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National Security and Education: What Is Graduating College Worth?

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Title: National Security and Education: What Is Graduating College Worth?

A recent study in a prestigious scientific journal purports to demonstrate a correlation between variants of human deoxyribonucleic acid (*DNA*) and college graduation (1). Very simply, sequences of *DNA* constitute *genes* which code for molecules contributing to human growth, development, functioning, and reproduction. In the study, some *DNA* variants coming from multiple *genes* were found to be positively correlated with college graduation and some aspects of cognitive performance. And cumulative genetic correlations were combined into a high score and a low score so that about 10% of people with the low score had graduated college, while 55% of people with the high score had graduated. This suggests a relationship between some *DNA* variants and college graduation about as strong as that for socioeconomic status wherein high students are much more likely to have graduated college than low students (cf. 2).

If such findings on genetic correlations with college graduation continue to be obtained, what shadow may fall on societies' educational policies and the very meaning of college graduation? If history repeats itself as tragedy, farce, or as film noir, here are some likely proposals.

One proposal would be to score all humans even before birth and track them throughout their educational lives. Because high-quality educational resources are finite, they would be afforded to high genetic scorers. Even before birth, one's educational life—and social life—would be dramatically determined. And policymakers would have to determine how to manage individual and sub-group outliers—high scorers performing poorly, low scorers performing well—who are inevitable when intervening with individuals who vary around group averages.

However, the recent study also suggests that only 11–13% of educational attainment and 7–10% of actual cognitive performance is due to genetic variation—and this affecting brain-development and neuron-to-neuron communication. Thus, there is 87–89% and 90–93%, respectively, still in play for other factors affecting college graduation. And critiquing the statistical assumptions and presuppositions used and using other statistical procedures could yield very different numbers.

Moreover, the study has focused on students of American of European ancestry and do not apply to African-Americans. In fact, the scores of African-Americans seem to have little relationship to college graduation. (One possibility might be that systemic social discrimination might have a much larger direct impact and not have been adequately partialled out of the genetic findings). So recommendations for genetically scoring and tracking students and for even the hint of more atrocity which have surfaced and re-surfaced throughout history—institutionalization, sterilization, and extermination—are unfounded scientifically, let alone legally, morally, and ethically.

Another proposal would be to continue research on genetic-educational correlations but with different goals than the first proposal. The goals would be to link various genetic scores, combinations of pedagogical content and delivery, various social support programs both within and outside of schools, various interventions beginning before birth, and college graduation (and other exemplars of educational attainment, especially substantive student learning outcomes).

The largest problem for this second proposal would be of political calculation and will be created and maintained within the crucible of ideology. Should higher education be delivered and funded by governments, business, families, other public and private entities? What knowledge is to be imparted leading to college graduation? How much should college graduation serve only as some social certification and social credentialing for adult life? Are college graduates expected to meet some minimum level of academic knowledge-based functioning? What does this look like? Who or what is accountable?

There are more complexities. For example, *stigmatized threat* refers to students who—having been negatively stigmatized (socially afforded some status as inferior based on an actual or alleged characteristic)—will underperform in a situation wherein the stereotype becomes personally salient and relevant. This has been demonstrated for socioeconomic status (2) and may for genetic scores as well. And for any tracking proposal based on genetic scores, why should finite resources be proportioned for students with higher as opposed to lower scores? Presumably, the high genetic scorers may not need them or not need them as much. The low scorers presumably need them more, unless it's assumed they won't benefit. In addition, why shouldn't budgets be modified so that there are more appropriate resources for more and even all students? These are political decisions not scientific ones.

Beyond academic goals, college graduation has been a phenomenon socially apportioning winners and losers among the haves and have-nots. Greater and greater focus on return-on-investment, job placement, and college debt as opposed to learning and how the learning occurs leads to alienation in the Marxist sense—i.e., for both teachers and students, education occurs without satisfaction of many basic human needs, values, and desires (3). The resulting college graduate and college teacher are minted less than whole with less human capital available for national security. So, the biggest dangers on the road to further correlating genetic variants with college graduation may be reinforcing the power of the already powerful and reinforcing the false consciousness of those who don't. Genetically reinforced college graduation and college graduation itself may become exemplars of technical progress with a negation of human progress leading to our contemporary world of brutalization and dehumanization. Is this what graduating college is worth? Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows (4).

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Abstract/Description: There are newly shared positive correlations between genetics and college graduation. Although higher education including college graduation has national security import, social policy implications based on such data are less clear.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

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