

Comments on the UVVU decision of 28. October 2013 in the Decay-case.

The case

Two psychologists, professor emer. Jens Mammen at Aarhus University and assistant professor Jens Kvorning at Alborg University, and lic. Scient. Morten Kjeldgaard at Aarhus University filed on 12. September 2011 a case of scientific fraud against Helmuth Nyborg (HN) at the official *Committee for Scientific Fraud* (UVVU) under the *Ministry for Research, Innovation, and Higher Education*, in Denmark.

The complaints related to the publication of Helmuth Nyborg's (HN) paper *The Decay of Western Civilization: Double Relaxed Darwinian Selection* (first published online on 2. April 2011, and then printed in 2012 in *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 53, issue 2, 118-125).

As the case has international connections, these comments are in English, and all translations are mine.

The accusations

The accusations vary both in scope and nature: Improper use of academic titles. Extensive plagiarizing. Misleading and manipulative application of data. Misleading references. HN did not properly describe the unusual and misleading statistical methods. Data and methods lack transparency. Another person has written substantial parts of the paper, but this is deliberately not being acknowledged. We see a case of illegal "Ghost Authorship". There exists a "hidden" contract between the HN and an economist (JEV), who is secretly hired as consultant to supply commercially available demographic data for money; the hidden deal is that his name should be kept secret. The paper exemplifies uninformed taking over of other peoples' ideas, methods, and arguments. There are hidden preconditions for use of the method applied. HN presents misleading interpretation of his own results and conclusions. He deliberately omits data from other sources that would weaken the conclusions. HN deliberately ignores the fact that birth rates are declining in practically the whole world. HN deliberately ignores relevant and contradictory data from *Danmarks StatistikBank*. HN misapply "all the talk" about genetics and Darwinian selection as purely ornamental (staffage). HN intends to provide his paper with an undeserved biological/genetic authority. HN misinforms his readers by pretending support from natural science. HN nourished improper personal relationships to the international journal that published his paper, by publishing plagiarized and misleading research in a special issue in the journal, for which he was the editor. The Decay article is an example of downright promotion of right extremist propaganda. The Decay article serves the secret purposes of a right-extremist organization (Den Danske Forening). The Decay article weakens the international trustworthiness of national Danish research, because it is secretly subjected to external, strongly politically motivated, interests.

The verdict

After more than two years of proceedings, the UVVU came on 28. October 2013 to the conclusion that out of the multiple accusations of fraud two actually seemed to have substance.

1. UVVU thus finds HN guilty of scientific fraud as he presented a misleading reference to a data source. This compares to uninformed construction of data or substitution with fictive data.
2. A majority of the UVVU committee (4) finds HN guilty of scientific fraud as he wrongfully assumed the role of sole author. A minority (2) finds that HN has not wrongfully indicated authorship.

UVVU therefore requests that HN's Decay paper shall be retracted in accordance with their Paragraph 15, stk. 1, nr. 2.

Comments

I will in this brief response not use any space and time on all the accusations, which UVVU found to be insubstantial, but will concentrate on commenting to the two UVVU found had substance.

Ad.1. Misleading reference

Based on an evaluation by an external expert (Lisbeth B. Knudsen; LBK), UVVU concluded that the reference to the UN birth data was misleading, because it was used to support data, which are not found there. Actually, this is about a conversion from the parameter Total Fertility to the parameter Crude Birth Rate. This conversion is seen by the UVVU as a serious breach of good scientific practice, which must be paralleled with uninformed construction of data or substitution with fictive data, and this breach was committed with gross negligence from HN's side.

The reference is not misleading, however, but it is true that the methodology section in the Decay article does not describe the proportional parameter transformation, which is needed for the UN Total Fertility Rates to be used in the mathematical projection model applied in the paper, as it requires Crude Birth Rate as input. A few plain words suffice to illustrate this straightforward transformation and what it means.

When two countries have similar Total Fertility Rates (the UN measure presented), and close to or similar distribution of ages, then there will be born close to or a similar number of children per 1.000 per year (Crude Birth Rates) in the two countries. Likewise, if two countries have very different Total Fertility Rates, and comparable age distributions, then the number of children born per 1.000 per year will be very different in the two populations.

To transform one measure into the other we needs straightforward proportionality calculation. This has nothing to do with substitution with fictive data, as claimed. The obvious character of this operation is the most likely reason why several anonymous international review specialists did not ask HN to add the description of it to the methodology section, well knowing that

the paper was under heavy space restrictions (max. 5.000 words total). They also knew that it makes no difference whatsoever to the conclusion of the study.

However, as soon as this omission was seen as problematic, HN submitted an Addendum to the publisher, explaining the proportional data transformation (with a copy to UVVU). Issuing Addenda is the normal procedure for correcting omissions, even for those omissions that do not change anything of substance. We see it every day in the scientific literature, and it is considered good practice and not a serious breach of good scientific practice. Proportional data transformation is neither construction of data, nor substitution with fictive data. As demonstrated in the third section below, an estimation of data based on variables and parameters is one thing, and fictive data is definitely a completely different thing.

By the way, the external expert (LBK) informed UVVU, that she had not previously in the literature encountered a mathematical [population] projection model with IQ. Her observation is of particular relevance in connection with accusations for unusual, uninformed, or misleading application of methods. However, this expert opinion cannot be considered part of a critique, as it is rather a statement of a fact. This becomes obvious for the following reason: A systematic population development - IQ coupling is, to the best of my knowledge, a new, creative, and highly useful construction, not to be found elsewhere in the literature. Moreover, the external expert apparently did not realize that UVVU only asked her to comment on the formula for population development without IQ - the one which was correctly presented by HN in the Decay article in the form of a simple mathematical population projection model. The fact that IQ was later coupled to the outcome of this population model in the form of a simple multiplication by a weighted average is neither a matter for judgment in the present court case, nor for the external expert on demographics to comment on, and it is certainly not relevant for the question of scientific fraud.

Ad 2. Hidden authorship

The UVVU committee was divided in the matter of whether HN deliberately hid a co-author (JEV), or perhaps used him as a so-called Ghost-writer. The majority found him guilty, because he intentionally and wrongfully claimed sole authorship.

However, this decision is as easy to counter at their first. The paid economist (JEV) did not write one word in the paper, but he did proof-read and corrected the methodology section concerning the model of population projection. He also acted as a consultant on how the data were optimally and correctly treated in the population model. This model simply had to be used in order to avoid severe faulty results originating from the officially available data on births (which, by the way actually are not divided by nations of origin), and because of the absence of the number of immigrants and their children of foreign origin at any time status point. All this is properly described in the methodology section on the projection model.

As I wanted to appreciate JEV's contribution, I wrote to him (twice, documentable!) and urged him to appear as co-author of the paper. Each time he declined my offer. Now UVVU

leaves me with the choice of physically forcing him to put his name on the paper, which I believe is against the laws, or to leave his name out and have myself declared scientifically fraudulent.

The UVVU does not pay attention to such simple facts. It readily, and against unambiguous documentation, decides that I had deliberately tried to hide JEV's name and wrongfully put myself in the role as sole author of the paper. I will question this decision.

Conclusion

For the above reasons I find that:

UVVU's basic premises for the verdict are at fault.

The accusations for having committed scientific fraud in two cases are unacceptable.

The request to withdraw the Decay paper is invalid.

Perspectives

Science is self-correcting. When a paper with invalid methods or faulty conclusions is published, other researcher will soon correct this, and science moves on.

This was clearly not the strategy of the three plaintiffs. They never publish their severe critique in the relevant international specialist-for a, where the Decay article is printed. Instead they submit a veritable broad-side of accusations to a local national committees, hoping that at least something sticks, as they can be sure there will only be few specialists in particular research areas, and where the occasional invited external reviewer does not always correctly answers all relevant questions. The plaintiffs have no intentions whatsoever to promote science. To the contrary, they wish to obstruct scientists promoting science they do not like.

They are even admirably candid about this. In fact, they motivated their critique when they wrote to UVVU (and to the periodical *Forskerforum*). They thus find that the Decay paper is devastating for the trustworthiness of Danish Research. *Steps have to be taken to stop researchers*, who assist political organizations in "white-washing their propaganda material", in such a way that it becomes part of "peer-reviewed" international research and is used in the public debate as authorized knowledge. In this they link directly to an American left-wing group of researchers who describe themselves as a fire brigade, who is obliged to put out to all scientific fires they find morally or politically offensive. This group also personally attack named differential psychologists, and has done much damage to American intelligence research over the years (see references at www.helmuthnyborg.dk)

The plaintiff's actions go far back in time. When HN in 1997 chaired the Biannual Meeting of *The International Society for the Study of Individual Difference*, and invited the main part of the international elite in intelligence and personality research to Aarhus, one of the plaintiffs

- Morten Kjeldgaard – publicly compared the scientific events taking place at this open meeting to what happened during the worst periods of Hitler’s and Stalin’s periods (www.eugenik.dk). He also made an attempt to prevent funding of this political “pseudo-science. Since then Kjeldgaard has closely monitored all HN’s activities, private as well as professional, at his home page. He has provided photos of a large number of named members of *The International Society for the Study of Individual Difference* and *The international Society for Intelligence Research*. He often refers to, interprets, or condemns lectures HN present or attend to. The second plaintiff, professor Jens Mammen, refers to this homepage in joint addresses to all HN’s former colleagues, and misrepresents HN’s previous project on sex differences in the daily papers (see www.helmuthnyborg.dk).

The plaintiffs did not respect the request of UVV, to keep proceedings secret until a final verdict. During the whole process they leaked HN’s “confidential” responses to the committee to a leftist Union Membership periodical (Forskerforum). This periodical misconstrued the proceedings, and raised public debate, but denied HN a proper response.

This strategy is guaranteed to succeed. Only few research projects are entirely flawless and just one, intended or unintended, error suffices to claim evil intentions, given proper vigilance. This is why the Decay article has had a good reception and is cited well in international circles, but leads to disaster in Denmark.

UVVU’s treat in the Decay-case is cause for worry for all scientists. Angry colleagues can use it as a *People’s Court* against essentially defenseless scientists. All it takes is to submit a series of accusations – right or wrong -, then leak all confidential hearings to a sympathetic press, and then have that press to deny a proper response. In this way the final judgment is secured long before an actual verdict. UVVU does not only work on faulty premises, but has become a misconception with the decisions of open acts, and has to be closed down as soon as possible.

It is also worrying that future young scientists have to make absolutely certain, that there will be no errors in their reference list. Just one error can now ruin their career forever. This is not fair. As a reviewer and editor through a life-time, I have often noted multiple minor and not a few major errors even in the papers of the best in the field. Not all these faults are due to ill will, and will be corrected in the run of time.

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