



# Deceptively yours: Valence-based creativity and deception



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## ABSTRACT

Recent research has been investigating positive and negative valences of creativity; that is, using the creative process to meet positive and/or negative goals set by respective stakeholders. Given the past association between creativity and deception, this study examined whether deception was differentially related to these valences of creativity. Participants ( $N = 169$ ) completed a real-world divergent thinking task, and responded to measures of trait deception and ideational fluency. Responses were coded for originality, valence, and whether deception was used to address the situation. Results supported the overall relationship between trait deception and originality. In the high creative subsample ( $n = 42$ ), trait deception predicted not just originality, but also both valences of creativity. However, in contrast to positive creativity, individuals were more likely to use deceptive and creative processes only to engage in negative creativity. Thus, deception as a process variable was associated with negative creativity. In the four Ps framework of creativity (Rhodes, 1961), results suggested that deception operated as a Person component in positive creativity, but as Person and Process facets in negative creativity. Implications for future research include identifying other cognitive processes along which the valences of creativity differ, and assessing such differences via electrophysiological means.

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## 1. Introduction

The normative definition of creativity requires usefulness and novelty as essential components of creative output (Barron, 1955; Plucker et al., 2004; Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Stein, 1953). The output is to be identified as creative through social consensus as well (Stein, 1953). This standard definition of creativity has typically not taken into account the entire valence range of creative acts, which recent comprehensive definitions have acknowledged (Kampylis & Valtanen, 2010). The subjectivity and relativistic nature of usefulness, novelty, and thereby creativity prompt the inclusion of valence; that is, an act that may be useful to one, may be useless or harmful to another. In this context, valenced creativity takes into account the goals toward which the creative process is directed, and recognizes that such positive or negative goals can be met via positive or negative creative means (Clark & James, 1999; James et al., 1999), yielding valenced creative output.

Thus, the study of negative creativity is within the broader context of a valence-based approach to the four Ps of creativity (Person, Process, Product, Press; Rhodes, 1961). After the initial description and assessment of negative creativity in Clark and James' (1999) work, recent research has examined its components (Kapoor, 2015; Kapoor & Khan, 2016). Of the four Ps, Person and Product facets have been studied; for instance, research has found negative creativity to be associated with

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negative personality traits, like the Dark Triad (Kapoor, 2015). While it is easy to comprehend how valence, as represented by the continuum of positivity to negativity, can influence the Person, Product, and Press Ps (Rhodes, 1961), whether the creative process can be influenced by valence remains unanswered. Facets associated with the creative person, such as personality traits, intentions, and goals can assume positive or negative valences; similarly, material and situational presses in the environment can be valenced, as can creative products. For instance, one can conceive of an individual with Machiavellian tendencies using negative material and contextual processes to devise a new method to seek paid leave from employers. At the other end of the valence spectrum, there may be an imaginative architect using positive material and contextual presses to design a unique kindergarten for children (Tezuka, 2014).

However, can the underlying process of negative creativity be distinguished from that of positive creativity? Creativity comprises core processes, like problem construction and idea evaluation, occurring in a recursive manner (Mumford, Mobley, Reiter-Palmon, Uhlman, & Doares, 1991). It also comprises subprocesses that may be task dependent or influenced by “intraindividual and interindividual variability” (Lubart, 2001). Given that past research has associated dishonest and creative behaviour (e.g., Gino & Ariely, 2012), this paper investigated whether deception represented a subprocess that differentiated the valences of creativity. In this context, deception was as a cognitive process associated with creating and communicating false beliefs (Carson, 2010) that may operate alongside the creative cognitive process. Earlier work done on cheating, lying, deception, and (positive) creativity has found an association between the constructs. Those with lower self-reported and behavioural integrity were more likely to be creative on a Remote Associates Test (Beaussart, Andrews, & Kaufman, 2013). Creative individuals were more likely to cheat and be dishonest because they might be more likely to generate justifications and rationalize their unethical behaviour (Gino & Ariely, 2012). Mai, Ellis, and Welsh (2015) also found that creative trait activation moderated the relationship between the creative personality and unethical decisions, in part due to the mediation by unethical justifications. Thus, the more creative an individual, the easier it was to develop justifications for unethical behaviour, especially when primed to be creative. In contrast, higher dishonesty could also lead to creativity (Gino & Wiltermuth, 2014). This result was explained by the reasoning that engaging in dishonesty enabled individuals to feel less constrained by rules and regulations, thereby spurring creativity. Thus, research has established a dual causality between creativity and deception: (a) the more creative one was, the more capable one was to justify cheating; and (b) cheating yielded greater creativity, given that both involved disregard for rules.

With respect to creativity in deception, Walczyk, Runco, Tripp, and Smith (2008) found that creative individuals were likely to generate more novel and a greater number of lies, when lying was a form of social problem-solving. It is important to note that deception does not necessarily have to be novel, but needs to be useful in the context. Further, all deception may not be meant to harm others; prosocial lying may involve fabricating information to protect others (see also Walczyk et al., 2008). Similarly, all creativity may not be meant to help others; negative creativity may also involve harming others accidentally (see also Clark & James, 1999). All kinds of deception are not creative, and all creative acts do not involve deception. It can be suggested that both deception and creativity require the individual to be cognitively flexible, unorthodox, goal-directed, and to be able to generate at least one alternative to a problem (see also Walczyk et al., 2008). Moreover, deception and negative creativity also require the individual to be morally flexible, because of the ethical implications of the two constructs (see also Antoniou, 2015; Bierly et al., 2009). Other work (Mayer & Mussweiler, 2011) identified the relationship between distrust and creativity, particularly in private contexts. As distrust was associated with the ability to flexibly think of alternatives, distrusting individuals were likely to be more creative, due to the common process of cognitive flexibility. Further, as impending deception was likely to be anticipated in distrust, distrusting individuals were also likely to be (preemptive) deceivers themselves (see also Schul, Mayo, & Burnstein, 2008).

Thus, past research has suggested a positive relationship between unethical behaviours, cheating, deception, dishonesty, and creativity (e.g., Gino & Ariely, 2012; Gino & Wiltermuth, 2014). In contrast to positive creativity, negative creativity has been associated with negative personality traits like the Dark Triad, which in turn have been associated with lower morality (Jonason, Strosser, Kroll, Duineveld, & Baruffi, 2015), and deception (Jonason, Lyons, Baughman, & Vernon, 2014; but see Wright, Berry, Catmur, & Bird, 2015). Therefore, the relationship of deception with negative creativity may be more direct; that is, deception may represent a subprocess in addition to the core processes used to engage in negative creativity (see also Lubart, 2001), rather than only be associated with it at the trait level.

### 1.1. *The present study*

The current work begins to explore whether there are differences in the processes that represent positive or negative idea generation. Here, idea generation represents the underlying creative process. Identifying whether the creative process can be valenced is complicated given the premise that the creative process is blind, and therefore without valence (Campbell, 1960; Simonton, 2011). However, this is not to say that the creative process could not be influenced by the valences of other Ps. Further, the associated, yet distinct, process of deception may also influence the creative process (see also Bierly et al., 2009; Gino & Ariely, 2012; Gino & Wiltermuth, 2014; Mayer & Mussweiler, 2011). Although past work has established an association between creative abilities and deception, this study posed an incremental question: was deception differentially associated with positive and negative creativity?

On the basis of the aforementioned literature, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: For creative individuals, higher deception scores would predict more original ideas.

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