**Are we getting dumb? And dumber?**

**We don't need strength and speed and smarts anymore, we just need a cellphone. And Google**

By Shelley Fralic, Vancouver Sunday, March 1, 2013

The evidence is overwhelming, or underwhelming, depending on where you stand.

Regardless, it's incontrovertible: We're getting stupider.

That's right, stupider. OK, more stupid, if you want to invoke proper English, but then no one does that much anymore, do they?

Anyway, it's clear that we're getting stupider, and the culprits range from the inane shorthand of social media to the decline in importance of the three Rs in school to the increasing reliance on technology to figure things out for us to the growing tendency by many among us to retreat into the soft shells of our egos. Consider the incriminating symptoms.

A few months back, a woman called 911 because she was in a traffic jam in Burnaby's Metrotown mall parking lot, and demanded the police do something about it.

And that's not the half of it: B.C. emergency operators recently released other absurd requests, like the man who called 911 because a store wouldn't give him a refund. Others called for help with a spider in the living room, a hamster giving birth, a broken television, a bad chicken sandwich from a fast-food restaurant and a daughter who wouldn't clean her room.

Just as stupid are all those fools who clog up our hospital emergency rooms, where they insist on receiving medical treatment for such things as colds, minor cuts, blood blisters, sunburn, bee stings, minor coughs, sprained ankles and sore throats.

A U.S. study done not long ago by the National Centre for Health Statistics found that nearly half of the millions of visits to emergency rooms in that country were unnecessary, with many of those people using the ER as they would a family doctor seeing patients for routine medical procedures such as refilling prescriptions.

In B.C., of course, the shortage of family doctors leads many to use the ER as they would a GP's office waiting room, instead of learning a little more about how to look after their own aches and pains and leaving the ER for, you know, emergencies.

Let's not forget the geography-and socially conscious-challenged, whose worlds are so small they have no knowledge of life beyond their own borders, who've been to Italy but can't find Venice on a map, who know Britain has a prime minister but couldn't possibly name him yet can reel off every single Kardashian.

They're right up there with the college-weary barista at the Starbucks in the mall who doesn't know when the mall opens. And the distracted clerk in the store who says "whatever is on the shelf is what we have" instead of actually helping the customer, and can't compute the change for a $20 bill when the cash register doesn't work.

And then there's the increasingly stupid English language, steamrollered of late by acronyms and emoticons and the shocking reality that no one can spell and, worse yet, no one seems to care, least of all the education system that is graduating a generation of illiterates. Language may be a living, breathing beast that is constantly evolving but if you recognize "redneckonize" then you know the roller coaster is off the rails. And while we're at it, do we have to refer to animals as humans, which even this newspaper often does, referring to a dog as a "who" instead of a "that?"

And does the F-word really have to be integrated into everything, from T-shirts to cancer slogans, bandied about as if it's as inoffensive as cotton candy, like the handwritten note, complete with stick figures, which was circulating recently on the Web and was allegedly written by an eight-year-old on a plane, who wanted to tell a Qantas pilot how nice the crew was and how she wasn't scared even though it was her first flight but, please, "don't f---up the landing."

Theories on our getting-stupider-by-the-minute universe abound, of course, as does the debate over whether it matters or not.

What isn't in dispute is that we're at a time in history when more information is available, at one's fingertips, than ever before, and while that's a good thing if you're doing research for a school paper it also means that we simply don't need to think as much as we once did, or figure out things for ourselves like we once had to. Calculators do our math, GPS tells us how to get where we're going, our smart devices answer our every question, and for many of us, life is relatively easy without a lot of personal effort.

Some studies suggest that as society becomes more removed from our hunter-gatherer roots, so does the need to think on one's feet or, as one report put it, there has been a profound "decline in evolutionary pressure to be smart."

We don't need strength and speed and smarts anymore, we just need a cellphone. And Google.

In other words, we no longer need to think to survive, because if we can't figure it out, someone else - or something else - will do it for us.

Which means we're getting dumb. And dumber.

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