

Review of: "Why the Standard Definition of Creativity Fails to Capture the Creative Act"

John Cowan¹

¹ Napier University

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Re: The standard definition of creativity

When I agree to undertake a review, I usually hope to bring to my appraisal a reasonable knowledge of the subject matter and of its relatively recent consideration in the literature. I can offer no such scholarship in this case. However, I can write and review as an academic reader who often praises students and other workers for their creativity, who has a clear notion of when I believe that quality is or is not present, and who therefore approached this article with keen interest. I review, then, as a representative of a readership whose interest this article may arouse. (This is a readership, incidentally, which would value the listing and brief definition of the four P's when they are first mentioned, and similarly the three C's.)

From the outset, it is clear that this is a scholarly and well-founded article. It is also well-written in an engaging style, wherein the author almost appears to be having a reflective conversation with themselves, taking the reader along with them and allowing them to eavesdrop. My attention was further caught on reading the mention in the abstract of erroneous deductions of the workings of a creator's mind. I recalled an occasion many years ago when I was asked for assistance with a plan for a staff development workshop with ambitious goals. I came up with a suggestion that provoked warm praise – for my creativity. Quickly I explained that there had been no creativity on my part, simply adaptation of a scheme pursuing a very different goal in a very different discipline area. It was with this memory freshly restored that I had proceeded from the abstract to the article itself, wondering, as I left the last line, how “satisfying” would be defined, judged, and justified as a prime quality of creativity.

I followed with interest the various well-reasoned rejections of elements of bipartite definitions, across wide disciplinary coverage. These directions facilitated my thinking, and raised valid reservations in my mind about my frequent use of an ill-defined concept. I was fairly happy with original, but as an engineer, tempted to link this with “fit for purpose.”

The author's consideration of the problems associated with the standard definition were readily comprehensible, and seemed valid to this non-expert user of the term. It was the second element of the definition that created problems for me, and for the author, whose each successive tweaking raised unresolved issues regarding its possible range of meanings.

The lengthy rejection of the initially attractive “value” seemed fair and soundly argued. Gradually the need to distinguish between the creative product and the creative experience was beginning to emerge for me, though not becoming focal. Instead, the author pressed the case for “novel and satisfying” without thorough exploration of the possible complications from the range of interpretational options, or of possible digressions en route to judgements under “satisfying”. I was

finding the scrutiny of the new definition rather less detailed than the demolition of the rejected options.

I was uncertain about the value of the consideration of the detail of the process of creative thinking, and the testing or assessment of individuals' creativity. Fortunately the author took us back to the need "to pay heed to the distinction between the creative experience and the creative product" while seemingly to this reader, still striving combine these very different concepts in one definition.

Having chatted my way through my review thoughts, my collegial recommendation to the author would be to maintain the attractively thought-generating style, explore the possibility of separating the two creativities into two definitions, and assemble a more robust justification and scrutiny of ``satisfying``.