

What counts as a talent nowadays?

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The annual *Miss America Pageant* struggles for survival tomorrow. And what makes it different from Donald Trump's *Miss USA* and *Miss Universe* is the talent competition. (Yes, *Miss World* also has a talent competition, but nobody in the United States pays any attention to *Miss World*, probably because of the aforementioned Donald Trump.) It's not that I go out of my way to watch these pageants, but if it's convenient, a bunch of us will get together to enjoy the festivities. During the opening parade of the *Miss Universe* pageant, we scream in horror at the hideous national costumes or the unflattering evening gowns. During the ~~swimsuit~~ Lifestyle and Fitness competition (Whom do they think they're kidding?) the women play the game "Real or Fake?" (I recuse myself from that game citing lack of expertise.) But my favorite part is always the talent competition. The talents are mostly musical, primarily singing, with a decent amount of instrumental performance—I enjoy these, particularly the instrumental ones, since I actually know something about the subject. The ones that aren't musical are dancing—I'm not particularly knowledgeable about dance and usually don't know what to make of the performance. Extremely rarely you'll encounter a dramatic reading (which to me feels like a cheat). As accomplished as the contestants are, these talents all feel kind of "squishy". (Indeed, back in the Regency era, the term *accomplished* was used to refer to proficiency at these sorts of talents, and it was an open secret that the reason for developing these skills was simply to secure a husband.) But where are the *real* talents? If only we had contestants demonstrating other talents like consensus building, project management, electronics repair, chicken plucking, or suitcase packing.

Then again, maybe those things are really skills rather than talents.

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