

December 1, 1964

Dr. M. B. Walters
1310 Fairmont Medical Building
750 West Broadway
Vancouver 9, B. C., Canada

Dear Dr. Walters:

I appreciate your interest in writing to me and am pleased at the opportunity to share my thoughts on the problem of creativity with you. However, I would prefer to remain anonymous and have generally discouraged the kind of personal inquiry that, with all good intent, you might now propose.

My chief complaint would be against the possibility of establishing scientifically useful generalizations from anecdotal studies. I fully realize the very serious problems involved in obtaining factual information in such a sphere, but social physics is retarded far more than it is helped by fragmentary and too subjective investigations.

My second point may contradict the aura of the first one, but it has to do with the utter unreliability of subjective reports, even when these have a purported objective tone. You should not trust anything that I might say about my undergraduate academic career, my marks, or my class standings without objective verification and, of course, I realize how difficult this is to obtain. Even as I regard your third question, I come more and more to the understanding how difficult it is to evaluate the role of unconscious processes, even in what is purportedly "progressive thought along clear conscious lines". In any case, a subject's impressions as to the characteristics of his thinking must be the most unreliable account of them. To your last question: discoveries that come from large research teams are likely to be derogated as being not "truly" creative for that very reason and quite irrespective of their importance in the advancement of scientific culture.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics