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CREATIVITY

Vol. 5, Issue 2, 2018

Theories – Research – Applications

Will Becoming More Creative Make us More Tolerant?

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Creativity
Openness
Flexibility
Stereotypes
Prejudice
Interventions

Article history:

Received 03 November 2018
Received in revised form 20 November 2018
Accepted 10 December 2018

ISSN: 2354-0036
DOI: 10.1515/ctra-2018-0015

ABSTRACT

This commentary attempts to address the question of "Why creativity matters?" from the perspective of social psychology, by pointing out processes, which promote creativity while diminishing prejudices. I argue that through enhancing creativity, stereotyping can be reduced which can translate to the further improvement of intergroup relations. The common correlates of low prejudices and creativity supporting this hypothesis, are presented in this paper and comprise: (1) cognitive flexibility, (2) openness to experience and (3) perspective taking. Further, I invoke the existing literature regarding the link between schema-inconsistencies and creativity, which highlights the interrelatedness of these processes, but views creativity as an outcome, rather than a tool for social change. The assumed relationship can be seen as an opening to numerous future research paths, as it can give rise to various detailed questions from the points of view of basic and applied psychology.

The call for suggestions regarding the importance of creativity opened by James C. Kaufman (2018) and possibilities of viewing creativity as a predictive, rather than an independent variable, can be tackled from various perspectives. This commentary attempts to address this question by considering the promising role of creativity in recuperating intergroup relations, and pointing out the overlap between mechanisms driving both - creativity and stereotypes/prejudices.

Stereotypes, despite their forcible role in organizing the social world and saving cognitive resources, are inseparably related to serious social problems, as they exacerbate intergroup conflict and relate closely to prejudices toward various groups - from ethnic and racial, through religious, to those related to appearance or gender. Their behav-

ioral consequence - discrimination - is clearly harmful for the targeted groups, as it affects their physical and mental health, results in poorer opportunities in education and on the labour market, as well as in a generally more negative quality of life (Dahl & Krog, 2018; Inzlicht, Tullett, Legault, & Kang, 2011; Paradies, 2006). The nature of prejudice and possible ways of reducing it, have been extensively studied throughout the last century. Scholars have identified various methods of reducing intergroup bias through promoting democracy, equity and tolerance (Stephan & Vogt, 2004). Some interventions based, for example, on intergroup contact, social cognitive training or moral development, have proved to have a positive impact on intergroup biases (Paluck & Green, 2009), yet their effects are typically low to moderate (for a recent meta-analysis see Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014). Simultaneously to the attempts of social psychologists who constantly search for new methods to reduce these biases, creativity psychology has recently set a goal of addressing the real social needs.

The first possible link between creativity and stereotyping is due to a cognitive property related to them both, namely - *cognitive flexibility*. Flexibility is one way to achieve original outcomes according to the Dual Pathway to Creativity Model (Baas, Roskes, Sligte, Nijstad, & De Dreu, 2013; Nijstad, De Dreu, Rietzschel, & Baas, 2010). A flexible way of thinking entails the use of remote associations, the application of broad and inclusive cognitive categories and unconstrained switching among them (Nijstad et al., 2010). It is a set-breaking and divergent way of processing information; a tendency to approach problems from different angles, and the negation of habitual thinking as well as of employment of fixed task strategies (De Dreu, Baas, & Nijstad, 2012). Also, for less creative individuals, stimuli are generally more strongly associated with fewer responses, in comparison to other responses (steep association hierarchy). For more creative individuals, the differences in strengths of associations are smaller (flatter association hierarchy) (Mednick, 1962; see Nijstad et al., 2010). This should result in a less stereotypical way of thinking. In light of this, activities enhancing cognitive flexibility and promoting thinking “outside of the box” can contribute to combating stereotypical associations - which is a promising first step for improving intergroup relations (Ensari & Miller, 2001; Hall & Crisp, 2005).

The second fact binding together creativity and tolerance is that they have a common personality correlate - *openness to experience*. A handful of studies has delivered evidence for its relation to creativity (e.g. Beaty & Silvia, 2012; Silvia, Nusbaum, Berg, Martin, & O’Connor, 2009). Openness is a predictive trait for a broad range of creativity measures including divergent thinking, everyday creative behaviours, creativity-

demanding occupations and creative achievements (Carson, Higgins, & Peterson, 2003; Feist, 1998; Silvia et al., 2009). Not surprisingly, supporting openness is a significant goal of creativity training (e.g. Dziedziewicz, Gajda, & Karwowski, 2014). Simultaneously, people who rank high in openness, tend to initiate and enjoy intergroup contact more often (Jackson & Poulsen, 2005) in comparison to people low in openness and this personality trait drives lower prejudice and discriminatory attitudes. This relationship is, however, mediated by Right Wing Authoritarianism (e.g. Cramer, Miller, Amacker, & Burks, 2013; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). Also, people ranking low in openness score higher on other measures that have been repeatedly linked to prejudice (for example religious fundamentalism, Saroglou, 2002). The conclusions about openness and intergroup relations should, however, be interpreted with caution, as recent findings suggest that people high in openness are indeed more tolerant, but not necessarily towards those who represent worldviews opposite to their own (Brandt, Chambers, Crawford, & Wetherell, 2015).

The third tangent point for creativity and prejudices is that of *perspective taking,* understood as a cognitive process, personality trait or an interactional process that generally entails putting oneself in another's shoes (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). Perspective taking decreases negative stereotype content and affective component of perspective taking - empathy - shapes (i.e. warms) attitudes (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Stephan & Finlay, 1999; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). In a situation requiring team work, building upon someone else's insights instead of questioning them, or forcing one's own opinions upon them, creates a space of tolerance, exploration and playfulness (Hawlina, Gillespie, & Zittoun, 2017). These, together with tolerance of ambiguity and an atmosphere of trust, have been shown to elevate idea generation (Winnicott, 2012; Zenasni, Besançon, & Lubart, 2008). Also, Hawlina and colleagues (2017) have shown that dyads with high levels of trait perspective taking are characterized by a higher frequency of domain shifts (i.e. higher flexibility) while brainstorming, in comparison to dyads ranking lower in this trait. The aforementioned evidence suggests that exercises supporting and engaging in perspective taking, can have at least twofold benefits - in creative performance, as well as in an attitude shift.

The link between creativity and stereotypes has been studied before; only the opposite causal relation - enhancing creativity through stereotype-reducing interventions - has awaited extensive elaboration and empirical verification. Gocłowska and colleagues (2013, 2013a, 2014) have shown that focusing on counter-stereotypical social associations (e.g. female-mechanic), or memorizing schema-inconsistent pictures (e.g. a Bedouin standing in snow) can increase creative performance, which can increase creative per-

formance, which has been operationalized as making more creative posters or scoring higher in Remote Associations Test (Goclowska, Baas, Crisp, & Dreu, 2014; RAT Mednick, 1968) and other divergent thinking tasks (Gocłowska & Crisp, 2013; Gocłowska, Crisp, & Labuschagne, 2013). In particular, interventions resulted in higher *flexibility* in generating alternative uses of ordinary objects (Gocłowska & Crisp, 2013a) or in generating names for a new food brand (Gocłowska, Crisp, & Labuschagne, 2013). Other schema-confronting experiences like the exposure to foreign cultures (Leung & Chiu, 2010; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009) were also shown to increase creative performance and, at the same time, they are known to improve intergroup relations (Stefaniak & Bilewicz, 2014).

In summary, there are ways in which creativity can contribute to the challenge of increasing diversity and to the fight against discrimination. To my knowledge, only one study has shown that priming the concept of creativity can reduce implicit biases (Sassenberg, Moskowitz, Fetterman, & Kessler, 2017) but no study to date has examined the potential impact that an increase of actual creative performance may have on intergroup relations. Although the idea of the social benefits of bringing creativity into the school curriculum has been recently present in the literature (Luria & Kaufman, 2017; Luria, Sriraman, & Kaufman, 2017), its empirical confirmation is yet to come. Taking further steps to reveal this process has the potential to be one of the field's avenues to answer the question of *"Why creativity matters?"*.

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