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Editorial

Editor's Note



Refers to: "The decay of Western civilization: Double relaxed Darwinian Selection", H. Nyborg, *Personality and Individual Differences*, Volume 53, Issue 2, July 2012, Pages 118–125.

Earlier this year, *Personality and Individual Differences* ('the Journal') has been approached with claims of ethical concerns relating to the above cited paper. In this Editorial Note we would like to inform the readership about the action taken by the Journal since, and the conclusions drawn. The Editor, Publisher and Author have agreed on the content of this Editorial Note.

A scientific committee has been assembled to investigate the case. The committee consisted of the following independent experts (listed in alphabetical order): Ian Deary; John Loehlin; William R. Revelle; Jelte M. Wicherts.

The enquiry Committee was asked to consider four questions:

- (1) Did the Article plagiarize data, figures or text previously authored by Ebbe Vig?
- (2) Has information of co-authorship by Ebbe Vig been deliberately withheld?
- (3) Did the author commit research fraud/data manipulation by citing the following link as a source for the UN's birth data: un.org/esa/population/publications/worldfertility2007/Fertility_2007_table.pdf and referring to it in the Article?
- (4) Did the author commit research fraud/data manipulation by using a population model not commonly used in demographics?

Approach of the investigation Committee:

All Committee members independently studied the contested paper, the original complaint ("letter to the editors") and the relating report of the Danish Committee on Scientific Dishonesty. The Committee also requested and obtained from the author two data files used in the Article, and studied the contents of these files. Finally, the Committee looked up the websites referred to in the Article as the source of the data.

Conclusions of the investigation Committee:

- (1) No. There are insufficient grounds to conclude that Nyborg plagiarized text, figures, and results from Ebbe Vig.
- (2) Yes. However, because Ebbe Vig supposedly declined the offer to become co-author of the Article, the Committee finds that H. Nyborg can be excused for not naming him as co-author. Through this Editorial Note we aim, however, to acknowledge the substantial contribution of Ebbe Vig to

the Article. Ebbe Vig has been paid by H. Nyborg for collating the data, devising the annuity model, describing the methods, and correcting an early draft of the method section of the Article.

- (3) No. It is clear that the UN reference is erroneous, but the reporting of the reference may well have been due to honest error. The use of the contested figure of 9.6 may also have been caused by error due to insufficient documentation of methods and the data file. It is likely that further errors will be found upon further scrutiny of the raw data.

A correction has been provided by the authors and is included as [Appendix 1](#) to this Editorial Note.

- (4) No. Differences in opinion on the use of a particular method are part of scholastic debates and cannot be seen as data fraud/data manipulation.

All raw data files underlying the study can be found as [Supplementary material](#) to this note, in order to enable others to verify the empirical claims made in the Article and correct any additional errors.

Through this Note we believe to have provided our readership with balanced and fair information. We also hope that this Note stimulates scholars to continue the scientific debate on all matters of research conduct and quality.

We would like to thank the members of the scientific committee for their time and effort, and their dedication to come to a fair and scientifically sound conclusion.

Appendix 1. Corrections to Fig. 9.6 as provided by the authors of the Article

- (1) For so-called more developed countries, UN provides common CBRs with 6 figures for the period 2005–2015 for expected low and medium levels, respectively. When the figures for high levels are also considered, the average UN CBR amounts to 9.575. Interested readers will find the documentation for this in [UN link 1](#) (see references).
- (2) In 2010, UN presented the actual figure of CBR 9.60 for more developed countries in a color-illustrated Overview of the World Population Prospect. Unfortunately, the links to the tables under the address ([UN link 2](#)) are now empty. The missing sub-link was one of the following – [UN link 3](#), [4](#), or [5](#) – and was located at the page referred to in [UN link 6](#).
- (3) Re the accusation of substitution with fictive data and control. The quality of the raw birth data referred to in the Decay paper did not allow for the application of sophisticated models. Therefore, despite its limited sensitivity, a fairly

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simple annuity model was chosen to deal with the overall CBR figure of 9.60 for more developed countries. However, concurrent test runs confirmed that the use of the actual national measure of birth rates for more developed countries made no significant differences in outcome, whether judged from the general picture or illustrated graphically. For example, choosing the 8 or 12 birth rates in their low, medium, or high variants for the period 2005–2020, gave an average CBR of 10.192, which did not alter the overall outcome picture.

- (4) Re alternative data sources. Readers of the Decay paper already know from the description in it, that further control test runs were made. Thus, using data from two slightly different alternative birth data sources provided virtually similar outcomes.
- (5) It is essential to realize that the dispersion of UN birth data for more developed countries is relatively small, which means that the UN CBR figure of 9.6 provides a good approximation. Moreover, the situation is quite different for less and least developed countries. The dispersion here is so large and for the least developed up to four times larger than those of the more developed countries, that using a common total birth rate for them all in a projection would be misleading. Finally, the simple annuity model used in the Decay paper cannot deal with the Total Birth Rates (TBR), which UN provided for the time-period focused upon. The UN TBRs accordingly had to be transformed to CBRs, as described in the addendum, but such transformation does not affect the conclusions in the Decay study.

(Jørn Ebbe Vig and Helmuth Nyborg, Monday, 20. October 2014).

Appendix B. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jpaid.2015.01.024>.

References

- UN link 1 – <http://books.google.dk/books?id=GR2DjxITiqQC&pg=PA49&lpg=PA49&dq=World+Population+Prospect%2Bcrude+birth+rate%2Bmore+developed+regions&source=bl&ots=oF5qGzviMY&sig=U66ePAul2Zlubor1S7bU4zZoaSk&hl=da&sa=X&ei=_ZrVUaSBDcyKswaG6oGACw&ved=0CFUQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=World%20Population%20Prospect%2Bcrude%20birth%20rate%2Bmore%20developed%20regions&f=false> [Table 20, p. 50].
- UN link 2 – <<http://www.un.org/popin/wdtrends.htm#>> [Fertility & Family Planning].
- UN link 3, 4, 5 – World population prospects: The 2000 revision – Highlights [pdf format], World population prospects: The 2000 revision – Annex tables of the highlights [pdf format], World population prospects: The 2000 revision – Annex tables of the highlights [excel format].
- UN link 6 – <<http://www.un.org/popin/wdtrends.htm#>> [Fertility].

Editor in Chief
Tony Vernon

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