

Chapter 1

Creativity and the Arts

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ABSTRACT

The chapter explores creativity from a psychological viewpoint, as spontaneous and reflective activities in several self-defining human efforts, such as telling stories and forming an identity. New discoveries from neuroscience and creative arts therapies combine to understand creativity as a range of normative human functioning, which blends with professional creative discovery in the arts at the higher extremes of this range. The chapter focuses on visual art and music, followed by a normative application of creativity as utilized in creative arts therapies. Finally, the chapter concludes by introducing normative creative tools to incorporate into everyday life.

OVERVIEW/INTRODUCTION

Recent discoveries in modern neuroscience have radically altered, and greatly expanded our understanding of the human brain. Many of these changes also affect our insights into human creativity, and the present chapter will include a perspective informed by neuroscience (Gazzaniga, et al., 2014; Juslin & Sloboda, 2012; Levitin, 2006; Myers & deWall, 2015).

Two major overarching conceptual models from psychology will be used to organize the following chapter discussion. The Biological-Psychological-Social, or BPS, model of psychology integrates information from many disciplines and adds a conceptual framework for incorporating new evidence and driving new hypotheses regarding human meaning. Psychology is described as a “hub” scientific discipline (Myers, & deWall, 2015, p.11), with levels of analysis that reach out to include biology and neuroscience as well as psychological cognition, emotion and behavior, all within a social/cultural context. These complementary outlooks help psychology to gain the broadest perspective on human mind, behavior and self-understanding (Myers & deWall, 2015).

The Life-Span Development Model was explored early in psychology’s history by Carl Jung (1957, 1964), and advanced to become a widely-accepted view through Erik Erikson’s later psychosocial model of development. He describes the model as “epigenetic,” or built on a biological ground plan, and culminating in the creative organization of experience known as identity. Adult growth proceeds to balance the continuity of identity within ongoing changes of life throughout adulthood (Erikson, 1960, 1997).

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HISTORY OF CREATIVITY STUDY

Early 20th century studies attempted to study creativity using creative products (i.e.; acknowledged works of art) and later attempted to explore the creative process by asking artists to introspect and describe their thoughts as they were creating. This was a typical strategy of that era, but, unfortunately, individual descriptions varied so much that the research produced unreliable and non-comparable descriptions of the thought process. This ultimately led to a dead end for half a century until modern neuroscience opened new ways to conceptualize how brain and mind connected human cognitive processes (McAdams, 2001; Myers & deWall, 2015). Cognitive neuroscience established a dimension of observation and data from about 1985, with neuroimaging of normal functioning human brains bringing the biological perspective strongly into the field (Gazzaniga, et al., 2014; Levitin, 2006).

Guilford (1950) and Bruner (1986) sought a modern approach to empirical/conceptual study, demonstrating the many ways to understand and express creativity. Bruner also distinguished narrative thinking, which was later realized to be a foundation of human literature as stories, and a way to explain our understanding of how life experience is recorded in the brain, basically by linking external events in sequence with emotional responses to these events. His work also encouraged the paradigm now known as Life-Span Development. (Bruner, 1986; McAdams, 2001). The field of Narrative Psychology was explored in relation to personality by McAdams (2001), and also applied to counseling processes (Nystul, 2011). The storytelling model has become a tool for identity development and/or correcting dysfunction, using the client's own language and experiences to describe meaning, whether for an individual, a couple or a family (Nystul, 2011).

SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF CREATIVITY

Since the mid- 20th century, the scientific study of creativity has been organized historically into “three waves” (Sawyer, 2012, in Beghetto & Breslow, p.417):

1. In the 1950s and 60s, the focus was on individual creativity and personality;
2. The second wave, in the 1970s and 80s, focused on the cognitive aspects of creative behavior. Both of these tended to focus on narrow approaches, using the individual as the unit of study.
3. The “third wave,” beginning in the 1980s and 90s, broadened the perspective to examine creativity as a phenomenon of groups within a sociocultural context, including an interdisciplinary approach and many possible forms dependent on context.

Using the metaphor of “waves,” rather than linear historical stages, has the implication of rhythms within a process, which is Sawyer's intention. Creativity is a complex function that changes over time as a cultural process, and all forms of investigation, from all three historical “waves,” are valid tools for understanding (Sawyer, 2012, in Beghetto & Breslow, 2013). We are reminded again of the major shift in thinking about the brain activity required to explore the complexity and creativity of brain function, from the linear perspective of the neuron, to the simultaneous, parallel processing perspective of modern neuroscience (Gazzaniga, et al., 2014; Myers & deWall, 2015).

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