

May 14, 2013

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Open Letter – Letter of Protest

Dear Dr. Spellman:

Last year, Earl Hunt published an article on international differences in intelligence in *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. Hunt's article reviewed the causes and consequences of international differences in cognitive ability, problems measuring international differences in cognitive ability, and the relevance of such differences to modern society.

Robert Sternberg (2013) provided a commentary on Hunt's (2012) article, and Sternberg's commentary is the focus of our letter.

We welcome commentaries and vigorous debate in science, and Sternberg's includes some important observations about the construct we label as intelligence. Unfortunately, Sternberg's commentary also attributes personal value judgments and motives to Hunt that have no basis in Hunt's actual statements, and does so in a manner not appropriate to scientific discourse, never mind unfair to Hunt personally. Below, we provide three examples of such claims, each based on a quote from Sternberg's article, and provide brief rebuttals to each claim.

(1) "Some of the countries today that are congratulated by Hunt as high in IQ are repressive dictatorships (disguised as self-labeled 'democracies')" (p. 188).

Hunt never "congratulated" countries with high IQs. This term disparages Hunt's motives.

(2) "The narrow intelligence of which Hunt is so proud has provided us with the means to obliterate our own species, hardly a compliment to the wisdom of the species and perhaps not to its intelligence either." (p. 188).

Hunt never said he is "proud" of narrow intelligence. Again, this disparages Hunt's motives.

(3) "Hunt admires the Spaniards, who conquered the Incas and Aztecs with their superior 'cognitive artifacts'" (p. 188).

Hunt never said he "admires" any people or culture who conquered other people from other cultures, another disparaging remark.

Sternberg's comments attribute value judgments and motives to Hunt that he did not state and do so in a manner that leaves a disparaging impression of him. But Sternberg makes a more serious charge when he says that people decide what they want to believe and then look for ways to

justify their beliefs, clearly implying that this was the motivation for Hunt's article. There is simply no basis for such an aspersion (and if there were, Sternberg's comments themselves would hardly be immune).

Sternberg reminds us that measured intelligence can be used in many ways, some of which many would not consider 'good'. This is important, but does not detract from the validity of the generalizations in Hunt's article. For example, although some countries with high-ability populations may have repressive dictatorships (as Sternberg implies), the citizens of higher-ability nations generally experience greater freedom and democracy. Similarly, although some countries with high-ability populations may use intelligence for destructive purposes (as Sternberg implies), high-ability nations generally have less crime, better health, and greater educational opportunities.

We strongly support vigorous debate based on arguments and welcome different perspectives in commentaries, which can lead to progress and understanding in science. Unfortunately, by misattributing claims to Hunt in a manner disparaging to him personally, Sternberg's commentary is at odds with rational-argumentative and ethical standards of discussion in science and mires scientific inquiry in calumny.

We hope that future commentaries will avoid innuendo and unsubstantiated allegations.

Best regards,

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References

- Hunt, E. (2012). What makes nations intelligent? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 7, 284-306.
- Sternberg, R. J. (2013). The intelligence of nations – smart but not wise: Comment on Hunt (2012). *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 8, 187-189.