

Looking at the 'Dark Side' of Creativity



An English examination at Dongguan Technology Institute in Guangdong province, China, in 2007. Students were given different test versions in an effort to prevent cheating. **AP**

This story comes from VOA Special English, Voice of America's daily news and information service for English learners. Read the story and then do the worksheet of activities at the end.

This is the VOA Special English Health Report.

Not all cheaters are creative. But apparently enough creative people cheat to interest researchers like Francesca Gino. Professor Gino is a behavioral economist at the Harvard Business School in Massachusetts. Behavioral economists use ideas from psychology to study how people make economic choices.

FRANCESCA GINO: "Interestingly, there are actually a lot of examples in the literature, novels, movies, comic books about this idea of the evil genius, but really no empirical evidence for this relationship."

Professor Gino was less interested in catching cheaters than understanding them. She tested volunteers to see how creative they were. Then she tested them in situations involving small amounts of money, where they could earn extra by cheating.

For example, they took a test and had to copy their answers onto another paper. But on that other paper the correct answers were already lightly marked, supposedly by mistake. The test-takers knew they would earn more for correct answers. They were led to believe they could cheat without getting caught.

The results showed that the more creative people were more likely to cheat. By comparison, people who were more intelligent but less creative were not more likely to cheat. Professor Gino says creative people are better at creating excuses to justify their actions to themselves.

FRANCESCA GINO: "What we find is that that creativity leads people to be more morally flexible, so they are much more able to come up with justification for the behavior that they're about to engage in and as a result, they are more likely to cheat."

She says workplaces that value creativity also create openings for that moral flexibility. Original thinkers may be less likely to follow all the rules.

FRANCESCA GINO: "We think that creativity really helps people resolve this conflict between something that is more longer term --which is the idea of being good and moral -- and then something that is more short term, and is the idea of advancing your own self-interest. And that does not necessarily mean getting money out of cheating, but it could also be getting other types of pleasures or utilities."

The study shows the "dark side" of creativity, she says.

FRANCESCA GINO: "So it's not that we are trying to say that people shouldn't be creative, we are trying to say that they should be creative but they should be thinking about the fact that their creativity can be used for the wrong reasons."

Her research with Dan Ariely at Duke University appears in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

Now do the worksheet ...

Level: beginner - intermediate

Time: 30 - 40 minutes

This worksheet will help you learn new vocabulary about cheating. You will answer questions about why creative people cheat, and write a short paragraph about whether cheating is ever acceptable.

1. Write a word that means the same as the words below. You can find the answers in the text.

original, imaginative _____

wicked, bad _____

very smart person _____

trick, deceive _____

2. Professor Gino says that creative people come up with justification for cheating. What does *justification* mean? Check the correct answer.

a reason or explanation for doing something

a sneaky way to do something

3. Look again at the title of the article: *Looking at the 'Dark Side' of Creativity*. Which sentence below is true?

Creative people only do good things.

Creative people might do bad things.

4. Read the sentence below. Is it *true* or *false*? If it is false, correct the sentence.

The results of a study showed that creative people never cheat.

5. Who is Professor Gino?

6. According to Professor Gino, where can you find examples of evil geniuses?

7. What was Professor Gino more interested in? Check the correct answer.

catching cheaters

understanding cheaters

8. Look at the sentences below from the article. They describe part of Professor Gino's study. Number the following steps in the correct order from 1 - 3.

_____ Volunteers took the test and had to copy their answers onto this paper.

_____ First, Professor Gino found volunteers to take a test.

_____ Someone lightly marked the correct test answers on a piece of paper.

9. Complete Professor Gino's sentence with *should* or *shouldn't*.

"So it's not that we are trying to say that people _____ be creative, we are trying to say that they _____ be creative but they _____ be thinking about the fact that their creativity can be used for the wrong reasons."

10. What journal does Professor Gino's research appear in?

OVER TO YOU

Do you think it's ever OK to cheat? Why do you think some people cheat?

Write 5 sentences explaining your answer.

ANSWER KEY

1. creative, evil, genius, cheat
2. a reason or explanation for doing something
3. Creative people might do bad things.

4. false; The results showed that the more creative people were more likely to cheat.

5. Professor Gino is a behavioral economist at the Harvard Business School in Massachusetts.
6. in the literature, novels, movies, comic books
7. understanding cheaters
8. ___3___ Volunteers took the test and had to copy their answers onto this paper.
___1___ First, Professor Gino found volunteers to take a test.
___2___ Someone lightly marked the correct test answers on a piece of paper.
9. shouldn't, should, should
10. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology