

I did not think that NYRB would publish my letter on the Feldman-Riskin review, as a long time went by and NYRB did not contact me. I was wrong – the June 9 issue had my letter with a response. Here are links to the original review and the response:

NYRB April 26

NYRB June 9

A few remarks on the disingenuous response of Marcus Feldman and Jennifer Riskin (F + R) to my criticism of their review. They associated Paige Harden's book with eugenics on the basis that the score for educational attainment is 'a bell-shaped curve'. F+R now say that the point is whether the score has a meaningful relationship to behavior. So why did they want to make the point that the score was bell-shaped? This was a dog-whistle reference to Charles Murray and a form of dishonest rhetoric. Next they attack me for saying that the correlation is 'enormously significant'. Indeed in the out of sample Icelandic study the p -value was 10^{-300} . Such a correlation can not be obtained by fiddling around with the detailed definition of EA, as F+R surely realize.

The crux here is that the score validates out of sample. This deserves explanation whether the recipe for the score was obtained by a burning bush, dictation from the god Mithras or refined statistical methods. We can check the performance on different data, preferably in another country such as Iceland – exactly as was done. And how do F+R propose to explain that the score correlates between partners, more than EA itself?

F+R criticisms of the score construction would invalidate most modern studies of the genomics of complex traits, (A search with Google Scholar on 'GWAS complex traits' gave more than 95000 hits) and their criticism of the construction of EA would invalidate most social science and quantitative psychology. Are we to believe for instance that socioeconomic status is more easily determined than years of attending school? Even traits such as height need judgment to use. My height is nearly two inches shorter than it used to be. What value should be used in a genetic study? What F+R are doing here is to demand standards of rigor for behavioral genetics that they would never demand in another context.

F+R say, with truth, that we don't understand the meaning of the genetic correlations. But we have here a genomic score at least weakly predictive of important behaviors such as mate choice. For scientists, it shows a remarkable lack of curiosity not to wish for a more detailed explanation.

Finally, when I first read the appalling review of F+R I said to a colleague that I wasn't sure there was much point in writing to NYRB as surely dozens of other geneticists would do so. He said that wasn't true, because they would be fearful of repercussions on their career. Many scientists have spoken to me about how bad they thought the review was, but it is striking that the two

letters by geneticists that were published, were from me (an unpaid associate at Harvard) and Victor Reus, an emeritus professor. Neither of us have much to lose. It is very bad if in the academy, where the search for truth should be paramount, reasonable views are suppressed out of fear.