

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

There are few intellectual exercises as tiresome as a disgruntled author bleating about his unfair treatment at the hands of a reviewer. Nevertheless, since Maris Vinovskis has suggested in HEQ that my data analysis in *Society and Family Strategy* is so flawed that “scholars should be wary of citing his specific findings,” I feel compelled to write simply to put readers minds at ease.

Professor Vinovskis’s concern stems from my sampling strategy. In order to assure that I could analyze the fertility of various ethnic groups, I oversampled these groups. When one analyzes such a sample, the standard technique is to weight the cases to assure a representative sample. This is precisely what I did.

Perhaps I should have explicitly said that I weighted the sample. However, if Professor Vinovskis were sufficiently exercised by this ambiguity, he could have calmed himself by consulting my dissertation, as I suggested in the notes, or simply by calling me. The fact that he instead decided to label my analysis “invalid,” strikes me as extremely curious.

Then again, when one also considers that Professor Vinovskis chastised me for inconsistent use of the “other” category in some tables and not citing his work sufficiently, perhaps raising this non-issue is consistent with the rest of his review.

Mark J. Stern
University of Pennsylvania

To the Editor:

I am delighted that Mark Stern took the opportunity to reply to one of my reservations about his book, but disappointed by his apparent inability or unwillingness to take seriously the other constructive criticisms of his work as well as by the overall tone of his letter.

In my review I pointed out that “Stern frequently does not provide the reader with adequate information about his statistical procedures to allow an assessment of the validity of his inferences.” One example involved the lack of any information about his weighted samples and I observed that “until Stern is able either to clarify or to rectify this seemingly fundamental flaw in his data analysis, scholars should be wary of citing his specific findings.” I am pleased to hear from Stern that he followed the proper procedures in this situation, but I strongly disagree

with him that interested readers should either consult his dissertation or call him personally in order to clarify such basic methodological issues. A simple footnote would have been sufficient and spared all of us the expense or necessity of obtaining further information.

The lack of information about the weighted sample is not an isolated example of Stern's carelessness in regard to providing methodological details about his work. As I pointed out in the review, he does not even specify how the rural Erie County sample was drawn. Nor am I alone in finding his work inadequately documented. Daniel Scott Smith in his review of Stern's book points out that tables often provide no information about the sample size and thereby make it impossible to assess his results (*American Historical Review* 94 [Apr. 1989]). Since the text of the book is only 138 pages long, surely Stern could have managed to provide the reader with the basic minimal information we have come to expect from any social science analysis.

Similarly, Stern simply tries to ignore the other issues raised in my review. Despite Stern's earlier call and use of a two-class model for occupational data, he continually employs different sets of occupational subdivisions in this book without any explanation to the reader. His use of the "other" occupational category in this work is only one of many instances of inconsistencies in how he organizes census occupations. In addition, Stern tries to dismiss my suggestion that he interact with the findings from several other comparable demographic studies (which also employed standardized fertility ratios) by making it sound as if I only wanted my own work acknowledged.

Space does not permit me to reiterate the other methodological and substantive points I raised about his work, but I urge the interested reader to go back to my original review and see whether or not any real "issues" were raised. I also invite the reader to compare the tone and spirit of my original review with that of Stern's reply and then decide which is the more appropriate way to conduct a serious academic dialogue.

Maris A. Vinovskis
University of Michigan

Editorial note: Letters are printed verbatim.