

Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success*,

Chapter 2, “The 10,000 Hour Rule”

(in this reading you are asked to be the “contrarian”—poke holes in Gladwell’s argument if you think you see any)

Just a preparatory question to keep in mind: Throughout this reading

- a. talent=nature while preparation=nurture
- b. preparation=nature while talent=nurture

[Start at the bottom of p. 37] pp. 37-41

According to this thesis (Gladwell borrowing heavily from psychologist Anders Ericsson), the most important element in achieving greatness is

- a. genetics
- b. mentoring
- c. environment
- d. self-regulating (practice)

p. 37-41: Gladwell/Ericsson offer as “Exhibit A” music students from Berlin. Notice that only hours of practice is being measured in this test. No test was given for the very common tests required in music conservatories, that of perfect pitch, musical memory (dictation tests), and hand/eye coordination (seeing a symbol for a pitch and moving accurately to a spot on a keyboard or finger board of some kind). These are all measurements of [take a guess]

- a. genetic gifts
- b. the number of hours you practice

pp. 37-39: As you read these pages, think of a possible fallacy here (what might Gladwell be overlooking?—what might be causing some violinists to practice more?). Make a case for genetics (an inherited gift) being at the root of genius.

p. 41: What might be the fallacy in Gladwell’s presentation here: that Mozart (by consensus the greatest prodigy the world has ever seen) wasn’t a genius until he had devoted 10,000 hours to his craft—in other words, as stated here, was in his twenties.

As our course progresses, this “ying and yang” between environment and heredity will continue. Given the statement of Gladwell, “Ten thousand hours is the magic number of greatness,” where would you classify Gladwell: a. among the environmentalists b. among the hereditarians

Having read about this theory (as developed by Anders Ericsson and borrowed by Gladwell)--that “anyone can be a genius if he/she engages in 10,000 of focused practice—think of an example that would disprove it.

O.K. Let’s move on to Chapter 3

Chapter 3, “The Trouble with Geniuses, Part 1”

p. 69: What is Chris Langan’s claim to fame? Why did he, according to Gladwell, become “the public face of genius in American life.” For what is he renowned?

- a. Being an ex pro football player with a very high IQ but who does poorly on game shows

- b. Being an ex pro football player with a very low IQ who does well on game shows
- c. Being a muscular guy (bouncer) with a huge IQ who got a perfect score on the SAT and does well on game shows

p. 73ff: Who was Lewis Terman?

- a. A Stanford professor who tested thousands of children to identify a pool of geniuses that he could follow through the course of their lives
- b. A Stanford professor who established the first school for gifted students in California
- c. A Stanford professor who established a school for underprivileged but gifted students in California
- d. A Hollywood script writer who created the film character “The Termanator.”

p. 75: Terman was interested in high IQs because the possessors would be indicators of

- a. a group who had used their extraordinary motivation to get ahead
- b. a group who demonstrated that memory and concentration were above all else the keys to genius
- c. the leaders in science, art, government, and education for the coming generation

p. 76: Why are manhole covers round and not square? _____

p. 77-78: What is a Raven’s Progressive Matrice test and what does it test?

- a. A test involving sequential analogies (sequential logic)
- b. A test of involving visual images in sequence (spatial temporal reasoning)
- c. A test of progressively distant bird flights (aviary reasoning)

p. 79: Regarding the relationship between exceptional human accomplishment (here “success”, earlier called “genius”)) and IQ, we are to conclude

- a. Once a person reaches an IQ threshold of 105, success is determined by other, personal factors
- b. Once a person reaches an IQ threshold of 115, success is determined by other, personal factors
- c. Once a person reaches an IQ threshold of 150, success is determined by other, personal factors

p. 80: Which of the two below supports this notion?

- a. Chris Langan’s IQ is 45 points higher than that estimated for Einstein
- b. The IQ estimated for Einstein was 45 points higher than Chris Langan’s

pp. 81-83: The two lists of colleges from which were graduated two groups of Noble Prize winners are intended to suggest

- a. That you have to have a high IQ and graduate from a top university such as Yale, Harvard, Stanford, Columbia, etc. to be a great success
- b. That you just have to be able to get into and out of a reasonably good college such as Union College, Hunter College, Notre Dame, etc.
- c. That neither attending college nor reaching an IQ threshold ultimately determines “success”

Student thought questions:

Assuming all of this is true, why bother with programs for “the gifted”? Should we have special summer camps for the “slightly above average?”

Should Yale College abandon a required standardized test (SAT)? Argue yes or no
Have any major colleges abandoned or made SAT and ACT tests optional?
Should Yale College adopt a minimum threshold of 1800 of a possible 2400, or 1250 of a possible 1600, allowing those above such scores to be placed in a pool from which admittees will be chosen by lottery? Yes or no
Should the same sort of much lower minimum threshold also apply at the Yale medical school or the Ph.D. program in physics (or for airline pilots)?
If so, why? _____
If not why not? _____
What about grades? Should they count? Identify a personal characteristic that grades might “test” that the SAT doesn’t? _____
Are job postings that require a college degree racist? If so, how so?

P. 86-87: Now Gladwell goes on to explore another area of genius beyond IQ tests (those of temporal/special reasoning, quantitative manipulation, and verbal acuity). What is it?

a. concentration b. creativity c. motivation d. honesty e. interpersonal skills

p. 87: People who are creative (and funny) tend to have the capacity for

- a. Inveterate thinking
- b. Degenerate thinking
- c. Divergent thinking

Group together correctly the following into pairs by drawing lines to connect them.

IQ test “the Blanket Test” divergent thinking convergent thinking deductive thinking

pp. 88-89: The implication here is that for genius which kind of thinking is more important, once a threshold of an IQ has been attained.

- a. Inveterate thinking
- b. Degenerate thinking
- c. Divergent thinking
- d. Convergent thinking

pp. 89-90: And what happened to the Termites (Lewis’s Terman’s IQ overachievers—also referenced in the Garber reading). Which is NOT correct?

- a. Three of them won Nobel Prizes.
- b. None of them seemed to have been wildly distinctive in any way and none won a Nobel Prize.
- c. Two persons who were rejected from the Termites Club, because their IQs weren’t high enough, went on to win Nobel Prizes.
- d. Terman concluded “intellect and achievement are far from perfectly correlated.”

Student thought question: What exactly does it mean “to be smart.” If it is not “pure intellect” that is the enabler of genius, what is it?