

EXPLODING A MYTH

A modern myth that has received wide acceptance is exploded by Dr. David Segel in *School Life*, when he denies that the average intelligence of adult Americans is that of twelve-year-old children.

"That assertion is not true," declares Doctor Segel. "Only five per cent of our adult population have a mental age of twelve years or less. The statement that the intelligence of the adults of this country was about that of twelve-year-olds came about through a misinterpretation of the data obtained from the intelligence testing carried out in the Army during the World War.

"There are several factors at work which brought about this misinterpretation. The mental ages obtained on the intelligence tests used in the Army were based on equivalent mental ages found on the individual Binet intelligence test. This Binet test, however, underrates adult intelligence.

"Later researches have shown positively that the intelligence of adults of this country will average considerably above that of twelve-year-olds."

By using research studies of typical cross sections of American society, Doctor Segel found that intelligence, which is defined as the *growth and decline of the ability to learn* "rises rather sharply until about the age of fifteen or sixteen, then rises less and less sharply until about the age of twenty-two or twenty-three. From this age the curve begins to drop, at first very slowly, and then more and more precipitously. The mental age of the adults of the early twenties (20-25) is therefore above that of any age group in the teens. At no chronological age level does the *average mental age* obtained from investigations fall to that of twelve-year-olds."

Applying the findings of research with typical cross-sections of American citizenry to census figures for the number of persons in the age groups between sixteen and fifty

years of age, Doctor Segel finds that the "average mental age of men and women of this country according to this method of calculation is 17.7."

"The word 'intelligence,'" points out the Office of Education expert, "is very loosely used. To the scientist it does not mean the total, collective knowledge, experience and judgment of an individual. It means, in other words, the speed of mental reaction to a new situation, his capacity to grow mentally.

"For the every-day living, due to the factor of experience, the ability of a man in his particular line of work does not begin to decline in the twenties. It is probable that the increase in all-around ability—not just ability to learn in a new situation—counteracts the tendency of the intelligence 'curve' to taper off after the twenties. It is possible that his all-around ability does not begin to decline until quite late in life."

Dr. Segel estimates that there are 10,000,000 Americans in the highest mental age group, that is, twenty-three years and up. There are probably 40,000,000 above the average intelligence level of 17.7 years for the adult group sixteen to fifty years of age (chronological). Only 3,000,000 adults have a mental age of twelve years or less.

"The adult population," he declares, "has an adult intelligence and not a childish intelligence. Comprehension of this fact should be of importance to those in charge of the radio, newspapers, and motion pictures. In many instances the myth that the men and women of the United States have an intelligence of twelve-year-olds has been used as an argument for lowering the educational or cultural level of newspapers, magazines, movies, and radio presentations. Educators should do their best to counteract all forms of propaganda which use this false premise."

The car to watch is the car behind the car in front of you.—Holyoke (Mass.) *Daily Transcript*.