

The Relationship between Creativity and Psychological Distress

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Abstract: Creativity has been into research since long for its relationship with mental health i.e. psychological wellbeing and psychological illness. Creativity has basic wide perspectives – healthy and unhealthy. Research indicates that participation in creative activities enhances the psychological wellbeing and health of the individual. Creativity involves cognitive, emotional and social factors and it is directly related to openness to experience, flexibility, autonomy, and playfulness, quest of taking risk, and continuity and tolerance. Present study focuses on the relationship between creativity and psychological distress. The data was collected on a sample of fifty students (N=50, all students of G.N.D.U. Amritsar, both male and female). The tests used in the present study are: Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (figural part only) (Torrance, 1961) and PGI Health Questionnaire, Psychological Distress only (Verma et al., 1985). The results indicate that there is a negative significant correlation between creativity and psychological distress.

1. Introduction

Creativity has been studied from different perspectives and has been associated with a number of interacting and opposing elements. Sternberg and Lubart (1999) stated that “creativity is the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e. original, unexpected) and appropriate”. Torrance (1967) defines creativity as the process of becoming sensitive to problems, deficiencies, gaps in knowledge, missing elements, disharmonies and so on, identifying the difficulty, searching for solutions, making guess or formulating hypotheses about the deficiencies, testing and retesting them, and finally communicating the results.

Efforts have been made since 1950s, when Guilford, in his presidential address to the American Psychological Association (APA), argued for the limitations of intelligence tests and his investigation of divergent thinking (Craft, 2001). There are different theories which try to explain the concept and process(s) of creativity from different perspectives. The present piece of research focuses on the psychological wellbeing and two opposing theories of creativity i.e. psychoanalytic perspective and humanistic perspective. Psychoanalytic theory proposes that creativity grows out of unconscious drives, or creativity is a by-product of primary process, a pathological view of the creative process which states that only unhappy people experience of day-dreams and fantasies that are integral part of the creative process. To Freud, there was a great similarity between neurosis and creativity, and both originated in conflicts stemming from wish fulfilment and biological drives (Freud, 1908)”. According to Humanistic psychology creativity exists when individuals allow themselves to be open to experience, to evaluate experience and to play with elements and concepts (e.g. Rogers, 1959; Maslow, 1959).

Creativity is a healthy part of human being. This view of human nature i.e. conscious, self-directed, self-actualizing, healthy process, distinguishes humanistic psychology from psychoanalytic and behaviouristic psychology (Maslow, 1963). According to May (1975) the ability to encounter life

in its fullest and engage with that part of it which is just beyond our senses is a prime characteristic of the creative act, and individual. He maintains that “for the unconscious which obtains in creativity is not the superficial level of objectified intellectualization, but an encounter with the world on a level that undercuts the subject-object split.” Creativity is the encounter of the intensively unconscious human being with his or her world and the similar are the words of Maslow (1962) that during creative encounter the individual is self-forgetful. Thus, becoming totally immersed in the present, the individual merges with the encounters and the subject-object split disappears.

Whatever the perspective is, the concern of the present research paper is the psychological wellbeing and creativity. Humanistic view purports the healthy view of creativity whereas psychoanalytic view states that creativity is the result of dreaming, day-dreaming, unsatisfied wishes, etc. From these perspectives, it can be ascertained that when an individual accomplishes any creative activity he would feel satisfied as he is doing due to some wish fulfilment. The point is, whether it is psychoanalytic approach or humanistic approach there is some relationship between creativity and psychological well-being.

An extensive theoretical literature has addressed the meaning of positive psychological functioning which is an important definitive of psychological wellbeing. Jahoda (1958) proposed positive criteria of mental health which generated new definitions of well-being as the absence of illness, also offer extensive descriptions of what it means to be in good psychological health. According to Ryff & Singer (1996) the points of convergence in the prior theories constitute the core dimensions of the model of well-being.

Each dimension is presented here:

- Self-Acceptance
- Positive Relations with others
- Autonomy
- Environmental Mastery
- Purpose in Life

Psychological well-being is usually conceptualized as some combination of positive affective states such as happiness (the hedonic perspective) and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life (Deci & Ryan 2008). Psychological well-being is all about lives going well. It is interplay of feeling good and functioning effectively. Lasting well-being does not mean that individuals feel good all the time; the experience of painful emotions (e.g. disappointment, failure, grief) is a normal part of life, and being able to manage these negative or painful emotions is essential for long-term well-being.

Psychological well-being is, however, compromised when negative emotions are extreme or very long lasting and interfere with a person's ability to function in his or her daily life. The concept of feeling good includes not only the positive emotions of happiness and contentment, but also such emotions as interest, engagement, confidence, and affection. The concept of functioning effectively (in a psychological sense) involves the development of one's potential, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose (e.g. working towards valued goals), and experiencing positive relationships. World Health Organization, defined health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1948). More recently, the WHO has defined positive mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (WHO, 2001). Findings by Huppert (2009) suggest that psychological well-being is associated with flexible and creative thinking, pro-social behavior, and good physical health. The findings by Winefield et al. (2012) do not provide strong support for the need to measure Psychological Wellbeing separately from Psychological Distress. Lamers et al. (2011) stated that there are separate but correlated lines of mental health and mental illness. The answer is unlikely to be categorical. For example Zautra et al. (2005) proposed that in times of low stress, positive and negative affect are relatively uncorrelated, but that in stressful situations they collapse to a simple bipolar dimension.

2. Psychological well-being and creativity

Positive affect and creativity - Some theories of affect suggest that creativity may be particularly susceptible to affective influence, mainly because positive affect leads to the sort of cognitive variation that stimulates creativity (Clore, Schwarz, and Conway, 1994). Isen (1999) suggested that positive affect has three primary effects on cognitive activity. First, positive affect makes additional cognitive material available for processing, increasing the number of cognitive elements available for association. Second, it leads to defocused attention and a more complex cognitive context, increasing the breadth of those elements that are treated as relevant to the problem. Third, it increases cognitive flexibility, increasing the probability that diverse cognitive elements will in fact become associated. Isen concluded that, together, these processes lead positive affect to have a positive influence on creativity. The biographies, letters, and journals of well-known creative individuals are

rich in emotional drama. A wide range of literature has often described affective dysfunction as an important factor of creativity, using stories of artists such as Vincent Van Gogh and Sylvia Plath to illustrate the troubled life of the creative genius. Teresa et al. (2005) found that positive affect relates positively to creativity in organizations and that the relationship is a simple linear one. Wright and Walton (2003) found that psychological well-being was positively related to creativity, even when positive mood state and positive affective disposition were controlled. The results from two laboratory experiments demonstrate that individuals experiencing emotional ambivalence or the simultaneous experience of positive and negative emotions are better at recognizing unusual relationships between concepts, therefore showing an ability believed to be important to organizational creativity (Fong, 2006). Puig et al. (2006) revealed that participation in the creative arts therapy intervention boosted psychological well-being by decreasing negative emotional states and enhancing positive emotions of subjects of experimental group. Similar results were also found by Svensk et al. (2009) and Nainis et al. (2006). Cropley (1990) in a review of different studies found positive correlation between mental health and everyday creativity. A study conducted by Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) revealed that happiness is linked with and precedes number of successful outcomes, as well as behaviors similar to success. Also, the evidence indicates that positive emotions, the hallmark of well-being, may be the cause of number of the desirable characteristics, resources, and successes correlated with happiness.

Hypothesis

On the basis of review of literature and different theoretical perspectives the following hypothesis can be formulated: **I-** There will be significant negative correlation between creativity and psychological distress.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

The data was collected on a sample of fifty students (N=50, all G.N.D.U. Amritsar students, both male and female). The age group of the subjects ranges between 20 to 25 years.

3.2 Psychological Tests

The tests used in the present study are:

- 1) Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (figural part only) (Torrance, 1961), and
- 2) P.G.I. Health Questionnaire (N-1), Psychological Distress only (Verma et al., 1985)

3.3 Statistical Techniques

Mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and simple correlation had been applied for the purpose of statistical analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

Hypothesis I: - There will be significant negative correlation between creativity and psychological distress.

To find out the correlation between creativity and psychological distress Pearson correlation had been applied on the total scores of three activities of creativity and psychological distress. The correlation obtained is -0.675 ($p < 0.01$), as shown in table I, which indicates that there is a significant negative correlation between the two scores. The negative direction of the correlation indicates that as creativity increases psychological distress decreases. This explains that there is a significant positive correlation between creativity and psychological wellbeing. The correlation can be interpreted in terms of creative process and wellbeing. Every creative individual is having some task, goal, passion or wish to accomplish. So going through the creative act and feeling satisfied after completing it is the part- and-parcel of the same thing. We can think of the perspective in the lines of psychoanalytic or humanistic approach to creativity, both lead to some type of satisfaction which is important aspect of psychological wellbeing. Stuckey and Nobel (2010) revealed that art-based interventions are effective in reducing adverse physiological and psychological outcomes, but the extent to which these interventions enhance health status is not known. According to Cohn et al. (2009) there's a link between creativity and positive emotions and, ultimately, happiness. Thaut and Abiru (2010) found that music-making sessions have positive effects on psychological problems. From the review of literature, and results and discussion it can be concluded that there is a negative significant correlation between creativity and psychological distress. As a number of studies and art therapies, and different theoretical perspectives reveal that creativity is a positive and healthy process, it leads to psychological wellbeing, and at the same it has healing potential for psychological problems. Art and music therapies are quite helpful in improving anxiety, depression, loneliness and even psychosomatic problems like pain.

Table 1: Shows the Correlation between Creativity and Psychological Distress.

S.N.	Variable	Mean	SD	r	p value
1.	creativity	223.0	21.6	-0.675	0.01
2.	Psychology distress	21.6	4.5		

SD, standard deviation; r, correlation coefficient

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