ABSTRACT

TITLE:	Genius: Individual Phenomenon or Social Phenomenon?
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ABSTRACT: Genius is not an absolute concept and seems to vary in its considerations from era to era, discipline to discipline, culture to culture, and person to person. Accepted formal definitions of genius are used to indicate a person of exceptional intellectual or extraordinary creative ability, to the inclusion of strong inclination or natural talent. Yet if this is the case, why is such a humanly diverse description limited by accepted example to predominantly men of academia or formal training active between the renaissance and 18th centuries? Einstein died in 1955, and presumably, so too did our living model of genius. This research was conducted to explore how we define and distinguish genius today. Is genius externally defined, or internally refined? Participants were 50 college students who voluntarily filled out a 5-section Genius Perception Survey/ Questionnaire created by the researchers. The questionnaire assessed overall perception of genius, whether the concept was perceived as an internal/ individual event or an external/ societal circumstance, some of the factors associated with that perception, and whether genius is considered natured or nurtured. Results indicated a significant means difference between selected statements representing either very internal (3.74) or external (2.66) perceptions of genius, with a larger mean of respondent's perceptions reflecting genius as a very internal/ individual anomaly, $t(40) = 2.88$, $p = .006$. Participants indicated that a genius is an "introspective individual" who is relatively socially extroverted, and "able to participate in and excel in communicating their ideas." Additionally, there were significant paradoxes between definitions given from differing academic disciplines. In short, it appears that genius and society opportunistically collide. One cannot exist and evolve without the benefits of the other - genius needs a society, through comparison and acknowledgement, to exist, and in turn, a society needs a genius, through innovation and increased awareness, to evolve - this cycle must repeat itself indefinitely for humanity to move forward.