

How to explain Mensa to a non Mensan

by Stefan Berner

As a member of Mensa (www.mensa.ch) I had several times to explain to a non Mensan, what a club of intelligent people is good for. The typical positive reaction was lack of comprehension. I noticed that most people cannot understand, how being intelligent could be a problem and why you would want to look for the company of other intelligent people. I tried once the following: *try to imagine your feelings if you spent a lot of your professional and private time with persons with an IQ noticeably below your own.* I won't try this one ever again. But I don't like to hide my Mensa membership in order to avoid embarrassing my counterpart. I would like to have an explanation they can accept, without feeling embarrassed or minor. I came across the "**Klub Langer Menschen**" (club of long people) (www.klm-schweiz.ch). And as with intelligence, there is a bunch of similar clubs and organisations all over the world. Two paragraphs from their (old) webpage:

"Wir sind eine Vereinigung von Menschen mit einer überdurchschnittlichen Körpergröße. Um Mitglied zu werden, müssen Frauen mindestens **1,80 Meter** und Männer **1,90 Meter** groß sein...."
"Außer dem geselligen Beisammensein mit Gleichgesinnten, den zahlreichen Infos über die Einkaufsmöglichkeiten, das Besprechen kleinerer oder gar größerer Problem(e)chen, versuchen wir einfach das Leben für uns LANGE etwas einfacher zu machen."

The similarity to Mensa was striking. Digging into it, I found a list of arguments, why being long can be an advantage and why a disadvantage.

I found quite a few analogies between long and intelligent people and between KLM and Mensa:

- belonging to the group is given by nature and can not be influenced by the individual person
- membership in the club depends on a measurable value only
- one major goal of the club is to provide a possibility for meeting peers

Most non-long-people see only the advantages

- Longs see everything when in an audience (e.g. at football, in the cinema).
- Longs are privileged as sportsmen, -women (volleyball, basketball).

- Longs have natural leadership in a group.

There are some evident disadvantages

- beds are too short
- chairs and tables are too low
- choice in clothes and shoes is restricted
- ceilings and door-frames are on head-level

and some non evident disadvantages

- being different
- being envied for something you didn't look for and can't change
- difficulty to find a suitable partner
- treatment by others: woman seem to be arrogant, men are

always expected to be group leaders.

Of course there are some principal differences (intelligence can be hidden, physical disadvantages can't be overcome). But as I don't want to compare the level of unhappiness or anything like that, I can use the KLM as an analogy. I found that for non Mensans the usefulness of a "Klub Langer Menschen" is much easier to accept than a club for intelligent people. And once shown the analogies, the step from accepting KLM to seeing the usefulness of Mensa is not such a big one.

