

Creativity's Divergent Roots in Fast and Slow Life-history Strategists

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Abstract:

What drives creativity? Is it fueled by the logical synthesis of existing knowledge, a risk-taking mindset that sparks novel ideas, or negative affect that drives problem-solving? This question is particularly relevant in late middle childhood, as children develop hypothetical-logical thinking and begin to exhibit sensation-seeking, risk-taking, or mood-related challenges. We propose that these different creative “fuels” may depend on individual characteristics. Using a life history (LH) framework, we hypothesized that children with fast LH strategies (shaped by harsh and unpredictable environments) would demonstrate creativity driven by a risk-taking and sensation-seeking mindset, whereas children with slow LH strategies (shaped by benign environments) would exhibit creativity derived from logical synthesis. Our results revealed a negative association between risk-taking/impulsivity and creativity in slow-LH children, but a positive association between recent anxiety/depressive symptoms and creativity in fast-LH children. These findings help resolve mixed findings on the causes of creativity and highlight new directions for research on adaptive psychological processes.