



The impact of competition on intrinsic motivation and creativity: considering gender, gender segregation and gender role orientation

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Abstract

The present research investigated whether competition influences children's artistic creativity and intrinsic motivation toward an art activity. Study 1 tested the hypothesis that boys' creativity would be enhanced by competition, while girls' creativity would be undermined. Fifty children (aged 6–10) made paper collages in one of two conditions; half competed for prizes and half did not. Results supported our hypotheses, and further showed that when children self-segregated by gender, the impact of competition was much more pronounced. Study 2 was designed to clarify the unexpected gender-segregation finding from Study 1. The Children's Sex Role Inventory [Boldizar, J.P. (1991). Assessing sex typing and androgyny in children: the Children's Sex Role Inventory. *Developmental Psychology*, 27, 505–515] was administered to 143 children (aged 6–11). One week later, these children made paper collages in one of four conditions; in addition to manipulating competition, assigned seating ensured that half of children were segregated by gender and half were not. Following the collage activity, an intrinsic and extrinsic motivation questionnaire was administered. Masculine children reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation when competing and when segregated by gender; they also reported higher levels of extrinsic motivation, especially when segregated by gender. These findings demonstrate that gender role is an important factor in determining children's responses to competition. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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From science fairs to spelling bees, children's efforts are often propelled by the desire to win against others. The value of and potential problems with this emphasis on competition has been a frequent topic of psychological inquiry (Garza & Borchert, 1990; Johnson & Engelhard, 1992; Knight & Chao, 1989; McGlynn, Gibbs, & Roberts, 1982; Vallerand, Gauvin, & Halliwell, 1986; Weinberg & Ragan, 1979). Although children are easily engaged by nearly any activity posed as a competitive game, there is concern that their energy becomes too focused on winning at the cost of other motivating aspects of the activity (Kohn, 1985; Nicholls, 1989). Because losers typically outnumber winners, competition may have negative motivational aftereffects, as well (Reeve & Deci, 1996; Reeve, Olson, & Cole, 1987).

Amabile (1982a) was the first to propose that competition can have a negative impact on creativity. In an initial study to investigate this idea, 21 girls, aged 7–11, made paper collages at one of two "parties." At one party, prizes were awarded for the three best collages, at the other they were raffled off. Artists later rated collages for creativity. Those collages produced by girls who were at the party where prizes were awarded were found to be significantly less creative than those produced by girls at the party where prizes were raffled off (Amabile). This study, now a classic, is often cited as evidence for the damaging effects of competition (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Kohn, 1985; Nicholls, 1989).

In addition, these findings were the first to provide support for a more general notion: Amabile's intrinsic motivation hypothesis of creativity. This hypothesis, which now has considerable empirical support, states that intrinsic motivation (derived from enjoyment inherent in a task) is conducive to creativity, while extrinsic motivation (fueled by a goal separate from the task) is detrimental (Amabile, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1996; Amabile & Gitomer, 1984; Amabile, Hennessey, & Grossman, 1986; Ruscio, Whitney, & Amabile, 1998). The intrinsic motivation hypothesis is consistent with a large body of research showing that extrinsic motivators can have negative impact on later intrinsic motivation and qualitative aspects of performance (Deci, 1975; Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973; McGraw, 1978). Competition also has been found to undermine intrinsic interest (Deci, Betley, Kahle, Abrams, & Porac, 1981; Vallerand et al., 1986).

Recent theoretical accounts, however, propose that the impact of extrinsic motivators on intrinsic motivation and creativity can vary depending on how the extrinsic motivator is interpreted (Amabile, 1993, 1996; Epstein & Harackiewicz, 1992; Kohn, 1996; Lepper, Keavney, & Drake, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 1996). In addition, empirical studies have sometimes shown positive effects of competition (McGlynn et al., 1982; Weinberg & Ragan, 1979). Extrinsic incentives may actually boost intrinsic motivation and creativity when they provide positive competence information or when they make the task more interesting or challenging (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990). It seems that the negative effects of extrinsic incentives appear when they are perceived as constraining, controlling, or when they are accompanied by negative competence information (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci et al., 1999; Shalley & Oldham, 1997).

While most studies have not found gender differences in responses to extrinsic incentives, there are exceptions (Koestner, Zuckerman, & Koestner, 1989). Deci and Ryan (1985) suggested that because of traditional sex role socialization practices, men and boys may be more likely to feel challenged by extrinsic pressure, while women and girls may be more likely to feel controlled. There is reason to believe that this is especially true when the extrinsic incentive is competition. Research has consistently shown that boys tend to be more competitive and to feel more comfortable in competitive

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