier's attention.

As to the "concerns" you summarized, they are invalid as anyone who read the paper with sufficient attention would know (see below). While different people may write the paper differently, for example, they may use "large" instead of "massive" to describe approximately 10 fold increase in educational attainment, that is not a reason to reject the paper following its acceptance. Furthermore, any "scope" issues should have been sorted out by the Frontiers immediately upon submission, back in October 2023, not after the acceptance, not after the Frontiers published the abstract, and not after millions of people read about it.

Please forward any letters sent to the Specialty Chief Editor regarding our paper and identify the Specialty Chief Editor or the person responsible for this rejection of our already accepted paper.

I am not sure how you will address publicly your post-acceptance rejection of our paper, including your weeks-long misinformation of tens of thousands of readers of our abstract and potentially millions of those who read about it, but I will follow up on it.

Given your post-acceptance rejection of our paper, please refund the APC charges immediately and confirm to me that you did so.

Finally, I also believe that the apology from the Frontiers and an explanation of **how the Frontiers secretly and extra-procedurally rejected the already accepted paper is in order. The Frontier's lack of transparency is astonishing.** The public and researchers need to know how it is possible to reject already accepted papers based on some alleged concerns by anonymous secret persons. They need to realize that acceptance in the Frontiers means nothing.

Best regards,
Dr. Bob Uttl

P.S. I have attached the copy proofs as submitted to us by the Frontiers for your perusal.

On Tue, Feb 6, 2024 at 3:25AM Frontiers in Psychology - Peer Review <psychology.editorial.office@frontiersin.org> wrote:

Dear Professor Uttl,

Thank you for your submission "Meta-analysis: On average, undergraduate students' intelligence is merely average" to Frontiers in Psychology.

We are sorry to say that we are rejecting the manuscript in its current form. Following the abstract being published online, a number of overstated claims were brought to the attention of our Research Integrity team. These claims were raised to the Specialty Chief Editor, who has since highlighted issues with the reporting, methods and analysis and the scope fit for the journal that warrant rejection.

>>> We submitted the paper a long time ago, it was reviewed by three reviewers who recommended acceptance, the Frontiers already accepted the manuscript, the Frontiers published the abstract on January 4, 2024, and millions of people around the world read about it.

 ShapeReporting quality issues

Title:

- The title is demeaning and uninformative. "merely" is a laden word, where the expectation was more. The title essentially says that the average is the average. This has no information. To have the title be informative, the first "average" in "on average" is to be read as "overall". The sentiment that the title brings may be deliberate, but there is no need to use tabloid-style titles for click-bait.

-> rephrase title to reflect the actual work

>>> The title succinctly reflects the actual work. The "average" refers to the mean. The use of "overall" would be misleading as it does not mean "average." The title is informative and no less than three reviewers raised no concerns about it. While someone else may have given it a different title, this is the title we decided on and which was approved by three reviewers.

Abstract:

- Again demeaning language is used. For example, under results it says "mere 102 IQ". Under discussion, it says "merely average". There is no need for this. Furthermore, the 6 points raised in this section without context can be too easily misinterpreted. It easily reads as "there is no point in going to university or to hire university graduates". This seems out of the realm of a meta-analysis.
- In lines 77-82, the tone of the article is laid out and it is far from neutral. These lines also indicate that this article is not a meta-analysis, but for the most part an opinion piece.
- The section between lines 84 and 127 is an all out attack on Gottfredson and Kaufman & Lichtenberger. This could have been packaged more sensitively. Instead, the authors add fuel to the fire and imply that Gottfredson and Kaufman & Lichtenberger are unscientific, unethical, and committed malpractice for not taking into account the Flynn effect.

>>> There is no demeaning language. The word "mere" means "being nothing more than" (see [merriam-webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com)). There is nothing demanding about a word "mere". If you would prefer word "only" instead of "mere" that would be an acceptable suggestion.

>>> Lines 77-82 have an appropriate tone. There is nothing at all that would indicate the article is an "opinion" piece and not "meta-analysis". The three reviewers raised no concerns.

>>> The statement that "The section between lines 84 and 127 is an all-out attack on Gottfredson and Kaufman & Lichtenberger" is false. The section tracks down the origin of the belief in a factual way. The section does not "imply that Gottfredson and Kaufman & Lichtenberger are unscientific, unethical, and committed malpractice for not taking into account the Flynn effect". However, to be clear, Kaufman himself stated in a published paper that "the failure to apply the Flynn correction [in Atkins cases] ... is tantamount to malpractice..." (see Reynolds, Chastain, Kaufman, & McLean, 1987) and we quote him/them for it.

Meta-Analysis:

- The meta-analysis section seems to be completely separate from the introduction. The tone is radically different and it is complete within 2.5 pages (compared to 5.5 pages of inflammatory introduction).

>>> The meta-analysis flows from the rationale in the introduction and there is nothing inflammatory in the introduction unless someone thinks that it is inflammatory to point out facts as to what Wechsler normative data say and to point out misinformation in scientific and popular literature.

Discussion:

- The discussion is far too long and not focused on the actual meta-analysis. The discussion starts by stating that later Wechsler tests are harder than earlier tests. Yet, the meta-analysis did not take this into account. In and of itself, this influences the perceived decline in IQ over the years.
- The first page of the discussion aims to give a neutral summary of the findings, but instead repeats the unfounded opinion that the widening participation policies of universities underlies to perceived decrease.

>>> The statement that "the meta-analysis did not take this [Flynn Effect] into account." is patently false. See the method, results, and figures that were corrected for Flynn Effect. Please read the paper before criticizing it.

>>> The first page of the discussion is the summary of the findings, neutral and based on facts. It is not an "unfounded opinion".

Methodological quality issues

Lines 198-202 contains an error, which is very wrong. It states "The basic laws of mathematics dictate that college students' and college graduates' IQs must have declined substantially over the last 80 years. For example, if 80% of the population pursues undergraduate education and if they have an average IQ of 115, the remaining 20% of the population would have to have an average IQ of 40 to maintain the average IQ of the entire population at 100."

This reasoning comes from this: If 80% have an IQ of 115, 20% have an IQ of X, and the total IQ is 100, then $X = (100 - 0.8 \times 115) / 0.2$. However, the maximum average IQ of 80% of a distribution with mean 100 and standard deviation 15 is around 105 IQ points. Hence, the example of IQ of 115 from 80% of the population is mathematically impossible. To get 115 IQ points the example would have to use 38.5% of the population. This is more than half the number used in the example, defeating the illustration of a detrimental impact of those with IQ less than 100 on the overall student IQ. In particular, the IQ of the remaining 61.5% of the population is around 90.6 IQ points to bring the overall IQ to 100.

The calculation used by the authors does not take the distribution into account, leading to false interpretations. This should be corrected.

>>> Lines 198-202 have no error. They explain, in simple terms, that the average IQ cannot be 100 if 80% of the population pursues undergraduate education. It is mathematically correct as your equations nicely demonstrated. It is an example designed to demonstrate that "the basic laws of mathematics dictate that college students' and college graduates' IQs must have declined substantially" as the proportion of the population pursuing undergraduate education increases. Of course, it would also create a non-normal distribution as you point out. However, the point is that the undergraduate students' IQ can't be 115 if 80% of the population pursue undergraduate degrees. If you wrote a paper yourself, you could have used a different example.

This same section also include many hints of the authors' opinion about the education and admission policies. In line 210, there is an unfounded use of "massive". In line 213, there is a suggestion of IQs having dropped "far below" where they once were, but no numbers are given. Crucially, there is no evidence presented in this section that "massive increases in college enrolments" is causing the drop in IQ of students. Yet, it is heavily implied in the narrative.

>>> The criticism that our use of "massive is "unfounded" is unfounded. The "massive" means "large" or "impressively large" which is what it indeed is (<https://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/massive>). But of you prefer "large" or "impressively large" we would consider it.

>>> Regarding line 213, the numbers are given just above inlines 202-210 -- please look and read before making false claims that "no numbers are given."

This latter point is again made in the opinionated paragraph in lines 228-237. There is no evidence presented that the IQ distribution differs between actual and normative data. Yet, the authors assumption is that it is and that it is due to colleges and universities admitting students with lower IQs.

>>> This criticism is unfounded. Again, it is necessary to read and consider what is written before criticizing it.

The authors tried pursued the reader that universities are admitting students with an IQ less than 100 (line 287). However, they use SAT scores instead of IQ scores. They go to great lengths to then justify this usage. They presume that the mean of the SAT total is the point of an IQ of 100. In fact Frey and Detterman (2004) used regression equations that include and intercept of 40 or 50 IQ points. This greatly decreases the authors' claim that "a large proportion" of universities are admitting students with an IQ less than 100. Finally, in this section, the authors

did not check the IQ distribution of students in the 1940s. Thus, there is no information presented on whether institutions at the time of 115 IQ points for undergraduates also admitted students with IQ less than 100.

>>> We did not try to persuade anyone; we outlined the facts. Readers can persuade themselves or they can continue to believe in myths. We used IQ scores, including Wechsler normative samples, as well as SAT scores. We do not "presume that the mean of the SAT total is the point of an IQ of 100." The College Board (2021b) provided those means and made clear that they represent "National Representative Sample" and we point the reader to it. Frey and Detterman (2004) did not have the data published 7 years later. Finally, IQs are standardized with SD of 15 so if the mean in 1940 was 115 IQ points it should be quite obvious that only about 16% of admitted students would score less than 100 in 1940.

Scope issues

The rest of the discussion has nothing to do with cognition or intelligence and is simply the senior author's frustration with the education system. This is again shown by picking out students who study Education having a lower IQ. The discussion also cites news sites and contains statements without references or evidence.

Note that this paper has nothing to say about cognition. It does not talk about intelligence as a cognitive faculty, but instead presents an opinion on institutional student admission policies. For this reason, it is out of scope.

>>> The comment "Note that this paper has nothing to say about cognition. It does not talk about intelligence as a cognitive faculty..." indicates that whoever made it is not even familiar with what cognition, intelligence, and "cognitive faculty" is. The individual does not understand that generational shifts in intelligence are saying something about shifts in cognition or "cognitive faculty"/cognitive ability across generations.

If you are willing to address these concerns, Frontiers in Psychology would be happy to consider a resubmission of the article to the Education section in Frontiers in Psychology. You will shortly receive a rejection notice which will close the submission with Frontiers - additionally, if paid, the APC will be reimbursed.

>>> The criticism leveled against our paper post-acceptance is unfounded. It appears to be copy/paste job from someone who does not want to see it published. Frontiers should not be censoring science but publishing it. Only fools would spend addressing unfounded concerns raised secretly with the Frontiers when the Frontiers editors do not even know their editorial and ethical responsibilities in dealing with concerns about already accepted papers.

Thank you for your submission.

Kind regards,
Catriona Leslie

Research Integrity Auditor Manager

Research Integrity



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