

EDITORIAL BRAIN SCAM? NO, THIS LITTLE LIGHT REFLECTS INTELLIGENCE

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Thanks to the Cartoon Network, even the youngest Americans are familiar with the old comic convention of a light bulb appearing above the head of someone who has been seized by a bright idea. Now it seems that the term "brilliant mind" is more than a metaphor.

The New York Times reports that research scientists at Washington University in St. Louis have discovered that test subjects who score well on intelligence tests also show more neural activity in specific areas of the brain while performing a difficult memory test. That activity is reflected in bright spots on a magnetic-resonance image, or scan, of the brain.

No doubt science fiction writers will portray this discovery in a sinister light. ("Coming soon from Steven Spielberg: Imagine a society in which citizens are divided into castes by compulsory brain scans -- until one of the downtrodden 'dimbulbs' leads a revolt!")

But, really, is this discovery all that revolutionary? The fact that some brains are, well, brighter than others is not exactly news.

Neither is the reality that intelligence, whether measured by magnetic resonance or IQ tests, is not the only or most important measure of human worth. Other qualities -- loyalty, compassion, perseverance -- also matter. Unfortunately, scientists are unlikely to come up with a "soul scan."