



5 August, 2006

Dean Svend Hylleberg  
Aarhus University

Dear Dean Hylleberg,

I write again in support of Prof. Helmuth Nyborg. My prior letter discussed obvious issues of process. New ones have arisen, chief amongst them whether Prof. Nyborg is being evaluated on the entirety of his research record (clearly, he is not, although that is specified explicitly by university guidelines), whether other scholars' work is being subjected to anything like this sort of scrutiny (again, obviously not), and the depressingly equally obvious issue of whether this investigation was politically instigated. Let us hold aside those issues, although historians will surely judge this affair on that basis.

Let me speak here only as a statistician and methodologist. I am most certainly *not* an expert in Prof. Nyborg's area of specialty, but came to know of his work due to its demonization in certain quarters, along with that of scholars like Arthur Jensen. Being naturally suspicious of any claims of inequality, I had hoped to find much of this work selective, unscholarly and statistically shoddy. Alas, it was not to be. Rather, Jensen, Nyborg, Gottfredson and many of their co-workers set a standard of empirical analysis that most psychologists would do well to adopt (I work extensively with psychologists, and I can speak with first-hand authority that the level of statistical sophistication and rigor in Prof. Nyborg's work is light years beyond what one typically encounters).

But let us restrict our purview only to the micro-slice of Prof. Nyborg's work that the committee was charged with examining. Yes, they found some irregularities. I have read them carefully, along with Prof. Nyborg's replies. It is my professional opinion that Prof. Nyborg's responses indicate two things with overwhelming clarity: (1) these errors were inadvertent and few in number; and (2) they were substantively inconsequential. Let me also add two points of my own. First, tools like Factor Analysis, although opaque to many, have been vetted by the statistical community for half a century, and are extremely well understood from both a theoretical and simulation-based (i.e., possible non-convergence and potential for empirical mis-application) perspective. Second, I would be shocked if you examined the work of *any* empirical researcher and failed to find errors of similar and greater magnitude. The committee report harps on such trivialities as typos in one digit of a reported sample size, the fact that there is attrition in longitudinal samples, and the like, and concludes that Prof. Nyborg must be dismissed. As Chomsky says, one must at least pretend to be serious.

Let me be clear that I cannot endorse the specific conclusions of Prof. Nyborg's sex difference research (because I am not qualified to do so), much less so the uses to

which some seem to have put it. But that's hardly the point. To bring up Chomsky again, in "Some Elementary Comments on the Rights of Freedom of Expression," he wrote:

*But it is elementary that freedom of expression (including academic freedom) is not to be restricted to views of which one approves, and that it is precisely in the case of views that are almost universally despised and condemned that this right must be most vigorously defended. It is easy enough to defend those who need no defense or to join in unanimous (and often justified) condemnation of a violation of civil rights by some official enemy.*

Chomsky was making his point about a notorious Holocaust-denier. With Prof. Nyborg, one confronts very nearly the opposite situation: someone who has devoted his life to scholarship, used the best methods available, passed dozens of articles through rigorous peer review at the most prestigious journals (why weren't these grave errors detected before, one wonders) and been universally lauded for doing so. That is, until now, when his career and legacy are being tarnished for mis-reading a formula and replacing a digit with an adjacent one in a sample size, among crimes of similar magnitude. But of course that's not the real reason, and it will not be long before that is known universally. One hopes the university will consider reversing its decision before it is set in stone and its reputation is tarnished as well.

Most Sincerely,

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