

Re: Factoring paper is wrong

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Bob Silverman wrote:

> *On 16 Jun 2004, Quinn wrote:*

>

> <snip>

>

>> *Well, you advocate getting at the ideas rather than the people.*

>>

>> *let $a+1=b+1$,*

>> *therefore $a = b$*

>>

>> *Proving statements such as the above don't necessarily invite passionate*

>> *minds to tackle them. Certain categories of maths problems invite certain*

>> *passionate types to try to best them:*

>>

>> *Let X be some arbitrary integer s.t. $N > 4$.*

>>

>> *int $N = X$;*

>> *while(($N = N \& 1 ? 3 * N + 1 : N / 2$) != 1);*

>>

>> *(1.0)*

>>

>> *Prove that 1.0 terminates for any X .*

>>

>> *All of a sudden, all kinds of personalities get into the mix.*

>

>

> <snip>

>

> *What surprises me is the following.*

>

> *Why do people who are totally lacking in mathematical maturity and*

> *mathematical education think that somehow they are going to find*

> *a magic proof that has escaped experts?*

>

> *I doubt whether these same people would ever considering doing (say)*

> *brain surgery. Yet they are just as ignorant about one subject as the*

> *other.*

>

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- > *I am sure that these people recognize that they do not have the*
- > *education or experience to do brain surgery. Why is it that they do*
- > *NOT have the same cognizance about their lack of math skills? Why*
- > *do they stubbornly cling to ideas that experts point out are wrong?*
- > *Instead, they attack the experts! I doubt that they would attack*
- > *a doctor who told them that they had no surgical skills.*
- >
- > *If one argues that *unsolved* problems attracts such people, why*
- > *don't we get people who claim that they have found a cure for (say)*
- > *cerebral palsy? That too is an unsolved problem.*
- >
- > *What is it about math in particular that attracts incompetents to*
- > *believe that they can solve problems that experts can not? Why do*
- > *they then attack experts who tell them that they are wrong?*
- >

I suspect that the problem is much more general than you think. Because tend to deal with people who do math (or think that they do math) you see the people who think that they are the next Erdos.

I suspect that delusions of competence appear in many more fields than math. I live with a writer and she dreads touring, talking to book clubs, and even admitting that she is something more than a mild mannered english professor because everyone thinks that they have the next great american novel, and all they need is some help to get an agent or an editor interested. At first I thought that she was merely being coy, but history has proved her right time and again.

I suspect that there are people wandering about convinced that they could revolutionize neurology only if the meddling cabal of the AMA would stop blocking their efforts. I have no evidence, but I believe that the entire Laetrile fiasco was caused by the equivalent to our beloved cranks.