

Why The World Needs Stupid People

Experts claim the intelligence of the average person in the world has lowered considerably over the past few decades. Is that good or bad? Find Bill Allin at <http://billallin.com>

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I'm not sure if you can blame everything on the American way of life, but the United States are big. So, if you have a lot of people there, the percentage of stupid people is bound to be higher.

- Stephen Malkmus, American musician (b. 1966)

[WARNING: This article does not encourage the development of stupid people or advocate that we keep stupid people stupid. We need some stupid people, some argue, but we have far too many and are developing more too quickly.]

First, an apology for the errors and misinformation in the quote above. While the United States has the third largest population on the planet, that means that--all other factors being equal--the US should have a greater number of stupid people, not a greater percentage. The United States is one country, so the verb should be in the singular form. Decide for yourself if that says anything about the author of the quote.

Despite the fact that the US is a highly developed nation in many ways--it even calls itself First World--it excels in turning bright children into stupid adults.

A redefinition of "stupid" is needed. The word originally referred to a range of IQ scores well below the "normal" of 100 (average being between 90 and 110). Some experts claim the average IQ score across the globe is now between 80 and 85. It is now generally accepted that IQ scores are not just flawed and skewed culturally, but that there are many kinds of intelligence other than that tested by Intelligence Quotient tests.

One key problem in defining intelligence is that the definitions are invariably made by people of high intelligence. Even the name of our species, homo sapiens sapiens (thinking man), was devised by highly intelligent thinking people. Those who came up with the name in fact described themselves, not the species in general. Even Albert Einstein said that if you define intelligence as the ability to climb a tree, a fish will not do well on such an intelligence test.

I prefer to use what is generally called the Law of Consequences in defining intelligence. As with Newton's Third Law of Motion (every action has an equal and opposite reaction), the Law of Consequences states that every action has a consequence, sometimes more than one consequence.

If you hit your finger with a hammer, the finger will hurt. If you drive your car off a bridge, you will likely die. Those are consequences. No one intentionally does either. But people do these things regularly because they do other behaviours the consequences of which are hurt fingers or death from crashing a car below a bridge.

Holding a nail with one hand while swinging a hammer at the nail with the other hand requires intense concentration, on the nail and the hammer. The person who swings the hammer thinking only of the satisfying result of having the nail permanently in place will not be thinking of the necessity for intense concentration. Concentration requires a second level of thinking.

Someone who drives too fast is careless. Driving too fast is exciting, evokes thrills. A driver who focuses on the thrill but not on the danger of a slippery bridge surface may cause the car to career off the bridge, resulting in the death of the driver and likely of passengers as well. Focusing on the safety issue when driving (at all times) requires a second level of thinking that few people indulge in once they become familiar with driving.

Anyone who has played chess with a good player knows that the good chess player thinks ahead. Expert level chess players think ahead not just one move or two, but many moves in many different possible scenarios. Being able to hold these multiple scenarios in your head while assessing each to decide what move you should make next requires levels of thinking that few people ever use.

Stupid people think only of one consequence--having the nail in place, the thrill of driving too fast, or whatever. They think only of what is immediate, of one goal. They react to present circumstances, rather than initiating new actions or thinking.

To a scientist who studies the brain, that is using the unconscious, not the conscious mind. Basically, the unconscious mind reacts to stimuli. The stimulus might be having the nail in place or experiencing a thrill. Real thinking takes place with the conscious mind. The conscious mind considers possibilities beyond the immediate, including smashing a finger or driving off a bridge. It considers consequences. It thinks beyond the immediate.

Over a long term, people use their unconscious mind so much that they become used to it, rarely moving to the stage of using their conscious mind. With practice of using only the unconscious mind all the time, people become stupid. Consciousness researchers claim that we use our unconscious mind about 95 percent of the time, our conscious mind only 5 percent. I would maintain that many people nudge the use of their unconscious mind closer to 100%.

If you have ever watched someone do something and wondered "Why did that person do something so stupid?" you have seen someone who probably is stupid by this new definition. As evidence, watch what people do with their shopping carts in a supermarket (turning them sideways to block the aisle while they look at something on a shelf) or check out many examples of thrill-seeking but stupid and risky behaviour on YouTube.com Stupid behaviour is so common today that several shows focus on videos of it. One show is even called *The Science of Stupid*.

The argument is often made that we need stupid people to make pizzas, work on assembly lines, drive taxis, and so on. In a sense, that is true. But there are also highly intelligent Mensa members who do these jobs as well. Nothing about these jobs demands that the worker must not think. That part is voluntary, a commitment to laziness.

Where do we develop people to be stupid in our societies? At home and in schools when they are children. We don't stimulate kids enough, challenge their brains, give them enough stimulating activities to do, teach them the Law of Consequences.

Many people become uncomfortable or edgy when I speak of deficits in parenting skills or education systems. Fair enough. Look at our dog and cat pets. Most would agree that they become more docile, more cooperative, more friendly, more loving of cuddles as our pets get older. Ask yourself why. It's not age. The reason is that they have been dumbed-down, their natural intelligence and curiosity suppressed until they eventually just look for simple gratification from humans.

We make our children dumb in the same way we make our pets dumb.

Do we need stupid people for our society to function? Leaders of industry and natural resources companies say yes. They need employees to do a job, work on an assembly line or dig mines deep underground, without thinking about what they are doing to themselves or about what their activities are doing to the long term survival of our planet.

Should we maintain our present course of developing intelligent and naturally curious children into dumb adults? That depends on how much you want to encourage and support leaders of industry and natural resource companies who get obscenely rich from the labour of their dumbed employees. Please note that the rich never do these activities.

The system will remain the way it is until we bravely step forward and insist that our education systems teach kids what they really need to survive and thrive instead of what they need to be dumbed-down. And until we insist that every young adult who becomes a parent knows what their children will need in the way of developmental skills, before those skills are needed.

Are you tempted to wonder if you might be stupid? The answer is: you read, stupid people don't read. By reading to the end of this article you have already exercised your conscious brain more today than a majority of people in your country.

Bill Allin is the author of *Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems*, a book about

easy and inexpensive solutions to our world's seemingly intractable problems. Stupidity is a highly fixable social problem.

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Author: builder

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