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., 2004). 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 [9,10] 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 [11,12]. A child may make 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 [13] 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 Glaveanu [14], which asserted that the psychology of creativity is in a state of crisis.

A key assertion of Glaveanu’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., [15,16]; Runco, 2015) 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
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Understanding used in discussions of children’s creativity, everyday creativity, and latent creative potential [17–21].

Other perspectives represent a social perspective. It is especially clear in the claim that no creativity without some sort of social recognition or consensus [14,22,23*,24]. 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 [25**]. 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 involves 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 [26]). In the sections that follow, we explore the possibilities and challenges of these two conceptions of creativity in their purest forms.

![Diagram of Primary and Secondary Creativity (PSC)](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2018.08.011)

Primary and secondary creativity (PSC).

**Figure 1**


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follow, we highlight two key contributions of PSC model to the contemporary creativity studies literature.

**Connecting the individual (primary) and the social (secondary)**

The PSC model asserts that creativity starts with the individual, but also acknowledges that the individual has a socio-developmental history and is immersed in a socio-cultural context. More specifically, unlike other extreme individualistic perspectives, the PSC model recognizes social influences are not entirely external to the person, but rather integrated in the person’s identity (see also [25**]). These ‘internalized others’ serve as dialogic interlocuters and play an intra-psychological role in how an individual experiences, interprets, and engages with creative endeavors. But, again, it is the individual who ultimately has these experiences and initiates possible interpretations of creativity.

Even when people collaborate with others on creative endeavors, each individual in the collaboration still has a unique interpretation and subjective experience of that endeavor.

Each individual, ultimately, is in dialogue with the medium or subject matter. And occasionally the individual produces something creative, which is recognized as creative by others (audiences, collaborators, external judges). They key here is that the individual’s creativity may also be socially recognized, but even if it is not, and it was original and effective, it was (personally) creative.

This position differs from previous descriptions of personal creativity. Runco [27], for example, suggested that creativity is always and only personal. In this view, what comes after, the social recognition and attributions by some audience are extricable from creativity per se. Social recognition, in this light, is more accurately labeled fame, reputation, or impact, but distinct from creativity. This is in direct contrast to predominately social views of Csikszentmihalyi [22], Kasof [24], and Glaveanu (2016), which hold that there is no creativity without social recognition.

The view outlined here draws on the previous conception of personal creativity but no longer rejects the creativity of the social attributions. In the PSC model, there may be personal creativity without social recognition, and there may be personal creativity that earns social recognition, and that recognition depends on the creativity of the audience.

**Two stages, one process**

The PSC model views creativity as initially personal, and all social attributions as subsequent and thus secondary. Social attributions are secondary in that they depend on personal creativity. Personal creativity must come first, and sometimes, but only sometimes, there is social creativity as well. The initial, personal creative process is, in this light, primary, and social creativity occurs second, after the personal.

There are times when creators take an audience into account [24]. This may occur throughout primary creativity, or it may be in the final stages of primary creativity; the stage known as verification [28] or implementation [16]. But often the creator is uninvolved with secondary creativity. As a matter of fact there are times when taking an audience into account undermines the creativity, where the individual decides that it is too risky to be highly original.

Kasof [24] suggested that because audiences can attribute creativity to products, creators should invest in impression management. But as Runco [27] pointed out, if a creator invests in impression management, they are taking time away from creative work and, as a result, they may not be as creative as they would be if they ignored an audience and followed their own creative inclination.

Indeed, the detrimental impact of extrinsic evaluations and expectations is well documented [29–31]. So again, primary creativity is often unrelated to secondary creativity and probably often benefits from that disconnect, given the potentially detrimental effects of evaluations on creativity.

Most importantly, the PSC model introduced here adds the idea that one process can account for both the creativity of the individual and the creativity of the audience. It thus represents a large step forward because it acknowledges both personal creativity and social recognition, and explains them in a highly parsimonious fashion, with one mechanism. What is most important, and unique to the present article, is that the PSC model acknowledges that the process underlying both primary (personal) and secondary (social) creativity is identical. Both require the construction of original interpretations.

This new conceptualization recognizes social attributions as creative. Indeed, they depend on exactly the same process as the initial insight, namely the construction of an original interpretation. The difference is that personal creativity involves a creator who interacts with a problem, gap, or even a medium (e.g., sculptors who discover meaning inherent in a particular stone) whereas secondary and social creativity require that some audience construct original interpretations of the product that resulted from the primary individual’s creative efforts. And just as the primary creator was in a kind of dialogue with a gap, problem, or medium, so too does the audience have a dialogue when it constructs creative interpretations. The dialogue of the audience is likely to be with some germinal quality of the initial creative product.

The idea of primary creativity and the possibility of secondary creativity resolves a key issue in the debate about how to best define creativity. This new conception is parsimonious in its pointing to one creative mechanism.
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(the construction of original interpretations), while at the same time granting creativity to individuals who initiate the process and also to the subsequent social interpretations, attributions, and implementations of external audiences. Moreover, it highlights how the social is part of the individual and the individual is part of the social. In this way, the PSC model helps to avoid personal-social dichotomies in the extant creativity literature, which otherwise diminish and erase the individual or ignore or trivialize the social aspects of creativity.

Uncited references

[32,33*]

References and recommended reading

Papers of particular interest, published within the period of review, have been highlighted as

- of special interest
- of outstanding interest

7. Simonton presents arguments highlighting the importance of expanding definitions of creativity to include the criterion of surprise (expanding the standard two-criterion definition) as well as the need to define what is not creative. He offers a three-criterion definition of creativity, which specifies novelty, utility, and surprise as core requirements in making determinations of what is and is not creative.
15. Gláveanu VP: Distributed Creativity: Thinking Outside the Box of the Creative Individual. Cham/Heidelberg: Springer International Publishing; 2014.
24. Hennessy presents an argument in alignment with claims that social psychological perspectives on creativity often fail to represent a fully contextualized social and cultural perspective. Hennessy also endeavors to clarify how methods such as the Consensual Assessment Technique while focused on creative products (for assessment) still reflect the unique intersection of individual, social, and cultural factors at play in the creative process.
26. Gláveanu offers a summary and response to how creativity researchers tend to conceptualize the ‘social’ in the field of creativity studies. He presents an argument that individualistic conceptions tend to dominate conceptions of creativity, even those that espouse a social perspective. He describes how social perspectives still tend to ‘externalize’ the socio-cultural and outlines several examples, including portraying the social as a form of: gatekeeper (i.e. determines what counts as creative), consensus (i.e. requires social agreement), cluster (i.e. a patterned system of values and behaviors), box (i.e. immediate social environment), shopping list (i.e. endless enumeration of social factors that impinge on creativity), and onion (i.e. individual at the center surrounded by layers of socio-cultural influences).
34. Smith JK, Smith LF: The 1.5 criterion model of creativity: where less is more, more or less. J Creat Behav 2017, 51:281-284.
35. Smith and Smith argue for an alteration to the standard, two criterion definition of creativity, one that focuses on the novelty of ideas with the “potential” of those ideas to have utility. They offer this as a 1.5 criterion definition, arguing that ideas that have not yet (or did not) make an useful impact in the world can still be considered creative.