



Primary and secondary creativity

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Who decides what counts as creative? Although most creativity researchers would acknowledge that both individuals and broader social audiences can offer interpretations about creativity, the way in which researchers tend to conceptualize and study creativity typically focuses on either an individual or a social perspective. Those who focus on individual interpretations may treat the social superficially (if at all), whereas those who focus on social judgments risk minimizing or erasing the role of the individual. Consequently, the question of ‘Creativity for whom?’ too often divides creativity research. In this article, we briefly review recent work in the field of creativity studies that falls along the lines of personal and social judgments of creativity. We introduce an integrative framework that endeavors to reconcile the divide between the personal and the social. Specifically, we introduce a model of *Primary and Secondary Creativity*, which illustrates how the one process of creativity can explain both personal and social judgments of creativity.

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The research on creativity goes back approximately one century yet the definition of creativity is still hotly debated. In recent years, various scholars (see [1–5,6,7]) have offered important questions about and alternatives to a definition of creativity. Standard definitions point to originality and effectiveness as requirements ([8]; see also Plucker *et al.* [9]). Alternatives suggest additional criteria and dimensions, such as: surprise, authenticity, inconclusiveness, potential, and discovery.

There is a broader point of disagreement. It is apparent when the question ‘creative for whom?’ is posed. That

question often arises because there is a kind of relativity to creativity. Rembrandt was not the most famous painter of his time, but today his reputation far exceeds his contemporaries. As a matter of fact, it may be that reputations vary more often than they remain stable [10,11] so there are questions about where *and* when something is creative.

The question of ‘creative for whom’ may be clearest when children’s creativity is considered: They may construct original and meaningful interpretations, using their vivid imaginations, but their creativity may not be all that original if compared with experts, nor even just older individuals [12,13]. A child may make up a cute song, but it most likely would not make the top 10 or be recorded and sold. It may be creative for that child, even if not broadly original and meaningful.

A review of the contemporary literature on who determines what counts as creative and how it should be studied reveals a dividing line between two perspectives: the *personal view* and the *social view of creativity*. This dividing line has long been noted in the creativity research [14] and has increasingly become the focus of discussion, debate, and exploration by creativity scholars. In fact, two entire issues of the journal *Creativity: Theories-Research—Applications* were recently devoted to critically exploring this (and other) conceptual divides. Leading experts and researchers in the field of creativity studies responded to critique of the field offered by Vlad Glăveanu [15], which asserted that the psychology of creativity is in a state of crisis.

A key assertion of Glăveanu’s (2014) critique pertained to his concern that the field has drifted into problematic dichotomies, one of which is the split between the individual and the social. This can result in researchers *either* placing an overly narrow focus on the individual at the expense of the social or focusing so much on the social that the individual is erased.

In reviewing the dozens of perspectives offered by contributors, the personal and social divide is evident, albeit sometimes nuanced. Several perspectives (e.g., [16,17]; Runco [18]) tend to focus on more individual or personal accounts of creativity. Although still recognizing external social factors, personal accounts focus more on cognitive mechanisms and more subjective, individual accounts of creative processes and outcomes. This includes the claim that something need only be original and effective for the individual creator to be considered creative. This perspective has broad implications, including those for

understanding children’s creativity, everyday creativity, and latent creative potential [19–23].

Other perspectives represent a social perspective. It is especially clear in the claim that there is no creativity without some sort of social recognition or consensus [15,24,25,26]. There must be an attribution of creativity by some audience or arbiters or there is no creativity. Still others assert that the social is always and already present in the individual in the form of dialogic interlocutors, norms, social positions and practices [27]. Again, there is no individual creativity without the social.

In what follows, we attempt to offer an integrative model which can serve as a bridge between the individual and the social divide. More specifically, our model of primary and secondary creativity demonstrates how personal and social creativity involve the same process, even though the personal and social recognition of creativity can differ. The model also illustrates how the social influences the individual and the individual influences the social in both primary and secondary creative outcomes.

Primary and secondary creativity

Predominately personal or social conceptions of creativity represent the extremes, and many creative researchers recognize that there are more nuanced and blended options. Indeed, it is not as simple as ‘either creativity requires social recognition, or it does not.’ Our model of primary and secondary creativity offers a viable integrated conception (Figure 1).

As illustrated in Figure 1, the model of primary and secondary creativity (PSC) asserts that creativity starts with the individual, who is in dialogue with a medium or

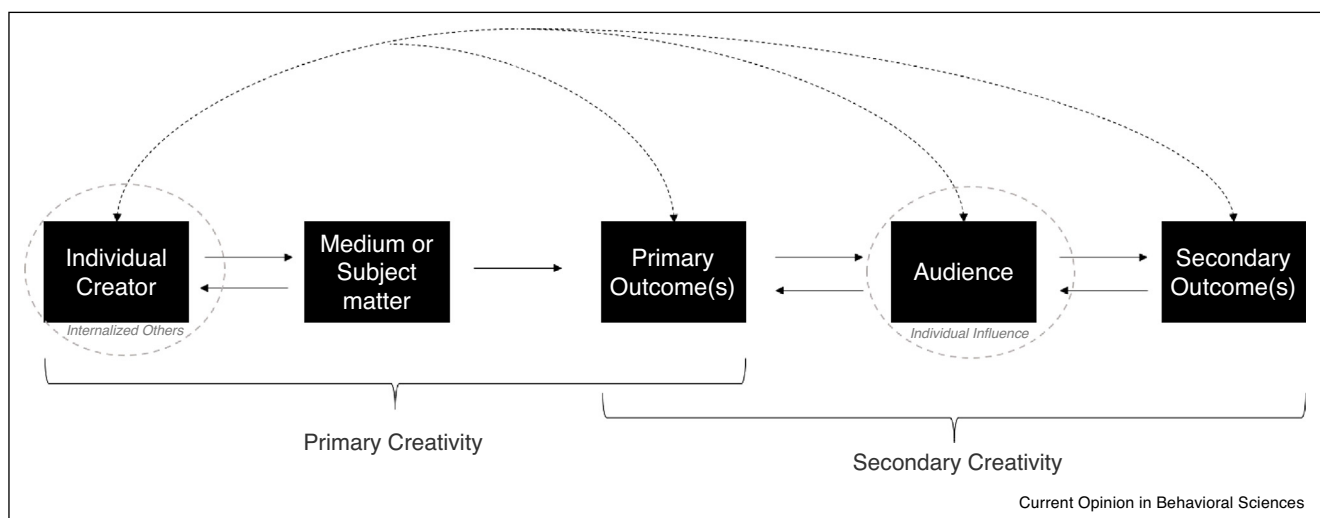
subject matter. This may lead to the construction of an original interpretation. This original interpretation represents the primary creative outcome, which may or may not take the form of a creative product.

The unique individual experiences and personal interpretations that are a part of that dialogue are influenced by internalized social and historical factors (denoted by the dotted circle), but the individual engaged in *primary creativity* is not necessarily concerned with or reacting to external social audiences (denoted by the dotted line from individual to audience), nor expectations about such an audience.

Secondary creativity, when it occurs, commences with an audience (external to the individual) being in dialogue with the outcome of primary creativity. The process of original interpretation and meaning-making is the same as that which occurs with primary creativity but differs in that the primary creator may no longer be involved. It is, however, possible that the primary creator has an indirect influence on the interpretations and experiences of the audiences (as denoted by the dotted line connecting the individual to the audience). Moreover, individual perspectives of the social audience can influence broader social interpretations (as denoted by the circle surrounding the audience). The outcome of secondary creativity is a unique interpretation and experience of primary outcomes by an external social audience.

In this way, the full trajectory of the PSC model illustrates that there are both intra-psychological (personal) and inter-psychological (social) process at play in interpretations of creativity (see also [28]). In the sections that

Figure 1



Primary and secondary creativity (PSC).

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