

An empirical study of the construct validity of social creativity

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Received 15 March 2007; received in revised form 26 October 2007; accepted 10 November 2007

Abstract

Creativity can be broadly defined as a combination of interacting individual and environmental resources leading to the production of valuable solutions. This paper concentrates on the type of creativity that can be expressed in solving social problems. After reviewing the potentially relevant psychological and contextual variables intervening in social creativity, leading to individual differences in this capacity, we present results of a study testing the nomological validity of social creativity in a group of 70 pre-adolescents. The findings indicate that social creativity performance is linked with socially relevant variables such as social competencies, popularity, and parenting style. Finally, we discuss the relevance of a creativity approach in social domains such as violence prevention programs and education.

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Keywords: Child; Adolescent; Social; Creativity

1. An empirical study of the construct validity of social creativity

In the field of psychology, the creative process is often defined quite simply as the act of producing novel solutions. Yet explaining why creative expression varies from one person to another represents a highly complex task, considering the number of variables that could potentially intervene in the creative process, as well as in the availability of the resources needed for the process to occur, in addition to the consideration the creative product receives from its public. Consequently, our approach is rooted in a multivariate framework, proposing that creativity results from interactions among variables that can be organized into cognitive, personality, emotional, and environmental domains (Lubart, Mouchiroud, Tordjman, & Zenasni, 2003).

In this paper, the multivariate nature of creativity will be considered in the social domain, a form that is expressed when one or several individuals choose new strategies to solve social problems or enhance social activities, within dyads or in larger groups (Mouchiroud & Lubart, 2002). First, we will raise some issues concerning the notion of social creativity, and try to expose

briefly the main psychological and environmental variables that may account for individual differences in this type of creative behaviour. Next, as part of a research program aimed at investigating the lifelong developmental process of creative social abilities, we present results of an empirical study assessing the construct validity of social creativity. As we measured different types of cognitive, socio-affective as well as environmental variables, we examine the shared variance of each measure with creative performance in social tasks. To conclude, we consider the learnability of social creativity, and discuss perspectives provided through a creativity approach to intervention programs, at the individual as well as societal levels.

1.1. Nature of social creativity

The emergence of novel ways to solve social problems or organize social groups has played a key role in social and cultural change. At the individual level, differences in this ability have long been documented, under various labels. One related concept is the ancient Greeks' *metis*, which in broad terms refers to ingeniousness and wisdom in solving practical problems. According to Destienne and Vernant (1974), this human ability has been for 10 centuries a central aspect since Ancient Greece, as embodied in Ulysses' cunning character or

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in works of Greek philosophers and politicians. Other closely related constructs to social creativity are Ribot’s (1906) notion of moral or utopian imagination in his typology of creative domains (see Mouchiroud & Lubart, 2006), or Gardner’s inter-individual intelligence in his Multiple Intelligences theory (1983, 1993). Moreover, the creative nature of social development has long been documented, in Piaget’s early work on moral development (1932), or later in Spivack and Shure (1974) and Dodge’s (1986) creative social problem solving perspective.

As the scope of social creativity may seem very broad, we find it useful to consider its main dimensions (See Table 1). First, as in other domains of creative expressions, novelty of the act can vary along a psychological-historical continuum (Boden, 1992; see Sternberg, 1999, for a formulation in different categories instead of a continuous variable). At the most mundane level, one behaviour may be considered creative from the individual’s point of view, as in adaptive social strategies that are novel to the self, yet known to other individuals. At the other end, we find historical creativity, in social contributions of individuals that have somehow altered our representation of a given social structure, or invented a novel one. As we investigated pre-adolescents’ creative potential in the social domain, as opposed to “actualized” (thus possibly historical) social creativity, our present study concerned mainly psychological social creativity. Yet historical social creativity can also be examined through empirical means, following for instance Simonton’s retrospective approach (1997).

A second dimension concerns the size of the group in which the creative behaviour occurs. Social creativity may be expressed from dyadic relations to larger groups, up to a “societal” creativity. Future generations can be included in the largest social group, as their survival may draw on socially creative behaviours (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). Within this two-dimensional space, we can find various examples of social creativity, such as Freud’s psychoanalysis (as a form of dyadic historical creativity), or Gandhi’s new form of social protest (as societal historical creativity). At the psychological level, each of us may display social creativity, from novel ways to deal with other individuals (dyadic psychological creativity) to implications in local or larger associations, trade unions, parties, social movements or religious groups (societal psychological creativity); ultimately, in an ecological perspective, societal psychological creativity may include any novel behaviour that help

reduce the ecological imprint (Rees, 1992) of individuals whose consumption levels have a negative impact on our global environment. Csikszentmihalyi (2006) considers this last form as creative expression in the “domain of the future”, whereas Family (2003) describes it as “collective creativity”.

To conclude our tentative sketch of the social creativity field, consider the possibility of “antisocial” or “a-social” creativity. We cannot deny that our species has invented numerous new possibilities to physically or psychologically harm others, sometimes we must admit in very clever ways. Yet we won’t label this form of behaviour “creative”, as we wish to include an ethical dimension in creative behavior (Bergson, 1919; Cropley, 1999). Consequently, acts such as invention of nuclear weapons or 20th century totalitarianisms that could be qualified as novel and appropriate, will not be considered creative. If their novelty is not easily disputed, their appropriateness is highly debatable. Here a “creativity as social judgment” perspective (see Amabile, 1996) can help us draw a firm line between social creativity and antisocial inventions. Nevertheless, aggressive acts can be examined through our creativity approach to social relations (Lubart, Mouchiroud, Zenasni, & Averill, 2004). As the emergence of socially creative behaviours can initiate positive social change, lack of it may turn social contacts into aggressive ones. Previous research in the social problem solving domain (Dodge, 1986; Spivack & Shure, 1974) has already stressed the relevance of creative abilities in social development. Understanding the origins of individual differences in social creativity abilities could thus bring valuable knowledge at designing violence preventions programs. In our discussion, we will present education programs that have considered the promotion of adaptive social development via fostering creative abilities.

1.2. Multivariate approach to social creativity

Even though the multivariate approach may seem methodologically costly, considering the high number of potential psychological and environmental factors to be examined, its value lies in its exhaustivity. In our current search for a comprehensive model of creativity, we must indeed not take the risk of leaving aside potentially relevant predictors. Additionally, this framework makes possible investigations of everyday creativity as well as groundbreaking discoveries and innovations. Different combinations of valuable levels of these predictors could explain why creativity varies from one individual to another and from one domain of expression to another within the same individual (Lubart et al., 2003).

As for other domains of expression, social creativity stems from interactions between cognitive, conative, emotional and environmental variables. Before we give an overview of potential predictors for social creativity, it must be emphasized that creativity involves more than the mere addition of an appropriate level in each of these variables. Several variables may have a specific level under which creative behaviour cannot be expressed. In addition, two or more variables may partially compensate each other, or have a multiplicative effect on the likelihood for creative behaviour.

Table 1
Examples of contributions along the two-dimensional social creativity space

		Size of the group	
		Dyad	Society
Novelty of the behavior	Psychological	New strategy in solving interpersonal conflict	Individual’s involvement in societal change
	Historical	Freud’s psychoanalysis	Gandhi’s method of social protest

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