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## Mensa Youth New Year 2009, a party to end all parties!

Michiel van  
Doorn

*About 55 young at heart Mensans from all over Europe - and even abroad - gathered at the turn of the year in Delft, The Netherlands.*

The primary goal was to celebrate New Year's Eve with a group of fun people. We Dutch know we are fun, but the foreign delegations showed their best sides too. Mensa The Netherlands planned to party in style with black tie as the dress code. At the start of the evening, a traditional Dutch party dinner was held, namely 'gourmetten', which is preparing your own food, small chops of meat and vegetables, on an electric raclette grill. With fifteen raclettes the power supply was hardly enough, but we managed, thanks to our electricity specialist. The evening continued

in a beautifully decorated party room, with professional music equipment providing dance music. Dutch 'oliebollen' and champagne were served, and at twelve midnight, a great fireworks show was given. Even though Delft was snow-covered, we managed to set the place on fire! Finally, when we became cold again, we all went back inside and partied until early in the morning.

Even though this was the main evening of the Mensa Youth New Year's event, the full five days were a blast. Put some Mensans in a room, together with food, drinks, games and couches, and they have a great time! Catan was played, Stratego, Taipan, Werewolves... and Psycho! Did you ever want to ask very

personal questions to your friends but never dared to? Play this game! But pssst, don't tell anybody else the mental disease the patients are suffering from, or you'll ruin the game forever!

The Mensa youth camps have become a twice-yearly event. In summer, Spain will be hosting the next camp. If you want to have a great time with great people, then stay informed. Check [myny2009.com](http://myny2009.com) for more info. Hope to see you in Spain!



*l-r Jacob Avlund, Simone Wevers, Arjen van den Kronenberg  
(Photograph by Liset Terpstra)*

## Catemaco! (an adventure in Mexico)

Almost as soon as our Aero Mexico flight set down in Veracruz, my wife and I were on the road again. It was a warm, June day and Guadalupe and I wasted little time in the Mexican shipbuilding and port city. We had meticulously planned our eagerly-anticipated vacation, and we would soon enough return to Mexico's Federal District to be

with Guadalupe's aged and ailing father once again. Upon leaving busy Veracruz, we headed south by bus towards Catemaco, a relatively nearby village known for its bustling population of *brujos* and *brujas* (sorcerers and witches). The townsfolk's specialty was freeing busloads of tourists from "evil spells and spirits."

Veracruz is near the exact place where Spanish Conquistador, Hernan Cortes, suddenly appeared in 1519 with his band of ruffians - Conquistadores - and linked up with his Aztec-Maya lover, the beautiful and brilliant *Malintzin*. Malintzin soon became known as *La Malinche* by the newly born mestizo nation. In the ensuing years the moniker was (and still

Thomas Hally



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is) associated with a type of “treasonous desire” for all things non-Mexican. My wife was soon to morph into a Malinche!

Our first encounter with a witch was weird—aside from the fact that *any* encounter with a witch would have been weird.

Suddenly, while we were casually seeing the sights in Catemaco, a spry, ancient lady with a creased, russet face ran out of a round, thatched-roof hut and, with stilts tied to her legs and waving her arms in the air like propellers, spotted us in the middle of a cobble stone street and began “spitting” expletives at us in the Nahuatl tongue.

She held an egg in each hand. Then, in broken Spanish, she addressed my wife: “*Oye, Malinche, están malditos!*” (Hey Malinche, you both are cursed!) She brazenly scolded Guadalupe, telling her, in more than just a few well-chosen words, that we would both need a *limpia* or cleansing. A foreign *güero* (fair-haired, man of European stock) does not mix well with a brown-skinned *Mexicana* was the gist of her seemingly xenophobic message. She frightened us at first, as we stared at her gold-capped teeth - what was left of them - and her piercing black eyes, the color of raven’s wings.

She then decided to become our friend, and offered us a *limpia* for the equivalent of about five US dollars. The *limpia* would free us

from the shackles of my cold, calculating “Anglo” temperament, making me more compatible with my “hot-blooded Latina.” Little did this scary old lady know that I, of *Celtic* origin, was the passionate member of our small family with my infamous “Irish Temper” and impetuosity, nor did she have any inkling that Guadalupe was always the calm, cool, and collected one. We were both halves of the same orange.

Adventure was what we looking for, so, with our curiosity piqued, we opted for the *limpia*. Sporting nothing but towels, we were led into a tiny, stone sauna known as a *temazcalli*. We savored the aroma of fresh mint, eucalyptus, rosemary clusters and, much to our delight, a bit of marijuana carefully placed on the top of a small grill above a hole in the floor filled with hot stones. My wife and I did not object.

After about twenty minutes boiling in the *temazcalli* alongside the *bruja*, wearing towels or in our birthday suits - the witch didn’t care which - we were led by hand into a spooky room illuminated by faint candle light. Doña Xóchitl started gibbering in Nahuatl once again, but this time she was dubbing us with palm branches while she chanted a blessing. It was all very pleasant and comfortable - and we were higher than kites - as she slowly passed an egg from our foreheads, to our chests, to our arms, to our buttocks and down our thighs.

After the *limpia* we headed straight for Hotel San Francisco some for some much-needed R & R .

Hotel San Francisco cost us around eighty pesos for the night or the equivalent of about four U.S. dollars - and was worth every centavo of it! The mattress had no sheets (blankets would have been impractical) and it was stained. The room stank to the high heavens. When we checked in did we somehow think that because the name of the hotel was the same as the City by the Bay we would be spending a night in the luxurious Sheraton Palace...?

It was 2 a.m., and even with our own clean towels spread across the bed we couldn’t fall asleep. The foul smelling room, the vociferous soprano-like voices of prostitutes haggling with their clients just outside our door, a fist fight in the hall, and the fact that our own terrycloth robes itched like crazy and were hot, as we lay naked on top of them, all made for a miserable night. We peeked out into the corridor that led to the rooms on the second floor and were unceremoniously greeted in the local dialect, which, according to the ladies, was called *Nahuatlol*. We were then chewed out in Spanish, told to quit complaining and return to our room - “or else!” The “dialect,” we were later informed, was a



discombobulated mixture of Spanish and Nahuatl. We had recently heard rumors about human sacrifice in the area, people “going missing” and such, so we meekly decided to do as we were told.

We returned to room 203, uncorked a bottle of red wine and proceeded to get even higher. What else could we do in situation like this? We pondered the humour of our

predicament and, literally laughing ourselves further into a stupor, we got some much needed shut-eye.

The morning brought us to the end of our last - and only - *bewitching* adventure in Catemaco. We wisely decided to take a boat tour of the Lagoon. The boatman skilfully made a necklace of water

orchids for my wife, and we were encouraged to throw the oranges and bananas we had picked up from the wet ground to the spider monkeys on the island in the middle of the small lake. Back on shore, we paid him his twelve peso fee and gave him another twelve pesos for the necklace: a most refreshing denouement to our daydream/nightmare in Catemaco.

thomas\_hally@yahoo.com

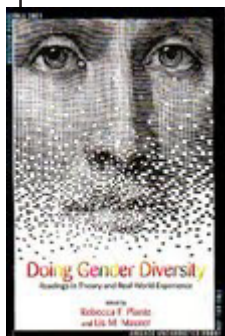
### books...

tom elliot

#### *Doing Gender Diversity: Readings in theory and real world experience*

edited by Lis M. Maurer and Rebecca Plante (2009, 576 pp., bibliography, index, pb.; publ. Westview Press, Boulder CO 80301

westviewpress.com, ISBN 978-0-8133-4437-9).



We’re hearing a lot about ‘diversity’ these days – racial, age, gender, etc. It’s to this last aspect that we are directed. Is gender diversity merely bisexual people and drag queens, or is it more? How is gender developed, experienced, and presented by a range of people? What are the multiple ways in which the universe of gender is socially, historically, and culturally constructed? Based on many years of research and discussion, this book contains sources from different perspectives – websites, first-person narratives, and

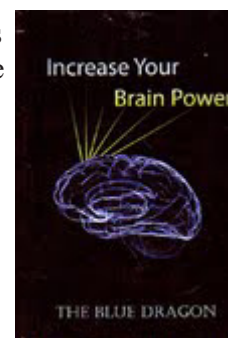
academic readings – and covers everyone on the gender spectrum, from atypical gender experiences and themes to conventional ones as well. A quick review of several article headings will give you some idea of the breadth of this subject: Defining and producing genitals, Commanding the room in short skirts: cheering as the embodiment of ideal girlhood, Lesbian and female-to-male transsexual account of identity, My life as an intersexual, Arab American Femininities: beyond Arab virgin/Americanized whore, Gender differences in the drive to marry, Can a gay man be a housewife, Men, race, and emotions, What the pregnant man didn’t deliver, and When the girls are men: negotiating gender and sexual dynamics in a study of drag queens. Each chapter ends with a set of suggested study questions.

#### *Increase Your Brain Power*

by Avi Ornstein aka The Blue Dragon (2008, 170 pp., illustrations, cloth; publ. Strategic Book Publishing, New York NY 10022

ISBN 978-1-60693-363-3). OK,

if the previous book taxed your gray matter, perhaps you should take a dose of this one first: a collection of over 400 creative puzzles designed to exercise and expand your thought patterns. You’ll find a variety of challenges here, some from categories that are totally new and original. You’ll deal with math, famous quotations, coded messages, sequential logic, history, and general knowledge subjects. Some of these tests are hard enough to give your brain muscles a cramp.



All books reviewed in this column are by Mensa authors

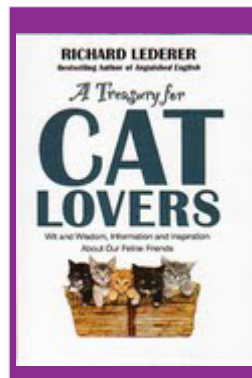


**String Theory for Dummies** by Andrew Zimmerman Jones (2009, 364 pp., illustrations, photos, index, pb.; publ. Wiley Publishing, Hoboken NJ 07030 www.wiley.com, ISBN 978-0-470-46724-4).

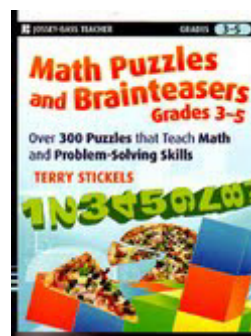
That title's not only an oxymoron of sorts, but a near impossibility as well! OK, let's admit it, we'd all like to understand quantum physics, string theory, and other cool new stuff, and impress people with scintillating cocktail party bon mots. But many of us are afraid. Well, fear no more, because Dummies books "Make Everything Easier". Now you, yes YOU!, can understand the 'theory of everything', discover how string theory was built on major scientific developments of the early 20th century, learn about the creation and evolution of the theory, take it for a spin, and study how it relates to gravity, parallel universes, time travel, black holes, and the Big Bang. Now don't you feel smarter already?

***A Treasury for Cat Lovers: Wit and Wisdom, Information and Inspiration about Our Feline Friends*** by Richard Lederer (2009 122 pp., illustrations, cloth.; publ. Howard Books/Simon & Schuster, ISBN 978-1-4391-0321-0 and 978-1-4391-0315-9). Two new books from our favorite punster, and

surprisingly they're about pets. Now who knew that Richard was an animal lover? Favoring felines myself, I'll use the Cat version as an example for both. Here's a heartwarming collection of fascinating facts, touching stories, witty word games, and more, all complemented by humorous drawings. Example chapters include Why Cats Are Better Than Dogs, Famous Cats and Cat Lovers, A Cat's Guide to Humans, and 10 Clues That Your Cat Has Hacked into Your Email Password. I'm sure you get the idea...



***Math Puzzles and Brainteasers Grades 3-5*** by Terry Stickels (2009, 232 pp., illustrations, answers, large-format pb.; publ. Jossey-Bass Teacher/Wiley www.josseybass.com, ISBN 978-0-470-22719-0 ). ***Math Puzzles and Brainteasers Grades 6-8*** by Terry Stickels (2009, 232 pp., illustrations, answers, large-format pb.; publ. Jossey-Bass Teacher/Wiley ISBN 978-0-470-22720-6) Each book contains over 300 puzzles,



especially created for the indicated grades, and include logic challenges, numerical manipulation, spatial/visual exercises, and language arts exercises. And let me tell you, you'd be surprised how hard some of these problems are, even in the grades 3-5 edition.

***The Motion Picture Screenplays of James R. Messenger: River of January***, A romantic screwball comedy by (2010, 150 pp., cloth; publ. The

Alexander Press LLC, Marietta GA 30068, ISBN 978-0-914695-06-6). For those who don't know, James R Messenger was an EMMY winner and two-time Academy Awards Nominee. River of January was a romantic motion picture comedy set in Brazil, Russia, and the US – a great love story set against a spectacular background. The plot involves a US State Department Foreign Service Officer, who is forced to go to Brazil on a cultural exchange to shepherd an unruly music group on a goodwill tour. Along the way he encounters a woman who is destined to fill his emotionally empty life, and who teaches him about the agony and ecstasy of love. Included in this book are "Ever Wonder How an Original Screenplay Gets Written?" and (for the novice) "How to Read a Motion Picture Screenplay".

tom elliot