

Culture and Creativity: Toward a Psychology Beyond the STEM Model

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Chair: Louise Sundaraajan, Ph.D., Ed.D.

Abstract:

The great mathematician Ramanujan claimed that his theorems were dictated by God in his dream. As Rao (1987) points out rightly, we would not have Ramanujan if he did not believe in this. Likewise Yukawa (1973), the great physicist, argues that creativity, in science as well as in art, is a highly personal process that is inextricably connected with cultural beliefs. What are the implications of this intimate connection between culture and creativity for psychology? This question is answered by an international and interdisciplinary panel in ways that challenge the conventional wisdom in psychology. First, in contrast to the overly cognitive accounts of creativity in mainstream psychology, this panel suggests that creativity involves the whole of life, not just cognition. The first speaker presents a Gita-based creativity in the work life; the second speaker presents a Native American worldview that values the creative process in connectedness and spirituality. Second, the panel points out that the STEM model of science has its ethno-centric limitations. Challenging the formulation of science as antithetical to art, a formulation characteristic of the either/or logic of Western metaphysics, the third paper presents the eminent physicist Sudarshan's (2002) vision of an "aesthetic integration" in science; and the fourth paper offers the Chinese yin-yang perspective that recasts dichotomies as paradoxes essential to creative discovery. Lastly, with Heisenberg (1958), this panel suggests that the potential for advances in science lies in the meeting of cultures. This point is elaborated by two papers: the fifth speaker presents second order creativity in multi-cultural hybrids; the fourth speaker argues that Eastern philosophy of wisdom complements Western philosophy of science—the former focuses on the creation of novel ideas as personal and tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1958), whereas the latter the verification of an idea after it is being created and made explicit.

A Gita-based approach to Creativity in the Work Life

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In Al Pacino playing Tony D'Amato in *Any Given Sunday* (1999), we see coaches inspiring football players to be a warrior, to give their best, to die for the team, to fight for every inch, toward the goal of winning. Thousands of years ago, a charioteer, who was himself a great warrior, found his warrior refusing to fight, and started a dialogue that continues to live in the popular culture of India even today. kRSNa, the charioteer, arjuna, the warrior, and their 700-

verses long dialogue are well-preserved in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a small portion of the epic, the *mahAbhArata*.

We use adrenaline arousing words to inspire our athletes in the West, whereas in the *bhagavadGItA* kRSNa uses that in the beginning but then moves on to review the entire philosophy of life with different paths to enlightenment, while highlighting the path of work or *niSkAma* karma as the best path available to us all. Clearly, what is a creative speech that motivates action is quite different from culture to culture. So would creativity be in general.

In this paper, the doctrine of *niSkAma karma* is examined in the context of positive and negative psychological constructs presented in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. I explain how *niSkAma karma* can help us be productive without losing our balance, thereby avoiding such negative consequences as stress, burnout, and, in the extreme case, psychological disorders such as depression. Special focus will be on how the wisdom of the *Bhagavad-Gita* is an antidote to the centrality of work in the contemporary society around the globe, the pathological focus on work life as the *raison d'être* for humanity, and the negative consequences of such a focus for health and well-being. Implications for creativity in the work life are explored, and demonstrated with *Gita*-based management styles in India.

Emergence and Complex Creative Relational Social Order among American Indians

**Joseph E. Trimble, Center for Cross-Cultural Research, Department of Psychology,
Western Washington University**

There is considerable diversity between North American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, villages, and communities in terms of their lifeways and thoughtways along with their approaches to spirituality and religion. Yet common themes exist across these groups. Tied into the cosmology of most, if not all, North American Indians and Natives is the importance of harmony, balance, vision, relationship, transcendence, connectedness, humility, respect, beneficence, and mystery. Spirituality and spiritual experiences can be unique to an individual, but it must be understood that the individual is not construed in the same way as Western European culture construes the individual. Rather, the individual is seen as an intimate part of the community and his or her purposes and gifts are directly tied to community living. Creativity and its derivatives are typically viewed as always emerging in a complex world where all life is respected and honored; they are an integral component of the flow of daily life. Those with gifts endowed by the Creator have a responsibility to the community to abide by and share the essence of the gift. Indigenous ways of knowing and being are inherently creative - everything is constantly in the process of creation and regeneration, inextricably tied to the creativity of body, mind, spirit, and community. For many Indian and Native communities spiritual gifts take on the guise of creative responsibilities. Examples of the expression of innovation and invention abound in the creations and artifacts of the ancient indigenous peoples of the Americas ranging from the precisions of the Mayan pyramids to the complex arrangements of the tribal ancient city-states in mid-America. The purpose of the presentation is to introduce and present an indigenous North American Indian and Native generalized worldview that values the creative process and its derivatives in the light of connectedness and spirituality.

Culture: The Missing Link in Scientific Creativity

Louise Sundararajan and Maharaj Raina

While equations in science may be universal, the scientist's journey to discovery is inevitably personal, and deeply cultural. This cultural perspective argues that non-Western scientists have different definitions of creativity, and may even have different emotions associated with the scientific discovery. A close examination of the life and works of Enakkal Chandy George Sudarshan (2002), the eminent particle physicist who has been nominated six times for the Nobel Prize, reveals the following insights that challenge the conventional wisdom in psychology of creativity: First, contrary to the Western tendency to conceive of creativity in terms of regression in the service of the ego, Sudarshan's notion of the scientist as a seer stems from a conceptualization of creativity in terms of a transformative vision, not regression. Second, challenging the conventional dichotomy between revolutionary and evolutionary creativity, Sudarshan argues for a confluence between genius and tradition. Lastly, contrary to the Western assumption of pride in personal achievements, Sudarshan claims that the moment of scientific discovery is associated with utter humility rather than pride. In the final analysis, according to the Indian as well as Chinese traditions, the essence of creativity lies in self-transcendence.

The Yin-Yang Balancing: Toward a Meta-Paradigm of Creative Cognition

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The inherently and increasingly holistic and dynamic reality is forcing us to look for our "lost key" in the right place with new light away from the wrong place under the old light in the West. The right place is where the East and the West meet, and the new light is the geocentric (the West-East balance) meta-paradigm. In this paper, I propose an Eastern paradigm of creative cognition consisting of three elements: *complexity* (rooted in the ontology of "Tao"), *ambiguity* (rooted in the epistemology of Yin-Yang Balancing) and *metaphor* (rooted in the methodology of "Wu" as intuitive imagination). The potential contribution of the Eastern frame of Yin-Yang Balancing lies in the mindset of "*either/and*" (fully recognizing inherent inconsistency and contradiction but never removing them by separating them spatially in content or temporally in process), in contrast to Aristotle's *either/or* logic and Hegel's "*both/or*" (initially tolerating inconsistency and contradiction but ultimately solving them). Implications of this *either/and* thinking for science and management will be explored.

In Praise of Impurity: Creativity and Cultural Hybridization

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In the Western tradition, creativity is typically attributed to the individual psychological process. It is thus that the discipline essentially reproduces the dualist epistemology underlying the discipline of psychology, along with the empiricist metatheory from which its conception of scientific knowledge derives. However, as we probe the problems of dualist epistemology, we

find significant shortcomings. Not the least of these is the irony of employing a deterministic conception of knowledge to grapple with a phenomenon that acquires significance precisely because it denies reduction to its antecedents. Of course, there is nothing intrinsically problematic about sustaining indigenous cultural traditions. Problems emerge in tendencies toward cultural imperialism. On the more positive side, in recognizing a multiplicity of perspectives from around the world, we expand our “ways of seeing” and enrich the potentials for action.

This latter view draws importantly from a cultural constructionist metatheory, a possible replacement for empiricism in its recognition of multiple local validities while privileging none. From this standpoint, however, local intelligibilities – including the very idea of creativity - rest on relations among people. Thus, a multiplicity of “creativities” may be anticipated, each functioning in its own indigenous setting. However, this form of *first order creativity* may be contrasted with *second order creativity*, one more relevant to the contemporary context of globalization. Second order creativity results from cultural hybridization, the inter-mixing of assumptions and practices. Historical illustrations from around the world are useful here. Examples may also be drawn from American psychology, including recent developments fostered by Buddhism and Russian literary theory. Most impressive are developments in the organizational realm, focusing on creativity by design. This work has rich potential for future developments in psychology.