



Interview Article

An interview with James Kaufman: creativity as we approach 2023 !

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Abstract

The elusive construct of “creativity” remains a major focus of empirical and investigative concern. In this interview, James Kaufman, one of the leading figures in the field responds to singular questions about the construct of creativity, the measurement of creativity and the current “state of the art” of creativity evaluation and assessment as we approach the year 2023.

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Introduction

Prof. Shaughnessy: James, I understand that you and Robert Sternberg have just co-edited a book on Creativity- How did this come about?

Prof. James Kaufman: *Bob and I edited the second edition of the Cambridge Handbook of Creativity and were pleased with the contributions and thought that a modified, shorter version with more curricular elements could be a great textbook. It was hard selecting the key topics, but ultimately, we are happy with the result. Bob was my graduate advisor, and I love that I still get to collaborate with him.*

Prof. Shaughnessy: E. Paul Torrance- is supposedly the " father of creativity". What do you or the authors see as his contributions?

Prof. James Kaufman: *Torrance’s contributions are enormous; obviously, there are his famous tests, but there is also so much more. His interest and research on so many dimensions of creativity is sometimes overlooked because his tests are so well-known. To give but one example, his work on equity and how creativity could help gifted programs be more fair and diverse was decades ahead of its time.*

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In addition, Torrance's encouragement of multiple generations of scholars is hard to overstate. I have heard so many stories of his generosity and kindness – and experienced it as a graduate student and young professional – that I think he was just as remarkable a human being as a pioneering researcher. I have heard many stories of his kindness and sometimes paying graduate student tuition and stipends out of pocket.

I remember I discovered creativity in my third year of graduate school and did a thesis on creative writing (a synthesis of the literature). My father suggested that I send it to Torrance (they were friends when they were both at Georgia).

I felt a little silly; he was the biggest name in the field and I was a complete novice. But I did, and Torrance wrote me back a generous, encouraging letter that I still have to this day. We kept in some level of touch for the rest of his life and I think about him often.

In general, I think mentoring is often overlooked. I was lucky enough to have a great undergraduate mentor in John Horn (and, in creative writing, T. Coraghessan Boyle) and an amazing graduate mentor in Bob Sternberg. Plus, of course, my folks informally mentored me.

Prof. Shaughnessy: How did you get interested in creativity?

Prof. James Kaufman: *I was a creative writing major in college and wanted to write novels. At some point, I realized I just wasn't quite good enough. I shifted to plays (and wrote plays and musicals for many years thereafter), but wasn't at the point of wanting to risk everything on the chance I would make it and support myself. I turned my psychology minor into a major and applied to several graduate schools and was lucky enough to get in to work with Sternberg at Yale. Even then, I didn't gravitate toward creativity.*

Near the end of my second year of graduate school, I was struggling a bit – I hadn't discovered my passion yet. I decided to explore creativity and Sternberg gave me a recommended reading list – his in-press 1999 Handbook of Creativity, plus works by Csikszentmihalyi, Simonton, Amabile, and others. I spent the summer in my parents' basement, reading everything cover to cover, and I was hooked!

Prof. Shaughnessy: How do we currently study this elusive construct called creativity?

Prof. James Kaufman: *I think there's a lot of exciting work being done in measurement. I do feel like we are still a bit too reliant on divergent thinking as the primary mode of assessment, but there is exciting new work being done: physics-based games that stealthily measure divergent thinking (by Val Shute and Ahmad Rahimi), new approaches to figural divergent thinking (by Baptiste Barbot), and a lot of advances on automatic scoring not only of divergent thinking but actual text production (by Dan Johnson, Roger Beaty, and others).*

I still am a fan of the Consensual Assessment Technique and am hoping that continued advances in machine learning allow us to be able to automatically score a wide variety of domains. My enthusiasm is tempered by the awareness that any high-stakes use of such method will immediately be set upon by rich folks trying to game the system, but... I remain optimistic.

Prof. Shaughnessy: What are some of the positive outcomes of creativity?

More and more I have become interested in this question!

Prof. James Kaufman: *It feels almost silly on one hand because creativity is generally considered a positive attribute or ability. But I did a paper with Marie Forgeard a few years back where we found that in general the field is not good at addressing this issue; most articles look at what factors might enhance creativity, not how creativity might enhance specific positive outcomes.*

I just finished a new book for Cambridge, The Creativity Advantage. I group the existing work into five categories: Self-insight, Healing, Connection, Drive, and Legacy.

Self-insight is all about identity, how narratives can help us organize and understand our lives while freeing up cognitive resources. Healing was a fascinating topic to dive into – some great work by Marie Forgeard, Jennifer Drake, Hod Orkibi, Daisy Fancourt, and many others. Creativity is associated with post-traumatic growth, it can help restore emotional equilibrium, reduce stress and anxiety.... So much more.

Connection is how creativity brings people together, whether by creating together, experiencing art together as in Jeff Smith's Museum Effect, or simply how a core cluster of creative traits are also associated with prosocial tendencies. Drive is passion, flow, motivation, and progress. Legacy I found quite interesting because it's how we deal with the fact that we know we're going to die. We can cope with this grim news with symbolic immortality. Otto Rank, Robert Jay Lifton, and many others have written about this issue and the different pathways we can find, but Stephen Sondheim put it most succinctly in Sunday in the Park with George, when he has a character sing about how everything comes down to children and art.

Prof. Shaughnessy: What are some of the positive personality traits/characteristics that seem to emanate from creativity?

Prof. James Kaufman: *Creative people tend to be more open to new experiences and new ideas. They tend to be better able to tolerate ambiguity or uncertainty. As a result, there are a number of positive attributes that can also be associated with creativity. Perhaps the most interesting is that creative people may be less likely to show prejudice, stereotypes, or bias.*

There have been several promising studies on this, mainly in Europe, and one of my graduate students, Sarah Luria, is doing her dissertation on this broad topic. I've also been doing some theoretical work with Vlad Glăveanu on this broader topic (positive creativity-related traits) as well.

Prof. Shaughnessy: ????



Dr. James C. Kaufman is a Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Connecticut. He is the author/editor of more than 50 books, including *Creativity 101* (2nd Edition, 2016), the *Cambridge Handbook of Creativity* (with Robert Sternberg; 2nd Edition, 2019), and the forthcoming *The Creativity Advantage* for Cambridge Press. He has published more than 400 papers, including the Four-C Model of Creativity (with Ron Beghetto). He is a past president of Division 10 (Society for Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, & the Arts) of the American Psychological Association (APA) and a former present of the American

Creativity Association. James has won many awards, including Mensa's research award, the Torrance Award from the National Association for Gifted Children, and APA's Berlyne, Arnheim, and Farnsworth awards. He co-founded two major journals (*Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* and *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*). He has tested Dr. Sanjay Gupta's creativity on CNN, appeared in the hit Australian show *Redesign Your Brain*, and narrated the comic book documentary *Independents*. He wrote the book and lyrics to *Discovering Magenta*, which had its NYC premiere in 2015. He has co-authored a book on bad baseball pitchers with his father and a book on Pseudoscience with his wife. He is finishing a book on theatre and creativity with composer Dana Rowe, *Taking Center Stage: Lessons in Creativity from Hamilton*, Gypsy Rose Lee, and more!

References

Prof.Dr. James C. Kaufman' University Page (2022). <https://education.uconn.edu/person/james-kaufman/>