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The impact of outcome and opportunity inequality on individual creativity

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Economic inequality is a major societal challenge, yet its effects on innovation and creativity remain unclear. In a pre-registered experiment (N = 438), we examined how outcome- and opportunity-inequality affect individual creativity. Participants were assigned to one of three conditions: equality (all received €5), outcome-inequality (participants received either €8 or €2), or opportunity-inequality (participants had either an 80% or 20% chance of receiving €8). Participants then completed convergent- and divergent-thinking tasks, with performance-based bonuses independent of experimental conditions. Compared to equality, outcome-inequality reduced performance only on the convergent-thinking task. Opportunity-inequality had no effect on either creativity measure. Further, the effect of outcome-inequality on creativity was mediated by negative emotions. These findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between types of inequality and suggest that income inequality could impair constrained forms of creativity, whereas opportunity-inequality may be less impactful on certain behaviors due to greater uncertainty about outcomes.