ARE MY IDEAS ORIGINAL?
THE CUES UNDERLYING ORIGINALITY JUDGMENTS

Daniela Soibelman
Advisors: Prof. Rakefet Ackerman and Prof. Ella Miron-Spektor

Metacognition is a research domain which has been evolved as a sub-domain of memory research. As a result, it is traditionally focused on learning and memory tests. However, people often face ill-defined problems that call for creative thinking, rather than providing a particular response. To date, most creativity research has focused on factors that enhance or inhibit the originality of generated ideas, as evaluated by others. Much less is known about how people judge their own originality. The present study addresses this gap by applying principles of metacognitive research to advance knowledge about originality judgments.

Previous research have suggested that it is more likely for the less original ideas to appear early, while the more original ones appear later in the stream of ideas. In two experiments I used a divergent thinking task in which people are asked to list as many possible uses for each presented object as they can. Unlike previous research, I asked the participant to rate the originality of each idea by assessing what percentage of their peers would produce the same idea. Two heuristic cues that were hypothesized to underlie originality judgments were examined: fluency and false consensus. First, I hypothesized that ideas that come to mind easily, or fluently, are judged as less original. Second, I hypothesized that because people tend to assume that others think like them, they underestimate the originality of their ideas.

Study 1 revealed that people accurately judge ideas that come to mind first as less original than later ones, which is in line with fluency heuristic cue. In addition, participants underestimated their originality compared to others, which may result by false consensus. Study 2 further examined the role of the two heuristic cues hypothesized to underlie originality judgments by disturbing to fluency and by referring to originality regardless of peers’ ideas. Disturbing these cues reduced the underestimation of originality, suggesting that originality judgments are affected by both fluency and false consensus. Theoretical and practical implications will be discussed.