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Gender differences in creative thinking

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Abstract

This study examines the relevance of sociodemographic factors on gender differences in creative thinking. A general population sample of adult women ($N = 466$) and men ($N = 273$), residents of the Canary Islands, were assessed with the Figural and Verbal Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT). We found statistically significant interaction between gender and educational levels on Figural Fluency, Figural Originality, Resistance to Premature Closure, Figural Creativity Index, and Verbal TTCT scores of Fluency, Originality, and Average Standard Score. The women with a university level education scored higher than those with secondary or primary educational levels on all the measures, but no differences were found among the men in relation to their educational level. Gender differences in creative thought were minimal and dependent upon educational level; men with primary or secondary levels were found to score higher than women with the same level of education. However, the differences were statistically significant only on the Figural Originality and Figural Creativity Indices. Women with a university level education scored higher than men at the same level, yet statistically significant differences were only found for Verbal Fluency.

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1. Introduction

Creativity is beneficial for individuals as well as institutions and societies since it is linked with productivity, adaptability, and health (Runco, 2004). Kerr and Gagliardi (2003) claim that creativity seems to be the most mysterious and critical human trait necessary for the advancement of humanity. Although many psychologists have been interested in studying creativity and have conducted numerous investigations, which have led to progress in the understanding of creativity, much work still remains to be done (Simonton, 2000). Creativity is difficult to define and measure (Runco, 2004), as this author has pointed out, possibly because it is a complex phenomenon, with different forms of expression and with many potential influences.

There is evidence of gender differences in creative accomplishment, particularly at the highest level, since there have been more geniuses and distinguished men in the sciences, arts, literature, music, and technical development than women (Eccles, 1985; Eysenck, 1995; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Reiss, 1999). Gender differences in creative achievement vary considerably according to the field of study, since there are areas such as writing, dance or theatre where women can also be found in the upper ranks (Baer, 1999, 2005; Eysenck, 1995). Some authors have suggested that the cause of masculine superiority in creative achievement is of a biological nature (Eysenck, 1995). However, research seems to indicate that the explanation for gender differences in creative achievement seems to be primarily a result of environmental differences in the development of children and in the milieu in which creative achievement is accomplished and evaluated. It has been suggested that gender differences in creative achievement can be explained by a combination of environmental factors such as: (a) gender differences in access to schooling and resources, since men have historically controlled women's access to many fields and also limited their development; (b) different expectations for and socialization of girls and boys; and (c) men's control of the standards by which an achievement is judged as creative (Baer, 1999, 2005). Furthermore, some authors claim that the myth of the lack of creativity in women is also due to the fact that the creative contributions of women have not been recorded (Reiss, 2002; Simonton, 1992).

Few studies have been conducted which analyse creativity in underrepresented groups such as women and minorities (Simonton, 1998, 2000). Simonton considers the creative process to be fundamentally the same among humans, because it emerges directly out of some fundamental features of the human brain as an information-processing system. Yet, there are aspects of the phenomenon that can operate differently depending on gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic level or demographic variables (Simonton, 2002).

While creative performance goes beyond creative thought, requiring among other things motivational and personality factors, it is also influenced by social and environmental factors (see, for example, Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004; Amabile, 2001; Hennessey & Amabile, 1988; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003; Runco, 2004; Russ, 2002; Wai, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2005; Wolfradt & Pret, 2001). Creative performance also plays an important role in the study and evaluation of creativity. Many authors consider divergent thinking and flexibility of thought as central to the act of generating a creative product (Russ, 2002). The results of the few studies undertaken on gender differences in creative thought are contradictory, but most do not find gender differences. Baer (1999) reviewed more than 80 studies that compared the scores for divergent thinking for women and men and found that in half of the studies there was no difference, while in about two-thirds of the remaining studies, women or girls scored higher, and in the other third, the

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