

Feelings of Entitlement Enhance Creativity

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Entitlement is rarely viewed as a positive quality. But a recent study finds that a sense of entitlement can lead to one surprisingly positive outcome—increased creativity.

Entitled people are unapologetic about getting what they want, when they want it, without regard for anyone else. By definition, entitled people feel that the rules just do not apply to them, and this can easily lead to problems in the workplace. Researchers have found that people who feel a sense of entitlement are more likely to make unethical decisions, break rules, and engage in hostile behavior.

But across four experiments, psychological scientists Emily M. Zitek of Cornell University and Lynne C. Vincent of Vanderbilt University found that small doses of entitlement may stimulate people's creative problem-solving skills.

“When people feel more entitled, they will think and act differently than others, and the more they do so, the more willing and able they will be to generate creative solutions,” the researchers write in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

For the study, a group of 99 college students received one of two writing prompts. In the entitlement condition, the students were asked to write three reasons for why they should demand the best in life, why they deserve more than others, and why they should get their way in life. Those in the other condition wrote about three reasons why they don't deserve more than other people.

The students then completed two standard tasks used to measure creativity: coming up with as many uses for a paperclip as possible and drawing an imaginary alien creature from another planet.

Across the board, those in the entitlement condition had higher creativity scores. Not only did they list more uses for a paperclip than the non-entitled group, their ideas were rated as more novel and

interesting. Their alien drawings were also rated as more creative than those in the non-entitled group, with more extraordinary abilities (like breathing fire) and more unusual appendages and features.

In another creativity task, 98 MBA students completed the same writing prompts before tackling a series of word puzzles. Each volunteer was shown three seemingly unrelated words (such as “falling,” “actor,” and “dust”) and asked to come up with a fourth word that would match all three words (in this case, “star”). They also completed measures gauging their feelings of uniqueness, affect, and sense of power.

Once again, participants made to feel entitled did better than their counterparts, answering more of the word problems correctly and the findings suggest that their creativity was related to their feelings of uniqueness.

“When participants felt entitled, they wanted to be different from others, and the more they wanted to be different, the more creative they became,” Zitek and Vincent write. “The entitled individuals’ need for uniqueness seemed to enable them to diverge from the common meanings of the words, which benefited their performance.”

Two additional online experiments conducted using 401 subjects confirmed the pattern of results: People who were prompted to feel superior were more creative than their unassuming counterparts, whether it was unscrambling sentences or coming up with uses for an empty building.

However, it seems that the relationship between trait entitlement—having an entrenched feeling of entitlement as an enduring personality trait—and creativity is not the same as the relationship between state entitlement—the fleeting, situational feeling of entitlement—and creativity.

“Thus, our results suggest that small, temporary boosts in entitlement can facilitate creativity, while a chronically entitled disposition does not help and might even backfire on the exact same tasks,” Zitek and Vincent explain.

For example, individuals who show trait entitlement may feel less motivated to put in extra effort to creatively complete a task. Zitek and Vincent suggest that future research should investigate ways to boost people’s sense of creativity without necessarily fostering the negative aspects of entitlement.

Reference

Zitek, E. M., & Vincent, L. C. (2015). Deserve and diverge: Feeling entitled makes people more creative. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 56, 242-248. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2014.10.006