

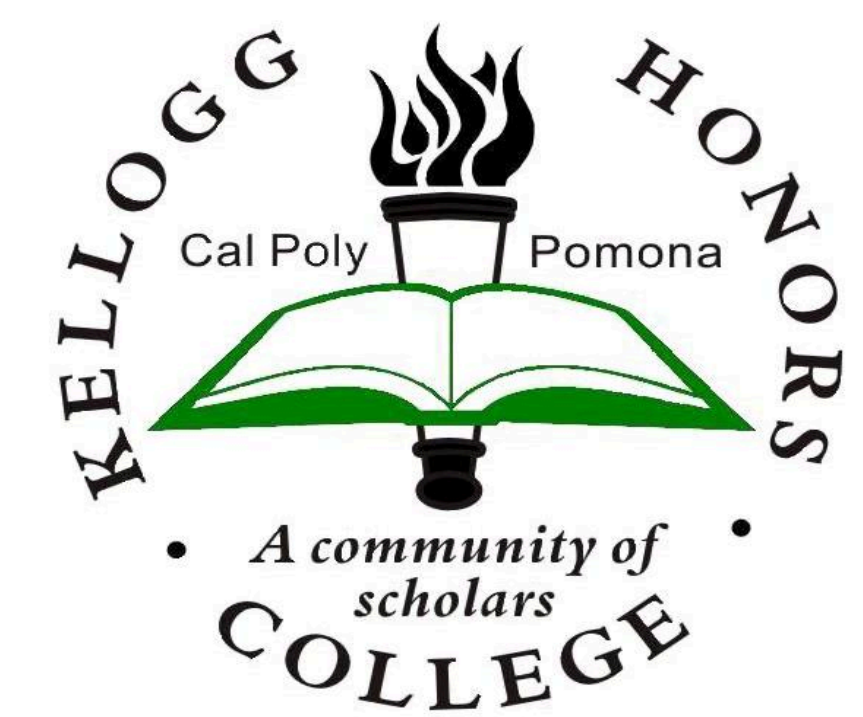
Like learning about different cultures? It is good news for your creativity



Jinfeng “Phoenix” Chen, Business Administration

Mentor: Dr. Zeynep Aytug

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Abstract

Globalization significantly contributes to increased interactions between individuals from various national cultural backgrounds. This trend continues to draw researchers' interest in national multicultural experiences (MCEs) and their impacts on creative performance. Studies have demonstrated that MCEs have a positive influence on creative thinking; however, current literature on the relationship between different types of MCEs and creativity is limited. This study examines the effects of two types of MCEs—multicultural exposures and multicultural interactions—on individual creative performance. The moderating effects of positivity/negativity of individual experience in this relationship will also be examined.

Introduction

Multicultural experiences (MCE) are generated when individuals encounter or interact with different cultures directly and indirectly (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008). Studies have demonstrated a positive link between enhanced MCE and creativity performance (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009; Leung & Chiu, 2010; Tadmor, Satterstrom, Jang, & Polzer, 2012). MCE can be categorized as multicultural exposure (ME) and Multicultural interaction (MI). ME refers to experiences with another culture without personal interaction, such as watching French shows on Netflix, listening to foreign music, and watching foreign cultures' festivals. Verses MI refers to social interactions like having friends from different cultures and communicating with others from another culture. This project studies the differences between ME and MI regarding their relationship with creativity. We also investigate individual emotional perception about MCE and their relationship with creativity.

Methods

Two hundred and ten participants were recruited through Cal Poly Pomona College of Business Research Panel (SONA) to conduct a 45-minute anonymous online study. They received 0.75 credit for course research participation requirement. Fifty-one participants were removed due to non-completion, ineffective priming, etc. The final sample size was 159 (42% female) from 24 distinct national cultures. Participants' mean age was ranged between 18 and 69 with a mean of 24 (SD = 6.4). On average, the typical participant reported having a multicultural exposure almost once a month (SD = 1.09), being exposed to different cultures for the last 8.9 years (SD = 7.37), and having exposures to six different cultures (SD = 12.61). On average, the typical participant reported having a multicultural interaction almost once a week (SD = 1.49), interacting with people from different cultures for the last 10.8 years (SD = 7.61), and having interactions with people from four different cultures (SD = 5.70). Participants were randomly assigned a question by the Qualtrics Survey Software to either prime their positive or negative MCEs. Individual MCEs levels were measured using a validated multidimensional Multicultural Experience Assessment Scale (MEXA) (Aytug, Kern, & Dilchert, 2018). In the creativity task, participants were given 5 minutes to list as many criteria as they could to classify 12 fruits into subgroups. The data was analyzed using the SPSS software. We conducted descriptive statistics, correlations and regression analysis. We also conducted moderation analysis using the process macro.

Results

Correlation analyses results support hypothesis 1 and 2. Multicultural experiences are positively correlated with 3 creativity measures, which provides initial support for hypothesis 1. Exposure is also significantly correlated with the 3 creativity measures, which are fluency flexibility, and originality. Interaction is only significantly correlated with fluency but not flexibility and originality, which offers initial support for hypothesis 2. Another interesting result we found is the gender differences in the fluency and flexibility measure. Mean analysis shows male were significantly more creative than females, thus we control for gender in the remaining analyses. In the linear regression analysis, we checked 3 models for creativity measures. In all models, MCE positively predicted creative performance, supporting H1. When we compare exposures versus interactions. Results indicated that exposures predicted creativity outcomes. But in interaction analysis models, only one of the creativity measures is significant. Therefore, data supports hypothesis 2 that multicultural exposures, versus interactions, have a more positive association with creativity measures. In the moderation analyses, results showed that there is no significant interaction between the multicultural exposure and positivity negativity moderation models. Similar non-significant results were found in the interaction models as well, thus there is no support for hypothesis 3, in that positivity and negativity being the moderator.

Discussion & Future Directions

Findings from this study further contribute to the literature in examining specific types of multicultural experiences' association in creative thinking. There are three key findings in this study. First, results supported the creative cognition approach (Guilford, 1967), in that, the more cultural exposures, cultural approaches, and differences people collect via multicultural exposures, the higher level of creativity they tend to exhibit. Second, social interactions with another culture are also important; however, they do not have as much a positive association with creativity as the exposures. Third, no evidence was found to support the moderating role of positivity/negativity of experience in the association between MCEs and creativity. It could potentially be the priming issue because, for example, a person may have lots of positive experiences with another culture; just because they are primed to think about one of the negative experiences, that does not mean their creativity will be significantly impacted. Another interesting finding in this study is that breadth of multicultural experiences outperforms frequency and duration in predicting creative performance, specifically, fluency and originality. Past researchers have affirmed the benefits of breadth of cultural experiences; for example, the breadth of foreign travel experiences increase trust behavior in decision-making (Cao et al., 2014). This is the first study to find the positive impacts on creativity when people are exposed to or interact with many different cultures. Future research needs to be conducted to verify this result and examine the relationship between breadth and flexibility.

This research has some practical implications in an increasingly diverse society. Our findings suggested that even in the absence of personal socialization, being exposed to other cultures via books, social media, videos, etc. can help improve individuals' cognitive and creative abilities. Besides traveling abroad, people can conduct these cultural exposure activities during leisure time to gain additional cultural learning, which will benefit them by enhancing their creative thinking. Furthermore, training and development professionals can combine these relatively low-cost exposures while designing personal, professional, and managerial training. Such training can contribute to facilitating an inclusive environment on campuses and organizations while bringing innovative benefits to individual performance.

Future research is needed to address the limitation of our study. Instead of priming, participants need to be categorized based on the positivity or negativity of their cross-cultural experiences (such as studying abroad versus being in military overseas) as well as measuring their creativity. Additional research can also be utilized to examine what is the underlying mediating mechanism that connects multicultural exposures to creativity. Further study in dyadic context is required to verify the role breadth of multicultural experience plays in creative performance.

In conclusion, the present study advances our understanding of the relationship between multicultural experiences and creative performance by examining the differential associations of multicultural exposures and interactions. The findings of our study shed new light on cross-cultural learning as it demonstrated the benefits of multicultural exposures and breadth.

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