The question of whether creativity is general or domain-specific is a frequently debated and discussed issue. No theory or model in creativity has attempted to bridge the gap between these differing views of creativity; most theories either implicitly or explicitly take a generalist perspective. The APT model uses the metaphor of an amusement park to explore creativity. There are four stages: Initial requirements, general thematic areas, domains, and micro-domains. This model attempts to integrate both general and domain-specific views of creativity. The first level (initial requirements) is very general, and each subsequent level gets more and more domain-specific. By the final level (micro-domains), the theory is very domain-specific. We also will discuss errors and variations within the model.

What does it mean to be called creative? Picture a chemist who creates a new compound, a poet who writes beautiful sonnets, and a computer scientist who invents a new programming language. Are these people as different as they seem? This question, in its essence, is whether creativity is one thing or many things – is creativity a general ability? Or is it domain-specific?

When we speculate about the nature of general or domain specific creativity, we are in essence asking if there is something (or some things) that people may possess in varying degrees that will lead them to exhibiting higher levels of creativity in everything they do – higher than they would have if they lacked these abilities. These abilities may extend to include cognitive skills, personality traits, motivational patterns, thinking styles, or even certain kinds of knowledge. Conversely, are there certain abilities or traits that may be uniquely suited toward a specific type of creative endeavor?

This issue is an important one in creativity research that has yet to be resolved. In the only Point-Counterpoint pair of articles in its history, the Creativity Research Journal asked two leading proponents of these competing positions to debate and argue the case for domain specificity versus generality (Baer, 1998; Plucker, 1998). Differences of opinion remain, and evidence continues to be gathered and debated. Yet certainly a middle ground is attainable. Even those who argue for the existence of domain-general creative-thinking skills recognize that domain-specific thinking skills...
also play an important role in creative thinking (e.g., Amabile, 1996; Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996; Conti, Coon, & Amabile, 1996). And domain theorists acknowledge that there are some general skills that play a role in all creative endeavors (Baer, 1993).

Yet no theory or model in creativity has attempted to bridge the gap between these differing views of creativity. A quick review shows that most theories of creativity either implicitly or explicitly take a generalist perspective. Indeed, any theory that proposes one system or process for any type of creative act is not taking into account the many differences inherent in being creative in different domains.

For example, Sternberg and Lubart’s (1996) Investment Theory uses a stock market analogy for creativity – the goal is to buy (ideas) low and sell high. They include six factors (motivation, intelligence, personality, knowledge, thinking styles, and environment) that can contribute to (general) creativity. In another example, Sternberg, Kaufman, and Pretz (2001, 2002; Sternberg, 1999) present a Propulsion Model, in which they outline eight different types of creative contributions based on how a given contribution shapes or changes the field. Although this model acknowledges the importance of different domains, the types of creative contributions are proposed as being consistent across fields.

Amabile’s (1983, 1988, 1996) Componential Framework presents creativity as a product of Task Motivation, Domain-Relevant Skills (such as the storage of relevant information), and Creativity-Relevant Skills (such as tolerance of ambiguity, self-discipline, and orientation toward risk-taking). Although this theory accounts for some domain variation, the thrust of the theory is general. Csikszentmihalyi’s (1988, 1996, 1999) Systems Model defines creativity as an interaction of the domain, field, and person. Again, although the importance of the given domain is emphasized, these interactions are assumed to be similar across vastly different areas.

The intent of this discussion is not in any way to diminish these theories, which are both useful and important. It is, instead, to point out the need for an additional theory that attempts to specifically tackle the general versus domain-specific question. Our goal in this paper is to present such a theory, the Amusement Park Theoretical (APT) Model of Creativity.

The APT model proposes a hierarchy of skills, ranging from the most general to the very specific. At each of the four levels of the hierarchy are both skills that are very general (at the highest level) or very specific (at the lowest). The theory uses the metaphor of an amusement park to explore creativity. Amusement parks offer a wide variety of activities, organized somewhat hierarchically. There are different types of amusement parks, and even within a given amusement park there are generally different types of rides and activities that appeal to different interests. At Disney World in Florida, for example, there are four separate theme parks. One of the four has an animal theme, a second has a movie theme, a third has an international theme, and a fourth theme park is aimed at children. Within each of the four theme parks there are special interest areas. In the park that is aimed at children (called the Magic Kingdom), there are such special areas as Tomorrowland (which focuses on the future) and Fantasyland (which specializes in rides related to children's stories). And then within each special interest area there are different rides and activities. In Fantasyland, for example, there is one ride based on Snow White, another based on Winnie the Pooh, and many others based on other children's stories.