The Light Side of Creativity: an Ethical Mindset Boosts Individual Creativity, a Moral Mindset Fosters Group Creativity

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Recent research revealed a dark side of creativity (e.g., Gino & Ariely, 2011), establishing that creativity can compromise ethical behavior. In two studies, we flip this perspective to show that creators with an ethical or a moral mindset enjoy a creative advantage. “Good”, then, can also boost creativity.

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It’s Not Just About You: Social Influences on Creative Outcomes

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Paper #1: Heart Versus Head: Examining Differential Effects of Empathy Versus Perspective Taking on Creative Product Design
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Paper #2: The Light Side of Creativity: An Honesty Mindset Can Boost Creativity
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Paper #3: Towards Understanding Creative Ingenuity in Dire Situations
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Paper #4: The Impact of Comparisons with Others on Creativity Outcomes
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SESSION OVERVIEW

Creativity has been defined as the generation of ideas, insights or problem solutions that are both new and useful (Amabile 1983; Sternberg and Lubart 1999). Consumers themselves engage in various problem solving activities and enjoy creative outputs in a wide range of contexts. In today’s society, perhaps more than ever, creativity prevails as part of our everyday consumption environment. Whether sharing an idea in an online community, engaging in a craft project or creating a customized product, consumers value creative outcomes. It is no surprise then that over the past several decades, researchers have delved in understanding the antecedents and effects of consumer creativity. Recently however, most research in consumer creativity has focused on studying the effects of situational variables, such as external constraints (Moreau and Dahl 2005), involvement (Burroughs and Mick 2004), noise (Mehta et al. 2012), spaciousness (Meyers-Levy and Zhu 2007) on creativity.

The proposed session aims to diverge from this trend. This session brings together four papers that examine a more human side of creativity. First paper (Herd and Mehta) furthers current understanding of empathic design and teases apart the differential effects of empathy and perspective taking on creativity. Specifically, this paper demonstrates that empathy leads to higher levels of shared identity which then leads to more creative product outcomes. The second paper (Sellier and Dahl) examines the role of ethics in consumer creativity. Building upon recent research which demonstrates that higher creativity can lead to more unethical behavior, this work shows that an ethical (or a moral) mindset can lead to higher creativity. Hence, looking at things from a positive perspective this paper suggests that “good”, can also boost creativity. The third paper in the session (Yang and Chattopadhyay) recognizes mortality salience and its influence on creativity. This research considers dire situations that can make death salient. The authors find that such thought processes can hamper divergent thinking, resulting in lower creativity of the generated ideas. Finally, the fourth paper (Tu and Argo) investigates the effect of consumers’ social comparisons and evaluation expectations on creative outcomes. This paper shows that when consumers’ creative outcomes are expected to be compared based on an individual’s own ability level, it’ll lead to higher level of creativity as it’ll enhance competition and involvement in the given creativity task. However, when the social comparison is based on the creativity outcome itself, it will negatively affect creative performance.

In sum, this proposed session examines a wide range of theoretical constructs (empathy, social comparison, morality, mortality) and their distinct influences on creative performance. All four papers in the session enhance current understanding of consumer creativity and provide cutting edge insights into how consumers’ subtle psychological variables can either enhance or inhibit creativity. Thus, we believe that this session in itself presents a coherent theme that will appeal to a wide range of consumer behavior researchers.

Heart Versus Head: Examining Differential Effects of Empathy Versus Perspective Taking on Creative Product Design

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The extant literature in product innovation and creativity has treated the constructs of empathy and perspective taking interchangeably (e.g., Dahl et al. 1999). Yet, recent literature suggests they are theoretically different processes (e.g., Davis et al. 1987; Galinsky et al. 2008).

Perspective taking is a cognitive process by which one imagines how another person thinks (Batson et al. 2007; Dahl et al. 1999). By taking another’s perspective, consumers are able to “put themselves in the shoes” of a target. This process allows them to better anticipate the behavior and reactions of others (e.g., Davis 1983). Empathy, on the other hand, is an affective process that involves the adoption of another’s feelings (e.g., Batson et al. 2007; Escalas and Stern 2003). Importantly, perspective taking and empathy have been shown to induce differences in the way the self is construed. Perspective taking involves taking another’s perspective, but allows one to maintain an individual self-identity (e.g., Simon et al. 1997). An empathic connection on the other hand enhances shared identity, a redefinition in terms of others (e.g., Brewer et al. 1993; Simon et al. 1997).

This adaptation of shared identity as compared to maintaining one’s self-identity allows individuals to retrieve unconventional knowledge about others which then leads to enhanced creativity (e.g., Maddux and Galinsky 2009). We thus propose that in a product design context an affective process of empathic concern as compared to the cognitive process of perspective taking will lead to higher levels of shared identity, which in turn will lead to product designs that are more creative in nature. We test our hypothesis across three studies involving real design tasks and consistently find that empathy (vs. perspective taking) leads to more creative product designs. To pinpoint shared identity as the underlying process, we both measure and manipulate it across studies.

In study 1, all participants (N = 80) were prompted with either perspective taking or empathy strategy (manipulation adapted from Batson et al. 2007). In the perspective taking condition, participants were told to visualize a target consumer interacting with the product. In the empathy condition, participants are told to imagine how a target consumer would feel while using the product. Following the manipulation, all participants were directed to provide new creative ideas for a laptop that is specifically designed for consumers age 65+. Following the study, independent raters blind to condition evaluated each participant’s ideas on the following dimensions: creativity, novelty, originality. These measures were averaged to create a mean objective
creativity score (α = .91). Results revealed a main effect of empathy vs. perspective taking (M_{PT} = 3.45 vs. M_{Emp} = 3.56; F(1, 79) = 4.65, p < .04).

In the next study, all participants (N = 45) were again prompted with either a perspective taking or empathy strategy. Following the manipulation, each participant provided many creative ideas as they could for a grocery cart for the elderly. Again, we found a main effect of strategy on objective creativity such that those prompted with empathy were more creative (M_{Emp} = 3.50 vs. M_{PT} = 3.84; F(1, 44) = 4.12, p < .05). In order to better understand the underlying process, we also captured shared identity measures of how similar they imagined themselves being to the elderly and how much they imagined themselves as a unique individual (reverse-coded). Mediation analysis using bootstrap approach showed a significant indirect effect of shared identity through which empathy (vs. perspective taking) influenced creativity (95% CI: 0.455, 4.336).

Finally, in study 3, we manipulated shared identity to provide further evidence that this change in how participants identify with consumers influences creative output. All participants (N = 180) were provided with Lego-like toy pieces called Krinkles and were instructed to create a toy prototype for a 4-6 year old child. Strategy (empathy vs. perspective taking) was manipulated as in previous studies. Shared Identity was manipulated by asking participants to “imagine, as a product designer, if you were a 4-6 year old child how you would interact (how you would feel) while playing with the toy.” In Self Identity condition the participants were asked to “imagine, as a product designer, how this segment of 4-6 year old children will interact (feel) while playing with the toy.” Following the study, we took pictures of each design and asked moms of 4-6 year old children to evaluate each design’s creativity (creativity, novelty, originality). A significant two way interaction was observed (F(1, 179) = 7.78, p < .01) such that when the participants were primed with self identity empathy lead to lower creativity of the prototypes. However, when shared identity was primed no difference was observed between empathy and perspective taking conditions.

Taken together, these studies reconfirm that perspective taking and empathy are distinct constructs which differentially influence identification with consumers, driving differences in consumers’ abilities to develop new and creative ideas and designs.

REFERENCES


The Light Side of Creativity: An Honesty Mindset Can Boost Creativity

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Considerable consumer research has established that a critical area of study is the investigation of contextual factors that enable consumers to be creative (e.g., Moreau and Dahl 2005). Alarming, recent research documented that creativity can negatively affect ethical behavior (e.g., Gino and Ariely, 2012). The present research flips this perspective to show that creators with an ethical mindset can enjoy greater creativity (study 1). We further show that a moral mindset can similarly serve as a creative boost (study 2). In sum, the activation of “good” can increase creativity.

What is a mindset? Engaging in certain tasks is known to activate a set of cognitive operations, which remain activated beyond the initial task, thereby influencing subsequent and unrelated tasks – the term “mindset” is used to refer to this global readiness (e.g., Gollwitzer, 1990). Following this research, we define an ethical mindset as a global readiness to have appropriate feelings in distinguishing between what is morally acceptable versus not (Crisp 2000). As such, an ethical mindset involves one’s justification of one’s actions as being appropriate (Gino & Ariely, 2012); it implies moral flexibility. A moral mindset is different in that it represents a global readiness to abide by an absolute set of rules allowing no internal justification – whether actions are appropriate is externally dictated.

We examine how an ethical mindset versus a moral mindset shapes subsequent creative cognitive processing. Prior research pinpointed constraints as a critical antecedent of creativity (e.g., Dahl & Moreau, 2007). Both an ethical and a moral mindset constrain the creative process in that they focus creators on ethical/moral creative solutions. Further, an ethical mindset provides autonomy, because it allows internal justification of one’s actions whereas a moral mindset stifles autonomy. For these reasons, we expect that an ethical mindset will foster individual creativity more than a moral mindset and than a non-constraining, neutral mindset.

We tested this prediction in a first study in which 92 students (45 men, age = 20.1 years) completed creative tasks after having been primed with ethics-related, morals-related, or neutral words. They were told that they would take part in two studies. The first task was a word search task. Participants had to circle words hidden in a grid, from a list appearing below the grid. We varied the list of words, so that most of the words either related to ethics (e.g., “altruistic,” “generous”), morals (e.g., “abiding,” “imperative”) or were neutral (e.g., “armchair,” “telephone.”). Participants subsequently
reported how creative, original, novel, inspired, artistic, and innovative they perceived their alien to be (1-7; not at all/very), their mood, and other measures.

Next, participants participated in an ostensibly unrelated creativity study. They were instructed to imagine visiting a different planet, and encountering an alien there. Their task was to be as creative as possible in drawing this alien (Ward, 1994). Next, they were given a creative problem-solving task, the Duncker candle task, for which only one solution exists.

Once all data from creators were collected, 16 peers independently rated each alien’s creativity, indicating how creative, original, novel, inspired, artistic, innovative (1-7; not at all/very; α for the averaged creativity score across peers = .99) the aliens were. Subsequently, they rated each alien’s attractiveness (6 items, all α’s > .85).

Seven participants did not follow the study instructions, and were therefore excluded from the sample. We report our analyses for the remaining 85 participants. We computed a self-perceived creativity index by averaging creators’ creativity ratings (α = .91), and subjected this index to an ANOVA. We found a significant impact of Mindset, F(1, 85) = 3.15, p < .05, r² = .04, such that creators with an ethical mindset perceived their aliens to be significantly more creative than creators with a moral mindset (M_ethical = 4.43 vs. M_moral = 3.44, t(82) = 1.94, p = .05, r² = .04); and than creators with a neutral mindset (M_neutral = 3.28, t(82) = 2.34, p < .03, r² = .06). Moral and neutral creators rated themselves as equally creative, t < 1.

Next, we computed an objective creativity index by averaging peers’ creativity ratings (all αs > .85). An ANOVA using this index as the dependent variable showed a significant impact of Mindset, F(1, 85) = 3.16, p < .05, r² = .04, such that the ethical aliens were judged more creative than the moral aliens, M_ethical = 4.34 vs. M_moral = 3.77, t(82) = 2.27, p < .03, r² = .06; and than the neutral aliens, M_neutral = 3.81, t(82) = 1.94, p = .05, r² = .04. Moral and neutral aliens were rated equally creative, f < 1.

Focusing on the Duncker candle problem, we found that 54% of ethical participants found the correct answer, a greater performance than moral participants (29% solved correctly, χ² = 3.62, one-tail p < .03), and than neutral participants (30%, χ² = 3.24, one-tail p < .04). We found no influence of mood or peers’ alien attractiveness ratings on our results, all p’s > .08.

A second study examines when a moral mindset can boost creativity above and beyond an ethical mindset. Following research in moral psychology (Haidt 2007), we suggest that a moral mindset (vs. an ethical mindset) will foster greater creativity when creators work in groups, because it activates group cohesion and facilitation processes during the creative process. In contrast, because it boosts autonomy, an ethical mindset compromises group cohesion.

We primed 90 participants with an ethical or a moral mindset as in study 1, before they worked on designing a toy for people eating behind the wheel, in groups of 3 or 4. Subsequently, they rated their creative process experience, in particular the extent to which they felt the group worked well and enjoyed cohesion. We found that moral groups produced more creative toys than ethical groups primed, p < .05. Further, we found that groups’ ratings of how well they worked together mediated this effect.

Together, our results suggest that, if creativity can lead to dishonesty, honesty can also produce a creative advantage.

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creativity ability is likely to be inferior to those with moderate level of internal locus-of-control under mortality salience.

Our propositions were tested in the field and the lab. In study 1, we obtained consumers’ new product suggestions (n=44,864) submitted to a major beverage company over a period of 174 weeks. Each of these ideas was evaluated by the firm’s customers and the average quality of the ideas submitted was calculated for each of the weeks. We also obtained empirical data on the extent to which death was reported in the media during the same period. We ran a regression with the quality of the new product ideas as the dependent measure, the extent to which death was reported in the media as the independent measure, as well as variables controlling for consumer participation level and seasonality effects. Consistent with our proposition, the level of death reporting in the media had a significant negative effect on the quality of new product ideas (beta=-3.23, t=-2.18, p<.03).

Study 2 examined whether mortality salience (MS) inhibits access to divergent knowledge. Participants (n=221) first responded to a locus-of-control scale (Rotter 1966). Following a most commonly used TMT paradigm (Burke et al. 2010), participants were then asked to write down thoughts regarding either their own death (MS condition) or viewing TV programs (control condition). Next, they completed the PANAS (Watson et al. 1988) that captured participants’ affective states and served as a delay task (cf. Pyszczynski et al.1999). Thereafter, participants in both conditions were asked to write down all the place names they could think of with “A” as the first letter. Consistent with the hypothesis that mortality salience inhibits access to divergent information in memory, participants in the MS condition wrote down significantly fewer foreign place names (e.g., Algeria, Aruba, Azerbaijan) than those who in the control condition (Mcontrol=3.98, MMS=5.09, t=2.50, p<.01). Further, a significant interaction effect between the locus of control measure and mortality salience manipulation was found (beta=-.86, t=2.95, p<.005). To probe the interaction, we trichotomized participants based on their locus-of-control. Contrast analyses revealed that, in the MS condition, participants with high internal locus-of-control wrote down significantly fewer foreign place names than those with moderate internal locus-of-control (Mmoderate=4.96, Mhigh=5.36, F=4.96, p<.03); however, the opposite was true in the control condition (Mmoderate=5.02, Mhigh=7.25, F=8.27, p<.005).

In study 3, participants (n=247) were given a business decision making task—deciding what new business should go into a commercial property where a restaurant went bankrupt (adapted from Goncalo and Staw 2006); Whether participants followed the precedence—using the space for a restaurant again served the DV. The experimental procedure was similar to that of study 2. As expected, the same pattern of interaction effect and contrast comparison results emerged (p’s<.04). Finally, inconsistent with an affect-based account, including PANAS scores in the analyses did not affect the findings of study 2 and 3.

Overall, these results shed light on how mortality salience affects information accessibility and creative problem solving, add to the literature non-conscious processes underlying creativity (e.g., Yang et al. 2012; Zhong et al. 2008), and illuminate the role of control beliefs in terror management theories. Moreover, our findings contradict lay intuitions: A survey of mid to senior level executives (n=30) at one of the largest logistics firms in the world revealed that the majority (67%, x²=15.2, p<.01) would put high locus-of-control managers in charge of problem solving, in crisis scenarios (e.g., natural disasters or terrorist attack that resulted in a major loss of life). Our results, however, suggest that those with moderate locus-of-control may be more creative problem solvers in those dire scenarios.

REFERENCES
The Impact of Comparisons with Others on Creativity Outcomes

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

From scrapbooking to gift designing, from online co-creation (e.g., “My Starbucks Idea”) to customization (e.g., NikeID customization service), people often undertake the role of designer. The success of these activities requires participants to be creative. Also, these situations often entail a social environment where participants may interact with, and expect evaluation from similar others. While past research has investigated the impact of evaluation expectation from experts (people who are experienced in the domain under investigation) on creativity (for a review, see Amabile 1996), little research has examined the situation where evaluations are expected from similar others who are involved in either the same or a different creativity task. The present research attempts to fill this gap.

Building upon social comparison theory (Festinger 1954), we propose that in a creativity task (e.g., making a card), in order to assess their own abilities, people are likely to compare with others when they can easily see others’ creations, especially when evaluation is expected from others. Further, we hypothesize that comparisons with others occur at different levels depending on the type of creativity task in which others are involved. First, when people are involved in the same creativity task (i.e., people making scrapbook pages in a scrapbooking class), comparisons are likely to occur based on the creativity outcomes, focusing on the dimensions under evaluation (e.g., the theme of the creation and the materials used; Wood and Taylor 1990). We refer to such comparisons as outcome-oriented comparisons. Second, when people are involved in different creativity tasks (i.e., people working under different categories of the same co-creation platform) comparisons are expected to occur based on an individual’s own ability level, focusing on dimensions related to creativity ability (e.g., one’s occupation and experiences in the creativity task). We refer to such comparisons as individual ability-oriented comparisons. We propose a focus on outcome-oriented comparisons is detrimental to creativity because it constrains choice of what and how to create, while a focus on ability-oriented comparisons could leverage creativity because it enhances competition and involvement in the creativity task. Of note, while several early studies have found that constraints enhance creativity in a variety of creativity tasks (e.g., Costello and Keane 2000; Finke, Ward, and Smith 1992; Stokes 2001; Moreau and Dahl 2005), we argue it is unlikely the case in our context since people participating in the creativity task are not explicitly required to follow the creations of others. This argument is supported by Moreau and Dahl’s (2005) finding that only when constraints are both restricted and required, constraints enhance creativity.

Study 1 used a 2 (task type: same vs. different) x 2 (expected evaluation: yes vs. no) between-subjects design. A total of 65 females were run individually with one trained female confederate who was attending as another participant and did either the same creativity task (making a card) as the participants or a different task (sentence scrambling). To assess the creativity of the participants’ card designs, three experts with abundant experience in card-making who were blind to the study hypothesis and treatment evaluated the pictures of the participants’ card designs on six items, including “the card design is creative, distinct, unique, complex, neat, and the materials used are novel” (1 = not at all, 7 = to an extremely extent; items adapted from Amabile 1979). A creativity index was created by averaging the scores of these six items of the three coders (α = .92). The results revealed a significant interaction of task type and expected evaluation (F(1, 61) = 5.13, p < .05), while both main effects were not significant (p’s > .05). Planned contrasts indicated that participants were more creative when an evaluation was expected from a person who was doing a different task versus doing the same task (t(57) = 2.23, p < .05). No other contrasts were significant (all p’s > .05).

Study 2 seeks to obtain evidence that comparison levels drive the interactive effect of comparisons and evaluation expectation on creativity. We will adopt the same procedure of study 1 except: 1) evaluation expectation will always be present and 2) comparison necessity will be manipulated, yielding a 2 (task type: same vs. different) x 2 (comparison necessity: yes vs. no) between-subjects design. We expect that when comparison is necessary, participants will compare with the confederate intensively at the creativity outcome level/individual ability level in the same/different task condition, and hence, participants in the same task condition will be less creative than those in the different task condition. However, when comparison is unnecessary, there will be no comparison at either level, and hence, task type will not influence creativity differently.

Study 3 seeks to obtain support from a real-existing co-creation platform of a company. We will adopt a 2 (task type: same vs. different) x 2 (type of information available: creativity outcome vs. personal ability-related) between-subjects design. Specifically, participants will see creations (vs. personal ability related information) of others from the same (vs. different) contest. The personal ability-related information will include participants’ age, gender, occupation and experiences in the co-creation platform. We expect an interactive effect of the task type and information available on the participants’ creations.

Overall, the proposed research will make a number of contributions. Foremost, this research will add to work on creativity by investigating the impact of similar others on one’s creativity. Second, this research will extend social comparison theory by demonstrating that within the domain of creativity, people can make social comparisons at different levels (i.e., outcome vs. individual ability), and that the outcome of creativity depends on the level of such comparisons. Third, while traditionally, creativity research has focused on the importance of experts when studying expected evaluations, the present research found preliminary evidence that expectation of evaluation from similar others also has a significant influence on creativity. Finally, the expected findings will provide insights into the impact of others consumers on the outcome of creativity in co-creation community.

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