

University College London
Department of Psychology

5th September 2006

Dr S. Hylleberg
University of Aarhus
Denmark

Dear Dr Hylleberg:

Dr Helmuth Nyborg

I find it both shocking and profoundly depressing that I should feel the necessity of having to write this letter to an academic dean in a fine university and in a country renowned for its liberty and democratic institutions. I believe that Dr Nyborg has been more a victim of a witch-hunt than a balanced, rigorous and fair scientific enquiry of his research output.

I have known Dr Nyborg for 30 years. He was visiting the Oxford Department when I was a D.Phil (PhD) student there. Since then I have debated with him at conferences, listened to his lectures, and on occasion peer reviewed his papers. I have seen his data, challenged his conclusions and argued with him as any academic would. As past president of the *International Society for the Study of Individual Differences* I have heard him give presentations to his peer group who know his work well and are, as ever, careful scrutineers of theory and methodology in this area. They (we) are experts in this area and there has never been any question of his integrity in his research, of any sloppiness or any attempt to disguise or misrepresent findings.

Dr Nyborg is, quite justly, widely respected in the academic community as a fine scholar and meticulous researcher. He has long worked in the same area and has therefore an impressive data bank. Of course, his research touches on areas of socio-political debate and considerable popular controversy where scientific evidence is only sometimes used to inform issues. Dr Nyborg has found evidence of sex differences that accord perfectly well with many other related scientific findings and are of little surprise to the academic community (from many countries, disciplines and political persuasions).

However there will be those who do not like these conclusions and therefore seek to dispute them. It is a sad fact that have been many researchers in this area who have been subject to this sort of attack (Chris Brand, Hans Eysenck, Lind Gottfredson, Phil Rushton). Each have gone through similar attacks on their research, personal integrity and so-called political bias. It seems clear that when their data, analysis and conclusions

have been very carefully inspected they have all been “cleared” of many false accusations. I believe the same will and should happen to Dr Nyborg.

Inevitably there will remain disagreements about data analysis. The experts disagree about the most useful, veridical and sophisticated methods, little more so than in factor analysis. There is no one, simple, correct way that everybody agrees on. Further there are various restrictions all researchers have on reporting their data. This is dictated by amongst other things, journal style and word length. Most academics invite others to write to them for further information and are happy to share their data for further analysis. Few are compelled to do so but I am sure mostly happy to do so. In fact yesterday I sent a large data bank to a colleague who requested it.

Your committee has spent considerable time and effort re-examining Prof Nyborg’s data. The question is what conclusions one can draw from it. The fact that they dispute certain issues and draw different conclusions is far from surprising. That occurs in all areas, with all data banks. It is the very stuff of the scientific enterprise. I believe that if another committee were to be formed by other experts they too might dispute *both* your committee *and* Dr Nyborg’s conclusions. This is not an argument for relativism but rather to point out that things are far from clear in the multifactorial world of the social sciences.

The issue is whether Dr Nyborg has followed ethical and scientific guidelines in his research and whether he distorted, misreported or mis-analysed his data for his own advantage. I believe that there is no evidence of this. I believe that this enquiry has quite unjustly challenged the fine reputation of an excellence scientist.

I trust that common-sense and justice will prevail in the end

Yours sincerely

Adrian Furnham
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Professor of Psychology