

The Transformational Potential of Hidden Creativity

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Abstract

In this chapter, we outline three ways to try to avoid potentially transformational creators from giving up on being creative. The first is to tackle misperceptions and biases that people have about creativity as a construct that could prevent them from identifying as a creative person. The second is to help people grow as creators by building insight and understanding that can help them develop their strengths, note potential resources, and overcome possible hurdles. The third way is to spread recognition that not only is the social domain just as valid as artistic or scientific domains but also that it relies on certain types of creative thinking that may be particularly useful for transformative creative actions. Throughout and in our conclusion, we discuss ways in which the creators who might be inspired by these efforts may be more likely to gravitate toward transformational creativity.

Keywords: Transformational Creativity, Hidden Creativity, Creativity Misconceptions, Distributed Creativity

The Transformational Potential of Hidden Creativity

Robert Sternberg and his colleagues (2020, 2021a, 2021b, this volume; Sternberg & Chowkase, 2021) make a powerful case for the importance of transformational creativity – creativity that helps make the world be a better place, both immediately and long-term. Most people are transactionally creative (i.e., for rewards/gain) or, perhaps, self-transformationally creative (i.e., using their creativity for self-development; Kaufman, 2023). Perhaps the ultimate question is to figure out the best way to increase transformational creativity.

One way, as Sternberg et al. (2021; Sternberg, 2021c) proposed for the broader construct of transformational giftedness, is to develop measures that assess potential for such transformative contributions. Another tactic would be to work with students who have been already traditionally identified with creative (or gifted) potential and help guide them toward more transformational aspirations (Choi & Kaufman, 2022).

In this chapter, we will highlight another path, which is to avoid potentially losing transformational creators because they do not think of themselves as being creative in the first place. Specifically, we see three directions such work could take to help spotlight such “hidden” creativity. First, it is possible to tackle misperceptions or generalizations that people have about creativity as a construct. Second, many people also have poor insight into their own creativity. Third, many people cannot conceive that social change could itself be a domain in which to express their creative ideas. Finally, we will emphasize the idea that true transformational creativity will come from the bottom-up – from a groundswell of people applying their creativity, across a wide range of abilities, to helping the world be a better place. The opposite angle, top-

down, or waiting for a creative genius to solve the world's problems, is less likely to end in success – in part for the reasons outlined by in the first chapter of this book.

Tackling Misperceptions and Myths

There is a wide array of popular misconceptions about creativity that are commonly endorsed by laypersons. Unfortunately, such myths tend not to be of the kind that inspire people to try to be creative in the first place; it is unsurprising that the more that people believe in these falsehoods, the less likely they are to identify as being creative (Benedek et al., 2021).

Many misperceptions limit which activities might “count” as being creative. Perhaps most notably, the “art bias” is the tendency to automatically consider artistic activities as creative, often at the expense of appreciating the creativity of other disciplines and domains (Glăveanu, 2011, 2014a). This myth that artists, in essence, have a monopoly on creativity (Runco, 2015) puts a lot of useful and genuinely creative human activities that are not art at a disadvantage, while not truly helping artists either. For example, the assumption that art is creative does not get enough scrutiny and, thus, represents a missed opportunity to understand such issues as what makes some art highly creative and why creators in all domains might feel the need to compare themselves with artists. It is also a misconception that places pressure on artists themselves to always feel compelled to perform creatively, contributing to the high rate of burnout in the creative industries (Thomson & Jaque, 2016).

Most of all, the “art bias” can prevent creators who are not artists from developing a creative identity (see also Glăveanu & Tanggaard, 2014). This possibility is particularly problematic from the perspective of transformational creativity, given that the latter is often expressed in the social domain through more or less mundane acts of sociability and altruism that might not have an artistic dimension to them. While transformational creativity does not have to

be artistic in order to be successful, being recognized as “creative” does rally forms of support – social and motivational – that are missed without such an acknowledgement.

Beyond domains, other myths are broadly focused on which actions or processes are considered “creativity.” If the arts present us with a positive bias when it comes to creativity, habitual action tends to have the opposite effect. Habits are usually associated with regular routines and, as such, with repetitive and automatic actions – two attributes seen as antithetic to creativity. Conversely, habitual action is oftentimes surprisingly adaptable and open to small yet significant creative contributions (for the example of craft, see Ross & Glăveanu, 2023). In fact, habits are the basis of human action and, by extension, creative action in any domain. Even artists, who are considered by most to break away from repetition and routines, depend on these types of habits for their creative success. More broadly, we can define habitual creativity as the creativity that helps well-rehearsed actions be masterful despite changing circumstances (see Glăveanu, 2012a). The “anti-habit bias,” then, prevents us from recognizing the fact that transformational creativity does not have to be revolutionary or directly lead to disruptive innovation. On the contrary, much of transformative creativity builds on existing traditions, such as pro-social habits and customs. Yet in the process of interacting with such traditions, transformative creativity renews them by making small but important changes to an otherwise expected set of habits. In this context, “habitual transformational creativity” can come to designate creative actions that lead to the greater good yet usually fly under the radar of both creators and their audiences for being mundane, repetitive, and generally predictable. These accusations ignore the fact that, oftentimes, transformational creativity continues rather than disrupts, builds up rather than tears down, and uses habitual action to transform existing conventions from the inside.

Related to the above, another misconception that explains why a great deal of transformationally creative acts are overlooked has to do with the assumption that, to be (transformationally) creative, one must have invented or initiated the specific way of helping or mobilizing resources or people to generate positive change. This implicit view that people who had the original creative spark deserve all the praise, whereas those who follow into their footsteps are not “real” creators, is problematic on many accounts (for a detailed discussion, see Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2022b). First, it glorifies the moment of insight without paying attention to what came before (its origins) and what comes after (its aftermath). Acts of transformational creativity do not begin and end with an original idea – it is the creative implementation of the idea and the way it leads to a series of other thoughts and actions that matter most (Praszkier, 2023). Indeed, the general tendency to overvalue the idea of inspiration led Bilton (2015) to propose the idea of “uncreativity,” which encompasses some Eastern conceptions of creativity, such as balance and harmony (e.g., Kharkurin, 2014) and non-generative aspects of the creative process, such as convergence and evaluation (Guilford, 1950).

Second, it is oftentimes difficult, especially with transformational creativity, to be able to even single out an original creator. Given that most processes of this kind play out in the social domain, there is a high degree of co-construction and collaborative participation at play. Moreover, given the kind of solidarity that can be built by acts of transformational creativity, it may be that even the originators do not want to claim credit for the initial spark but would rather pay tribute to the communities that made their sparks come to life and become truly transformational. Finally, the “spark bias,” to coin a phrase, reflects wider Western assumptions about creativity that prioritize individuals over groups, novelty over usefulness, and authorship over co-creation (Li, 1997; Niu & Kaufman, 2013). Many of these assumptions are a result of the

legacy of Modernity (Escobar, 2023). Such assumptions might help some transformationally creative leaders to achieve their goals by motivating them to succeed against the odds and encouraging them to be original in their methods and approach. But these are also assumptions that discourage those who might not want to lead yet would be happy to participate in transformationally creative activities. They would also risk losing those creators who are content to not have “the spark,” yet unhappy to be forgotten or made invisible because of it.

Finally, other unfounded beliefs are about what types of people are creative. The idea that creativity is only reserved for geniuses has long been dismissed by scholars (e.g., Montuori & Purser, 1995). Models such as the Four C’s (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009) divide creativity into different levels of eminence, from mini-c (personal creativity) to little-c (everyday creativity) to Pro-c (expert creativity) to Big-C (genius creativity), with the explicit intention of highlighting how creativity can be expressed across a wide continuum of efforts. A whimsical (if personally meaningful) idea qualifies as being creative just as much as a brilliant insight that eventually results in a scientific breakthrough or classic piece of theatre. We are not arguing, of course, that mini-c is as creative as Big-C, of course, but that they both “count.” The Propulsion Model of Creative Contributions (Sternberg et al., 2002) proposes eight different types of creative works that range from replications to paradigm-shifting reinitiations. Similarly, there is an obvious difference between a copy of the *Mona Lisa* and the actual *Mona Lisa* – but both would fall under the broad spectrum of being creative. People who self-identify as being Big-C are more likely to hold a fixed mindset view of creativity, or that creativity is largely stable and unlikely to improve (Karwowski, 2009). People with a fixed mindset were found to be less creative (Karwowski, 2014).

The Mad Genius Bias is one of the more discussed biases (e.g., Schlesinger, 2009), with most overviews acknowledging some minor connection between mental illness and creativity at the Big-C level but without any causal link or extrapolation to everyday creativity (e.g., Kaufman, 2014). People who believe in the idea of the Mad Genius were found to be less creative and to have much lower (or, curiously, much higher) creative self-efficacy (Kaufman et al., 2006).

Given that most people will not be taking an exam on creativity scholarship, why does it matter if they understand the truth behind these myths? It matters because believing in such myths may make people feel that creativity does not belong to people like them – people who may not be artists, prone to inspiration, good idea generators, or mad geniuses. Not identifying as being creative is associated with having lower creative self-efficacy (Karwowski, 2016). Unfortunately, most people do not necessarily gravitate to implicit beliefs that will help them with their creativity (Baas et al., 2015). The more people understand what creativity can include, the less likely their creativity will remain hidden.

Increasing Insight and Understanding

If dispelling myths about creativity may help people avoid harmful misconceptions that could consider themselves uncreative, then encouraging people to understand their own creative strengths and goals may help them maximize their abilities. Creative metacognition has several components (such as intuiting the best times to share your creativity; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2013), but it is primarily studied as how accurately someone understands their own creativity. This ability has been studied in terms of how well people can evaluate their own creative performance (Kaufman et al., 2016), discern their most creative ideas (Silva, 2008), and distinguish their

creative abilities across different domains (Beghetto et al. 2011). In general, people who are higher in creative metacognition tend to be smarter (Karwowski et al., 2020) and more creative (Benedek et al., 2016).

Of course, it is easy to note that if people can increase their creative metacognition, then they are more likely to get the most out of their creative talents. It is much harder to outline specific steps needed to achieve this feat. Certainly, there are a variety of best practices to offer constructive feedback that should enhance creativity (e.g., Holinger & Kaufman, 2018) while, ideally, avoiding being so harsh that the creator loses their passion (e.g., Beghetto, 2014). Rather than detouring into the details of best educational practices for encouraging creativity, we will instead focus on the macro level of how people can understand their own creativity better.

One way is to reach clarity as to their creative goals. Some people, for example, value and enjoy the creative process and are happy being creative regardless of the outcome. They may prefer to engage in mini-c or little-c pursuits for fun or growth. Others may certainly enjoy the process but also specifically want to produce a final product. It is worth the extra time, effort, and less obviously pleasurable parts of creativity (i.e., revising and responding to criticisms and feedback) to create a work that will specifically appeal to others and may become part of a domain or field. Their goals may be more aligned with Pro-c or even Big-C. We are not saying that there is an either-or situation here; many Pro-c creators may be primarily focused on the process, with the resulting product a happy additional result. But understanding the nature of one's creative goals can help people make better decisions about how to create.

Just as people can be aware of their preferences and goals, they can also identify their existing or potential affordances, their desired audiences, and possible constraints.

Transformational creativity, like any other form of creating, does not take place in the vacuum.

To engage in it, one has to be part of a wider ecosystem that goes beyond problem, creator, and creative idea or product and broadens to include audiences, affordances, and a series of new and old cultural artifacts. Given its clear social and ethical embedding, transformational creativity makes a strong case for why creative action is not to be found “inside the head” but instead distributed “into the world” (Glăveanu, 2013, 2014b). To properly understand its processes fostering insight and understanding, we need to consider the social and material context of transformational creativity. The former is relatively straightforward to grasp, given the fact that transformational creativity typically is fundamentally oriented toward others. And yet, who these “others” are is not always an easy question. Finding one’s audience and knowing how to communicate with them – both by listening to and addressing their needs and concerns – is an essential skill for all creators who hope to make a positive impact in society. What complexifies this picture even more is the fact that audiences are often multiple and diffuse. They can range from close collaborators to potentially critical competitors. They can include mentors, institutional partners, people in need, and people who must be unified. To efficiently engage in transformational creation, the person or group in question needs to be persuasive and, in particular, win the battle for hearts and minds among members of a public that is not yet engaged but could be convinced to participate.

This ability is likely to be cultivated over time and will depend on how well creators understand the affordances they use (or should use) in order to rally support. The notion of affordance has a long history in psychology (see Gibson, 1986; Jones, 2003), but it is a relatively recent concept in the psychology of creativity. This gap speaks to a wider neglect when it comes to the physical environment and its contribution to creative acts. We propose that transformationally creative leaders cannot afford to ignore affordances. Affordances are enablers

of action and capture what is possible to do (and, by extension, think) in any given situation. Successful acts of creative transformation depend on perceiving and exploiting the right kinds of affordances (see Glăveanu, 2012b) as well as the ability to identify and categorize potential constraints (Tromp, 2023). Recognizing and valuing material and social resources and distinguishing between constraints that are merely hurdles versus those that are impenetrable are both ways to become aware of various possibilities for one's actions. These are preconditions for creativity yet, at the same time, one of the more difficult tasks faced by those who engage in transformational creativity. This is because, oftentimes, what is possible is considered in narrow terms, as in what actions or outcomes are most likely to happen, or in overly pessimistic ways, as in what might go wrong. On the contrary, what transformational creativity requires is an exploration of not only possible but impossible (yet hoped for) futures (Damhof & Gulmans, 2023; Freeman, 2023) so that the creator can understand what unique affordances can lead to a more profound transformation. This understanding helps overcome functional fixedness, or the assumption that every object is meant to serve one specific function (Duncker, 1945). As such, creators can develop more flexible relationships with surrounding objects and places based on the view that everything can be used in a variety of ways. Then there is the issue of enacting affordances once they are perceived. This can be easier said than done when those actions are likely to come against social norms, conventions, or even laws. In those cases, to display transformational creativity means to change existing norms, to defy restrictive conventions, and to challenge unjust laws, when necessary. Not all creative actions are permitted but oftentimes the first people to build barriers to what is possible are the creators themselves. A wide, flexible, and ethical consideration of audiences and affordances can help one find surprising allies,

identify unlikely opportunities, and mobilize others for long-lasting social and cultural change (Mulgan, 2023; O Brolchain, 2023).

In addition to the external barriers that constrain creativity, internal barriers of affect – and especially anxiety – can also limit how far people are willing to go in exploring their creativity and fulfilling their creative potential. There is emerging evidence for the presence and impacts of creativity anxiety, a form of anxiety that is specific to creative thinking and is independent of a person's level of other general anxiety traits (Daker et al., 2023; Daker et al., 2020; Ren et al., 2023). Creativity anxiety has been demonstrated across a wide range of domains, from writing and dance to math and science. Indeed, showing the cracks in the false equivalency of art with creativity (the art bias, as we have discussed early), this work has identified the “paradox of the uncreative artist,” that is, the phenomenon of artists who may operate beautifully as technicians of their craft, but are in fact anxious and avoidant about generating original art (Daker et al., 2020). Notably, recent evidence suggests the real-world impacts of creativity anxiety on the paths that people choose to pursue (or not pursue) in life. Specifically, people who experience creativity anxiety are more likely to avoid activities and career paths that they view as creative (Daker et al., 2023). This may present a disproportionate limitation on creative exploration and expression for women, because creativity anxiety appears to manifest more strongly in women than in men (Daker et al., 2020). Encouragingly, the availability of the Creativity Anxiety Scale (CAS; Daker et al., 2020) is a step toward identifying creativity anxiety so that it can be addressed, potentially by educators or organizations seeking to help their students, employees, etc. overcome creativity anxiety. Initial evidence using the CAS indicates that professional development that encourages creative agency and helps people identify their own creative resources (e.g., asking “how am I creative?”; Anderson, et al., 2022)

can effectively reduce creativity anxiety. Experiences that encourage artistic expression and appreciation (from music-making to simply engaging the senses in aesthetic appreciation of everyday objects) and experiences of evaluating others' creative works have also shown encouraging effects for addressing the barrier of creativity anxiety (Shimizu et al., 2021).

Finally, it is important to note that not all anxiety associated with creativity is completely without merit. If one aims for transformational creativity, as we have noted, there is often a certain amount of defying the crowd and conventional wisdom involved (Sternberg, 2018). Sometimes one finds allies and supporters amongst one's affordances and audience... but not always. A life lived in pursuit of transformational creativity is not always an easy path. Intellectual (Beghetto, 2009) and social (Tyagi et al., 2017) risk-taking is needed to be creative, and what qualifies as a "sensible" risk may vary wildly among people. A creator who is willing to give up their reputation, livelihood, relationships, and even life in pursuit of affecting positive change may accomplish tremendous leaps toward progress, peace, and justice. Yet while we may admire such creators, we see a similar trajectory for transformative creativity as there exists for creativity itself. Some people will make small strides, but hesitate to have their loved ones suffer or ostracized. Just as we appreciate mini-c and do not disregard those ideas that do not reach Big-C, so too do we caution against condemning those transformational creators who are not transformative enough.

Engaging with Others and with Society

Transformational creativity is represented by creative action in almost any domain (Kaufman et al., 2017), so long as the guiding aim is to strive toward the common good, either

short or long term. In this sense, nearly any creator – painters or coders, designers or scientists, cooks or hairdressers, philosophers or poets, to name a few – can display transformational creativity in and through their work. The common denominator is the fact that they would have to show concern for social relations and aim to contribute to society in wise, just, and agentic ways. It is the social domain, broadly defined, that is at the heart of transformational creativity as a kind of creativity performed with, for, and toward others (see also Glăveanu, 2018). Although there is considerable focus and research on creative expression in, for example, the arts and sciences, society as a domain of creativity has received limited attention so far (with some exceptions; see the notion of the “domain of the future” in Csikszentmihályi, 1996). The focus on transformational creativity offers us a new opportunity to engage with processes taking place at a social level in a new way, while also adding an ethical concern (another dimension of social life) to traditional criteria for creativity, such as novelty and usefulness.

What a closer analysis of processes of transformational creativity comes to show is that “generic” building blocks for creative action, as depicted by the Geneplore (Ward, Finke & Smith, 1995) and componential (Amabile, 1996) models of creativity, among others, are not sufficient to understand what makes creative acts “transformational.” In order to achieve its aims, transformational creative action needs to build on a wider range of processes, including socially-oriented phenomena such as empathy, perspective-taking, compassion, and ethical thinking (see also Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2023). These are as common in everyday life as divergent and convergent thinking are (Jones & Estes, 2015), but not as well understood – especially in the way they relate to creative outcomes. To fully appreciate transformational creativity, both in science and in common sense, we need to move from a narrow focus on ideas or insight to one that

expands to consider social interactions, cultural norms and values, and the ethical engagement with others and otherness.

It also requires a series of cognitive processes that are less discussed in the literature on creativity. Key among them are anticipation and futures thinking (Cole & Kvavilashvili, 2021; Poli, 2023). These processes help individuals and communities imagine the future beyond the here and now, a future that ranges from probable and possible to impossible. They also help those who do imagine be able to understand what preferable futures look like and what makes them desirable (Gall et al., 2022). This intersection is where transformational creativity meets futures thinking – they both place considerable emphasis on the consequences of action. Without the capacity to anticipate how things will turn out, we would have great difficulty in acting ethically. Ethics, ultimately, is a future-oriented category: it concerns current actions inasmuch as these actions carry consequences for the future. Anticipating good or bad outcomes is part and parcel of what makes action ethical and, ultimately, what makes creativity transformational. But transformational creativity is much more than anticipation. As suggested here, it occupies a space in-between the concern for others, the concern for the future, and the concern for creativity.

What are the implications of resituating transformational creativity within society? We can think here about challenging myths and misconceptions, as we did at the start of this chapter. The historical ideas of lone genius or, more relevant nowadays, of solitary creative minds, are problematic for a category such as transformational creativity. What the latter calls for are distributed accounts that recognize the interconnection between creators and their audiences, between ideas and objects, between mind and culture. We can also think about what can improve a person's capacity for this kind of creativity, which is again a theme of concern. What reflecting on transformational creativity *as* societal creativity (Glăveanu, 2015) adds to the above is a

concern for how to shape social contexts that foster this form of creative engagement.

Sociocultural theory offers some suggestions in this regard. First and foremost, it points us to the role of scaffolding in learning to be creative, including learning to be transformationally creative.

This means that the social and material environment can be structured in such a way that they encourage people to not only think but also to act creatively in view of the greater good. A

second suggestion, continuing from the first, is to offer role models of transformational

creativity. It is not enough to tell students about how important or impactful this kind of creativity is. What makes the difference is *showing* them with the help of others, whether

teachers, other experts, or their fellow students, who are more experienced in this area (what

Vygotsky referred to as creating a Zone of Proximal Development; Vygotsky, 1978). Most of all,

however, what matters is for teachers to recognize that their students, from the start, as capable

of transformational creativity and, as such, as already active, agentic and “creative” social and

political participants. In other words, teachers must recognize the fact that transformational

creativity is not something someone eventually acquires or learns, but rather that it is a central

part of our existence as human beings from the start. All of us have experience being

transformationally creative – whether this experience is ordinary or extraordinary – and

becoming more creative, in a transformational sense, depends on starting from where we are,

working with others, and growing together.

Looking Forward

Transformational creativity can come with brilliant leaders, but also requires the quiet power of the multitudes. Many social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, are driven by strategic protests in many different locations, large performance art pieces, chants and signs

designed to attract media attention, and an array of other tactics (including morally ambiguous techniques, such as hacking and vandalism; Kapoor & Kaufman, 2022) that need the eclectic talents, efforts, and participation of thousands and thousands of people (Yoganathan, 2020). We have highlighted several different pathways toward this goal. One is to shatter the biases, myths, and misconceptions that may prevent people from identifying their own creative potential because they do not fit a preconceived idea of what a creator could be. Another is to build insight and understanding that can help people grow and develop as creators by fostering strengths, spotting resources and opportunities, and overcoming potential hindrances. Finally, there is also the recognition that the social domain is not only just as valid as the artistic or scientific domain but relies on certain types of creative thinking that may be particularly useful for transformative creative actions.

Not only would these pathways potentially give a voice to the “hidden” creators who might otherwise be silent, but we would argue that many of these creators would be more likely to be inclined toward transformative as opposed to transactional creativity. If people are not intimidated by the genius bias or spark bias, for example, they are also likely to have confidence in their own abilities; this, in itself, is fine and even desirable, but there is a fine line between narcissism and self-esteem. Unfortunately, having inflated positive self beliefs about one’s intellect and openness – as opposed to the more community-focused traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness – is more associated with narcissism (Bosson et al., 2008). We are in no way claiming that people with high creative self-efficacy are narcissists. However, we do posit that the people with lower creative self-efficacy who may thus be more vulnerable to some of the misconceptions we have noted may also be specifically less likely to want to use their creativity for selfish purposes.

Transformative creativity can absolutely be driven by future Big-C creators; indeed, our history is filled with the stories of leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi (and, perhaps in the future such young activists as Greta Thunberg and David Hogg). But history is also filled with large-scale movements for social change that have succeeded because of the efforts of hundreds and thousand of mini-c and little-c creators working together (Choi & Kaufman, 2022). Protests need the leaders who go into the history books, but they also need the clever protest signs, original strategies to distract the powers that be, and when absolutely necessary, the weapons made out of cheap and readily available materials. Nurturing a wide net of potential creators across a variety of C-levels, domains, and creative thinking strengths can help supply the creative breadth and scope needed for positive change to happen.

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