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An investigation of creativity's perceived impact on psychological well-being

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate creativity's influence on psychological well-being, due to identified contradictions in predominantly quantitative previous research. For a greater understanding, a phenomenological qualitative design has been used. Reflecting Ryff's (1989) Scale of Psychological Well-being within semi-structured interviews, data was collected from 11 art students from the University of Bedfordshire. Inductive thematic analysis revealed the following themes: Creative compass, Social Interactions, Volition, Perceived achievements and self-attitude, Self-efficacy and lifestyle. Positive implications have been found on all dimensions of psychological well-being, apart from autonomy. The qualitative method of enquiry has allowed for an exploration of this effect and of further observations. Finally, it's been recommended that future research could use a more diverse sample when exploring the topic.

Keywords: Ryff, inductive thematic analysis, creativity, psychological well-being, qualitative, An investigation of creativity's perceived impact on psychological well-being

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Manifestations of creativity date back from the prehistoric era (Andreasen, 2005).

Prehistoric people possessed the attribute of creativity because they realised they can use a stone as a tool, or that by making it sharp it could be used for cutting or trimming things, or that they could form groups and hunt large animals, or that they could try to plant seeds and see if crops would grow, or creating clothing, all the way to figuring out how to transport objects that are heavy and thus inventing the circular wheel (Andreasen, 2005). It is thus important to study creativity, as it not only inspires great works of art but also drives technological progress. However, beyond this effect of creativity on the macro level, regarding its impact on a society and its history, creativity can also impact individuals on the micro level (Simonton, 2002), regarding one's psychological well-being (PWB). After providing a description and definition of creativity, its link to well-being will be highlighted, followed by defining well-being and evaluating previous research. In addition, gaps in the literature will be highlighted to justify the research question addressed by the current paper.

When describing creativity, various factors need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, creativity is a rather complex phenomenon, as it is not limited to its physical manifestations (painting, sculptures), but also entails intangibility (Andreasen, 2005). Thus, beyond creative achievements such as Egypt's pyramids, Athens' Acropolis, the Roman Roads, creativity can also refer to the act of imagination. In addition, creativity can also be perceived as problem-solving: not only through divergent thinking which generates more possible solutions to one problem (Addis, Pan, Musicaro, & Shacter, 2014) but also through creativity's cathartic effect. This cathartic effect has also been outlined by Csikszentmihalyi (1988), who suggested that self-expression occurs as a need of solving an issue that persists in an individual's life. In this case,

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that psychological tension is perceived as a problem, in which case creativity, through its expressive properties, could be seen as a means of problem-solving, since it ameliorates an issue (obstacle) that is in front of one's wellbeing (goal), that obstacle being psychological distress. Therefore, creativity is a multi-dimensional phenomenon.

Moreover, this complexity also emerges when considering the influence of culture on perception of creativity. Based on the dynamic political and ideological atmosphere of each era and locale, creative expression and subsequently its external appreciation can vary (Runco, 2014). This further suggests that culturally, not all that is original is also valued or appreciated as creative. This is bound to another key aspect of creativity: that creativity is not just originality. Therefore, originality is not enough in order to be considered creative, but it must also be effective (useful, fit, or appropriate) or have value (Runco & Jaeger, 2012), explaining why a random generation of words or sounds is not considered creative, in contrast to a poem or a song. Thus, given these different aspects of creativity, there is yet no consensual definition of creativity. Nevertheless, Plucker, Baghetto, and Dow (2004) have reviewed creativity journals and have suggested a comprehensive definition of creativity as 'the interaction among aptitude, process, and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context' (Plucker et al., 2004, p. 90).

Furthermore, being an object of research and observation, creativity's link to well-being became more apparent. Upon studying artists and creative individuals, Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990, 2003, 2009, as cited in Mei-Ju, Show-Sau, Ting-Yu, & Ho-Tang, 2016) observed a distinct psychological state, which he called 'flow'. This term describes a psychological state in which the individual is highly engaged in the activity, their sense of time is lost, and they are completely concentrated towards the activity, which they experience as an intrinsically

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rewarding experience. Among these characteristics of ‘flow’, it has been indicated that the full concentration and the engagement components are the most important, because they are linked with one’s motivation and their perception of challenges as controllable (Carr, 2005, Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2009, 2014, as cited in Mei-Ju et al., 2016), which are further linked to well-being. This is what determined researchers to claim that engagement and flow are central to well-being (Diener, & Seligman, 2002, Csikszentmihalyi, & Seligman, 2000, as cited in Mei-Ju et al., 2016). Thus, if well-being entails features of flow, and flow was discovered upon observations of artistic individuals, then it could be deduced that aspects of the creative process are linked with well-being, through engagement or flow – thus highlighting the relationship between well-being and creativity.

However, flow is just one element that constitutes well-being, thus calling for a more comprehensive evaluation of the phenomenon. It should thus be considered that well-being is comprised of two major aspects: hedonistic well-being, and eudaimonic well-being (Simonton, 2000). Hedonistic well-being refers to subjective and emotional elements (positive affects and satisfaction with life), and eudaimonic well-being refers to one’s psychological and social functioning (Simonton, 2000). Thus, well-being can be defined either as the attainment of pleasure and the avoidance of pain (hedonia), or as the degree to which an individual is fully functioning, based on meaning and self-realisation – eudaimonia (Ryan, & Deci, 2001).

In spite of the popularity of the hedonic perspective, it has been widely criticised, due to its focus on the satisfaction of desires leading to momentary pleasure. Contrarily, the eudaimonic view suggests that not all desires lead to well-being once they are fulfilled, despite their pleasure producing outcomes. Therefore, from this perspective, subjective happiness does not equal well-

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being, proposing instead that the eudaimonic perspective would be a more valuable concept (Ryan, & Deci, 2001).

In terms of measuring eudaimonic PWB, the most widely used form of measurement is that of Ryff (1989), who has established a framework of PWB comprised of six different dimensions that are also inter-related: autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, purpose in life, personal growth and environmental mastery, all of which will be further described.

Firstly, autonomy would refer to self-determination and sense of independence, as well as confidence regarding voicing one's opinions, regardless of whether they coincide with the general public opinion. Secondly, self-acceptance is a concept that describes the extent to which an individual accepts or likes certain aspects of their personality and also from their past. Moreover, positive relations with others reflect the individual's attitude towards other people, but also the individual's perception of how others perceive him/her. What is more, purpose in life refers to the individual's sense of purpose, of having a goal, of having a direction and a destination in their life. Furthermore, the personal growth dimension refers to the development of the self, that may occur even in adverse conditions or when a challenge occurs in one's way of thinking about themselves and the world around them. Finally, environmental mastery would describe the extent to which an individual might feel in control of the situation that they live in (Ryff, 1989). All these elements are considered to describe and define well-being, more precisely eudemonic well-being.

Previous research

In terms of previous findings, a large amount of research has indicated positive implications of creativity on one's well-being, upon varied spectrums. Within the mental health

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spectrum, creativity has been found to alleviate self-stigmatisation, increase self-confidence and self-acceptance (Papagiannaki, & Shinebourne, 2016), as well as decrease mild to moderate depression by increasing one's sense of purpose, balance, personal growth, achievement, awareness of self and others and readiness for relationships (Zubala, Macintyre, & Karkou, 2017). Additionally, creativity has been found to increase PWB by improving memory in people with dementia (McGreevy, 2015), as well as promote feelings of calm, inclusion and openness in mental health contexts (McKeown, Weir, Berridge, Ellis, & Kyratis, 2015). Psychologically, it's also been found to relieve stress (Nicol & Long, 1996), and lower death anxiety by providing symbolic immortality (Perach, & Wisman, 2016). Also, creative ideas and lengthier creative activities seem to be triggered by states of happiness (Baas, Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008; Conner, & Silvia, 2015)

Moreover, within social or occupational settings, it's been found to increase positivity at work and in social relationships (Conner, DeYoung, & Silvia, 2016). These effects also seem to be irrespective of age, as among young people creativity engages, empowers and provides a sense of belonging (Burnard, & Dragovic, 2014), promotes behavioural and emotional self-control, while also serving as a means of expressing oneself without forcing thoughts and emotions through verbal articulation (Nigmatullina, & Geraskimenko, 2016). On the same note, for older individuals, creativity has been found to promote PWB and physical health (Hallam, & Creech). All of these findings suggest positive implications of creativity upon PWB in both contexts of aiding pathological symptoms as well as enhancing well-being in individuals without pathological symptoms.

However, despite all these, there have also been negative findings. Arshad and Rafique (2016), Samreen and Rafja (2016), as well as Bharti and Bhatnagar (2017) measured PWB using

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Ryff's (1989) scales and found that creativity did not predict PWB. They argued that this might be due to a general poor PWB predisposition of artistic individuals, caused by either creatively-unsupportive environments encouraging them to suppress their creativity, or by art-related frustration and creative burnout manifesting in mental health issues and generally low PWB. The emphasis on the link between artistic creativity and mental illness has also been made by other researchers such as Ivcevic (2007).

However, it would be useful to consider there might be other factors that can contribute to the development of a mental disorder, such as the general lifestyle of individuals (Runco, 2014; Taylor, 2018), substance abuse (Quello, Brady, & Sonne, 2005), or excessive stress (Goh, & Agius, 2010) that might trigger pre-existing biological vulnerability (Zubin, 1977, as cited in Goh, & Agius, 2010).

The current study

Therefore, considering the contradictory findings and the majoritarian tendency of exploring the phenomenon through a quantitative paradigm, further research is needed. It has been suggested that when evaluating topics related to art, the evaluation methods should seek to capture the way people experience art as well as their viewpoints (Royal Society of Public Health, 2013). This might suggest that qualitative investigations may be more appropriate to capture how people experience art and help to build an understanding of the impact of creativity, thus explaining the chosen methodology of the current paper. By adapting Ryff's Scale of well-being (1989) to a qualitative format, the current paper brings an element of innovation to the current body of research. Considering that it might be unrealistic to thoroughly explore all facets of creativity within a single study, the current paper only focuses on the physical and artistic side of creativity, thus choosing to interview art students due to their creative inclination and the

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nature of their course that demands creative engagement. Finally, the study aims to answer the following research question: ‘What impact does creativity have on psychological well-being?’ as perceived by art students.

Method

Design

Phenomenological Qualitative Design has been used, to gain understanding regarding the participants’ perspectives of how creativity might affect their well-being.

Participants

The sample consisted of 11 Art students at the University of Bedfordshire, of which 6 were female and 5 were male. The sampling method was convenience sampling, as data were collected from individuals who were conveniently available to participate in the current study. The interviews have been arranged at a mutually agreed time, within the University’s campus.

Materials and apparatus

Ryff’s (1989) Scales of PWB have been used after obtaining their permission, which examine an individual’s PWB within six areas: autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, purpose in life, personal growth and environmental mastery. The scales are represented by either a medium length inventory form (54 questions) or a lengthier one (84 questions). However, for the current paper, 14-item (84 questions) scale have been qualitatively adapted, generating two interview questions per each dimension, in a way that synthesises the dimensions, whilst also adding the aspect of creativity’s impact as well (see Table 2).

Further materials include a poster for recruiting participants, and a voice recorded borrowed (to maintain confidentiality) from the Psychology department so that interviews could

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be recorded, without which transcription of the content in Microsoft Word could not have occurred.

Data collection

The data corpus consisted of interviews that were semi-structured and prepared beforehand. The interviews lasted between 10 to 22 minutes ($M = 16$), which took place within the Luton Campus of the University of Bedfordshire. The use of interviews as the data collection method was due to the aim of gaining in-depth data. Open questions allowed participants to freely express their perceptions and experiences of the way in which creativity impacts their PWB. Also, interviews allowed for the possibility of giving prompts to interviewees, so that certain aspects of the conversation could be further emphasised when necessary.

Procedure

The interviews have taken place within the Luton campus of the University of Bedfordshire. Participants were first given an information sheet and a consent form, and after they have been audio recorded they have been thanked for their participation and given a debrief form. In terms of data analysis, after verbatim transcription and pseudonymizing of any personal data, the data has been analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytic procedure involved data familiarisation, followed by coding (highlighting evident and recurrent data patterns), revising the coding in light of the research question, and placing relevant codes into larger categories or themes, while also considering the relationship between those coding categories. Finally, a various concept-sharing group of codes have been formed, upon which the following set of themes has been produced: Creative compass, Social Interactions, Volition, Perceived achievements and self-attitude, Self-efficacy and lifestyle.

Ethics

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Ethical clearance from the University of Bedfordshire has been obtained prior to commencing data collection. Moreover, the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) has been adhered to at all times, by ensuring that individuals participate voluntarily, being able to withdraw during data collection or to request data withdrawal after 28 days from the date of their participation, whilst also being able to ask any questions of the researcher and being ensured that the provided data is anonymous, confidential and not used outside research. For this purpose, they have been given a consent form and an information sheet which made them aware of any possible implications that their participation might have.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity must be taken into consideration as coding and theme generation was developed by the researcher alone, and thus subjectivity transparency must be considered (Probst, 2015), together with the generation of self-awareness. Self-awareness is critical for ensuring rigour of research, as the subjectivity mentioned above leads to a lack of neutrality which the researcher needs to be aware of. Given these considerations, a table of themes with their constituent codes and their prevalence has been generated, to ensure complete transparency (see Table 1).

Findings

The transcripts have been analysed through inductive thematic analysis, resulting in a set of themes that might serve as a way of understanding the impact of creativity on one's PWB. Thus, the following five themes have been found: Creative compass, Social Interactions, Volition, Perceived achievements and self-attitude, Self-efficacy and lifestyle (see Table 1).

Theme I: Creative compass

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This theme refers to the extent to which creativity is perceived as a means of guidance, finding purpose or being directed towards a certain path – even towards one’s inner self. In addition, this theme also refers to participants’ perception of creativity as strongly linked with their future, in terms of aspirations, goals, dreams or career prospects. Therefore, a diminished sense of direction and purpose in life, perceived triviality in one’s daily activities, and a lack of planning or working towards the future would illustrate a low level of expressed purpose or consideration of the future. This would represent a low degree of the purpose facet of PWB. Alternatively, a high marker of PWB in terms of purpose would be represented by actively planning and working towards one’s future and having a sense of direction and purpose in relation to one’s creativity.

When creativity guides, drives or leads individuals, the role of creativity is similar to that of a compass – it shows one in which way to go. Firstly, it is expressed that in the absence of creativity, one might lose their sense of direction or purpose.

‘It can fix you if you’re lost— that, if you lose your creativity you don’t know what to do’ (Elisa, 2: 16).

Similarly, this guiding or directing aspect of creativity seems to guide one towards their career aspirations and goals.

‘I’m an animation student [...] wish to [...] create animation films or TV shows [...] it’s been part of my life that I wish to do as a career’ (Patrick, 1:2).

‘With those skills that I do have, they will help me achieve my dreams and goals [...] I wanted to have, um, my own business [...] I really like fashion, I’m going down this route. [...] the creativity in me has always pushed me down this route’ (Athena, 4:30–32).

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Furthermore, the perception of creativity as a directing force is also expressed in terms of intrinsically finding oneself.

‘When I start in my creativity I find myself, because when I'm being creative, I'm using my emotions as well’ (Zara: 5:56).

‘Um, I think it (creativity) helps me figure out who I am, like, what exactly it's my viewpoint of the world and how I shape it and how it shapes me, and how I know where I want to go in life and what I need to do’ (Semaj, 3:50).

Thus, while Zara expresses that creativity can serve as a means of finding oneself through the use of emotions, Semaj also adds the idea that creativity can be a means of insight and of self-awareness of their own self in relation to the world, and in relation to the path they want to follow and the steps they need to take.

Theme II: Social interactions

This theme reflects the way creativity might influence one’s interactions with other people, reflecting the positive relations facet of the PWB construct. On the one hand, a high level of this dimension would be represented by individual’s acknowledgement that they are perceived positively by other people, as well as by the presence of mutual conversations and positive relationships with others. On the other hand, a low level of this dimension is characterised by feelings of loneliness, lack of positive relationships or difficulty in maintaining them, or being perceived in a negative way by other people.

For some individuals, it appears that due to their creativity, people have perceived them negatively or even belittled them.

‘I've had negative a lot, because, like it's said, I feel different, and they see me different and they even point it on the bad way’ (Elisa 4:36).

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‘Yeah, it's looked down a lot [laughing], a lot of people laugh at it like “You went to uni to study fashion?”’ (Navaeh, 5:56).

‘I'm doing bridal design, people [...] were kind of like ‘Oh, so you kind of taking the easy way’. [...] it's more than just cutting and sticking some things in a sketchbook’ (Athena, 4:28).

Alternatively, there have also been participants which have expressed that they have not been necessarily been perceived in a negative way, although other people have labelled them in a specific way.

‘From an outsider's point of view I'm almost —almost immediately labelled like “Oh this person's this”; I get asked if I'm an art student a lot because it's quite obvious. Um, but [...] I've not had any negative from it so far which I think is a good thing’ (Ezra, 4:32).

‘I feel like people view me [...], as a, kind of arts snob, or someone that just knows about art [laughing], so, obviously I don't say that's a bad thing, but, yeah, like, being creative, people automatically place that, um, kind of image in their heads’ (Caiden, 4:38).

Furthermore, it's been expressed that one's creativity has helped fit in with other people, through mutually respecting one's ideas.

‘I think it helps me fit in well, 'cause you know [...] I think anybody can get along if we can only suspect other people's ideas’ (Semaj, 2:18).

In addition, further participants have expressed that one's creativity is a positive asset in interacting with others and in the way others perceive them.

‘I show people my artwork, they like it, and we end up talking [...] about art for hours’ (Markus, 5:46).

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‘People get more interested in me I think. [...], being creative allows me to get more people interested in being friends with me and such [...] I think it tricks more people, it's like they like your ideas they think you're unique, they think you're funny and such’ (Orion 4: 49–52).

‘I think it (creativity) connects with others, very well. Like— because everybody is creative in their own way, it— it gives you something to talk about’ (Zara 7:77).

Theme III: Volition

This theme reflects the participants’ perceptions and experiences of the extent to which they express their creativity regardless of external opinions. In addition, as the title of the theme would suggest, this theme is represented by the idea of doing something out of personal choice, relating to one’s volition or will, as well as their perseverance in creating in spite of the obstacles. In relation to PWB, this theme reflects its autonomy dimension. High markers of autonomy within PWB would be represented by the participants’ ability of expressing their creativity regardless of other people’s opinions or values, or the general consensus (as in, the commonly expected way of doing something), as well as their ability to maintain their confidence in their creative expression and not have their decisions influenced by what other individuals might be doing.

Firstly, it is expressed that one’s will and personal values dictate creation.

‘If I get an idea I have to create that idea, I, I don't do it because somebody else has told me to do it [...] It's all for me [...] I have to be satisfied knowing that I've done what I thought of’ (Zara, 3:27–29).

In addition to this, Zara and Caiden add more on the idea of perseverance and keeping productive.

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‘Whatever I need to do, and how hard I might have to work, I have to keep going. Even though if I feel at certain points— I can't give up, I have to keep going’ (Zara, 9:97).

‘I always have to do something better, [...] I have to do something, all the time. I always push myself for more’ (Caiden, 5:46).

Moreover, while Guava expresses the importance of being uninfluenced by others (also referred to as the community’s opinion) and persisting in spite of others’ reluctance towards their creative expression, Navaeh also emphasises the importance of being confident particularly when others might try to input their own values.

‘The point is always to bring something new, that's why you're a creator really [...] if I'll create I have to do something that someone else does not have, so sometimes I can make an impact, like the community might think “Oh”— you know when you don't know something, you tend to shy away from it’ (Guava, 3:18).

‘Because a lot of stuff comes from my religion [...]; I try to portray that in my work but I think it's a lack of understanding sometimes, from other people. That's when the confidence things come in, you have to be confident enough to voice what you believe in, and what you wanna showcase through your work; 'cause the teacher might suggest “Oh, make something a bit shorter” or something, but that's, not what you want to do because it goes against what you believe in’ (Navaeh, 3:30).

Thus, autonomously expressing one’s creativity can be encountered with challenges, such as when tutors request adjustments, as it can impede the process of creating a product to the artist’s own preferences.

‘Sometimes it can be an obstacle [...] I did my designs [...] then maybe one of my tutors will come and say “Oh, that's nice, but the fabric you want to use... I don't like it” [...] it's challenging

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for me to take that on board, because it's my creativity, isn't it? It's my design. Or it's my fabric. This is how I want it' (Guava, 10:84).

However, it is also expressed that despite considering one's own values, others' values, opinions and feedback also matter and should be taken into consideration.

'We both have to be satisfied with what we're doing [...] I'm like this kind of guy who wants to give something— a little something for everyone. [...] make people as satisfied with the work as much as possible' (Orion, 2:22).

'Usually, I produce work that I want to produce, so yeah, it's usually for myself, but, I do draw for people. Yeah, usually teachers' (Markus, 2:18).

'Once you find the right audience, they'll, you know, they'll like what you're doing and you can keep doing it, [...] you'll get where you need to be, where you're hoping to go [...] if you end up doing things that upset your audience, you're gonna lose them and [...] lose [...] everything' (Semaj, 3:44–60).

'At the end of the day I'm aiming to show people as effectively as I can what I can produce [...] So, if there's any bad points, I'm trying to cut them out straight away [...] I will obviously ask you why, and try to improve it in the next product or the next artwork' (Caiden, 3: 24–28).

'I want to get better really, so I wish to get credit and know that if I'm doing better or something I need to learn from' (Patrick, 2:14).

Thus, it is expressed that although one's own values matter, others' values are not being neglected, as suggested by Orion and Markus. In addition to this, Semaj Caiden, and Patrick express the relevance of external feedback – firstly, Caiden and Patrick express that by listening to others' opinions and their suggestions, they will be able to express more effectively what one can produce and improve their artwork ; and secondly, Semaj expresses that by considering

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others' values as in the audience's opinion, one can continue with their creations, towards where they are hoping to go.

On the same note, it is expressed that although one's values influence their creativity, it is important to consider others' values/opinions when it comes to ethics and keeping political neutrality.

'My own values are obviously quite important, um, but I do like to think about the side of [...] fair trade, ethical kind of things [...] making sure that if I am going to create something which has some sort of political issue that I'm not stating my side. So, then, every viewer can feel included' (Athena, 1:10).

Theme IV: Perceived achievements and self-attitude

This theme illustrates the participants' perceptions of their achievements as well as their attitudes towards themselves in relation to their creative expression. This relates to PWB in two ways: firstly, in terms of markers of personal growth as a dimension of PWB – which, on the high spectrum are represented by accepting unfamiliarity or challenging situations, seeing life as continuous process of learning, changing and growth, being aware of one's improvement, development or achievements so far); and secondly, by self-acceptance (accepting one's creativity in spite of certain weaknesses or deficiencies) whose high markers are represented by feeling pleased with oneself and feeling positive about one's achievements.

'I feel proud of my work and what I always do best [...] I feel like now I can get [...] to the point where I can make my own film and, I have all these [...] skill sets to [...] fulfil my career [...] In my first year I'd always tend to not have it right [...] that's why I feel proud about how better I became' (Patrick, 2:2–34).

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‘I would say it has changed me, ever since I discovered it [...] because I used to be different, I didn’t have relationships, I wouldn’t speak, I wouldn’t, I would not know what to do in life’ (Elisa, 3:30).

‘I’m not a very confident person naturally, but I feel through my work, [...] when you have to discuss your ideas and everything, the confidence has built up’ (Navaeh, 2:20).

Patrick and Elisa express a sense of awareness of one’s achievement and the process of growth – which can be either related to one’s improved skillset (Patrick), to one’s improved interpersonal abilities and direction in life (Elisa), or to one’s improved confidence (Navaeh). These aspects represent high markers of the personal growth dimension of the PWB construct because it relates to one’s awareness of their achievements or improvements.

‘I see people quite differently and in a more observant way and I think more open-mindedly as well. You know I’ll look at someone and it won’t immediately be “Oh this person is this”, in a really judgmental way. It will be me thinking “This person has a really nice face shape”’ (Ezra, 2:18).

‘Well, being creative and, like, exercising my creativity throughout the years, has helped me, like, develop like an out of the box [...] way of thinking’ (Caiden, 4:32).

Whereas Ezra expresses that her creativity has helped her develop a more open-minded way of thinking towards other people (in the sense that they would not negatively judge someone but would rather observe them in a positive light), Caiden also adds that their creativity has helped them develop a different way of thinking. This relates to one’s acknowledgement that creativity has contributed to their personal development and growth, which is a high marker of the personal growth dimension of PWB.

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‘Because I— I have a lot of insecurities with how I physically look [...], but [...] being able to draw and represent people and creatures in such different ways, it makes me feel better about myself’ (Ezra, 4:39).

As expressed by Ezra, one’s creative expression has helped them become more accepting towards themselves, showing the link to the self-acceptance dimension of the PWB construct.

Furthermore, to add more on the self-acceptance aspect, it seems that perceptions have varied, as illustrated below.

‘I’m very critical. [...] I’d like to be a perfectionist, but— [laughing], my work’s never up to my standards, sometimes’ (Markus, 6:64).

‘I can be very critical of myself when it comes to my work. Because of other people’s opinions and their thoughts, [...] I do have like kind of sleepless nights, cause I’m thinking “Oh what did that person say about this, my choice of fabric used there.” It does play in your mind a lot’ (Navaeh, 6:73).

Therefore, both Markus and Navaeh express low markers of the self-acceptance dimension, as they display a rather critical or fault-finding attitude towards one’s creative expression. However, the difference is that while Markus suggests that it is his own standards that are not being met, Navaeh suggests that her critical attitude is due to others’ input towards their creativity.

On the other hand, it is further expressed that mistakes should not be looked down upon, but be seen as part of learning, which Zara expresses to be a continuous process, suggesting a high level of personal growth.

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‘Every day we are learning [...] there’s never an end to it [...] If I’ve created a certain project and it has failed, I shouldn’t look down upon it, [...] learn from the mistakes [...], to make sure the next time I do it, it works [...] goes further, [...] better’ (Zara, 8:89–105).

However, the concept of mistakes can be overcome altogether when mistakes are perceived as an art form. This would suggest a high level of self-acceptance, because even what someone might call a defect can be perceived as an asset, thus illustrating the ability to see beauty in imperfections.

‘I feel like there’s an art in not being perfect [...] When you’re not perfect, you’re showing [...] imperfections. And imperfections can’t be copied’ (Caiden, 5: 50–52).

‘There is nothing really wrong, in anything. So, you can make a mistake, like for example, you can be making that dress and make a mistake, and pour coffee on it, and it creates a funny stain, I could look at it and think “Oh, that stain actually looks nice”’ (Guava, 8: 68).

Guava and Caiden express that there is originality and authenticity in making mistakes and that they do not necessarily need to be adjusted or improved, as they are an inherent form of art, demonstrating a highly accepting perspective.

Theme V: Self-efficacy and lifestyle

This theme reflects certain aspects of the environmental mastery dimension within PWB: the extent to which one feels able to handle certain demands or situations, and the ability to arrange one’s home or lifestyle to their own preference. A low level of this dimension would be reflected by either a lack of perceived efficacy in certain situations, or by not being able to build one’s lifestyle/home to their liking.

‘I design my own clothes, so maybe at home, it probably plays a large part because I decorate my home, I do everything in my house’ (Guava, 4:32).

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‘I like to decorate stuff with— with pins or with stickers and I just— I don't like plain— plainness. I don't like plainness for the sake of plain’ (Ezra, 2:16).

Therefore, Guava and Ezra express their ability to express their creativity in their home/lifestyle, suggesting a high environmental mastery as part of psychological
 ‘My creativity only comes when I’m doing my course, I don’t do it outside of uni’ (Navaeh, 5:60).

Thus, Navaeh expresses an exclusivity of creative expression, as it occurs only throughout their course and is not perceived as being transferred towards her own lifestyle or home.

In addition, regarding one’s perceived efficacy in a certain situation (or their perceived ability to handle that situation), it is expressed that although one might lack the confidence regarding handling a specific situation, such as an unknown situation, they would nevertheless be able to handle it one way or another. Therefore, this would reflect environmental mastery in a contradictory way, because whilst they don’t perceive that they could be able to deal with that situation (thus, a low perceived self-efficacy), they still manage to do it (being able to deal with a demanding situation).

‘If I'm exploring other media, say if I stay away from my comfort zone [...], I'd lack the confidence to do stuff like that [...] Sometimes it kicks in, but it's usually at the last minute [...] manage to make something out of unusual tasks’ (Markus, 2:20).

Furthermore, it is expressed that one’s creativity can help one in structuring demanding situations in a way that would help them deal with that situation the best and not become overwhelmed by it – as high markers of the environmental mastery dimension.

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‘Challenges begin to feel like I’m solving a puzzle, and that helps me because [...] my brain goes “Okay how can we figure this out? What components have we got? How can we put things together, or take it apart to, you know, figure out what’s going on in— in the least stressful way possible”, and it—it can make you can make even the most boring of things really fun, sometimes’ (Ezra, 3:24).

Discussion

The findings that have been detailed above illustrate important elements regarding the way individuals perceive the impact of creativity on their PWB. Thus, based on the five identified themes, various aspects have been found.

Firstly, it has been found that creativity serves the role of a ‘compass’, as expressed by all the eleven participants, with subtle differences. More precisely, creativity has been perceived either as guidance, purpose, or direction provider (9 out of 11 participants), or as means of intrinsic discovery of the self (2 out of 11 participants), or alternatively as a future or career aspiration (10 out of 11 participants). These perceptions thus imply a high degree of PWB, within the ‘purpose in life’ spectrum, regarding this sample.

However, these positive implications on PWB have not been consistent throughout all data set, as perceptions have sometimes been mixed. The first example of such a situation is found within the ‘social interactions’ theme, which entails mixed and sometimes even contradictory findings, ranging from negative external perceptions (4/11), to neutral ones (2/11) all the way to positive external perceptions (4/11) or positive interactions due to participants’ creativity (8/11). Interestingly, the 2 participants that expressed having been judged due to their creativity in a negative manner, have also reported positive relationships or conversations, suggesting that negative situations have not been consistent at all times. Therefore, based on the

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codes of the theme and their prevalence, positive findings were more prominent, thus suggesting a high degree of PWB within the positive relations dimension as found amongst the sample.

Furthermore, the volition theme (reflecting autonomy dimension) illustrates particularly interesting findings, as found among all eleven participants. It seems that while 8/11 participants expressed that they create based on their personal will and perseverance, 8/11 have stated that both their own values as well as others' are considered when creating, and a further 2/11 have stated that they wish to express their creativity in spite of others' opinions. What this implies is that although 8 participants expressed their will and personal choice to create, 5 of them were also part of the 8 participants who also considered others' opinions and feedback. In addition, from the whole sample, only 2 participants have explicitly expressed the wish of not considering others' opinions when creating something. What all this information implies is that overall there was a majoritarian tendency of considering one's own values and opinions as well as others', which does not suggest a high level of autonomy (characterized by expressing one's creativity regardless of others' opinions and being uninfluenced by others). Therefore, following the PWB framework proposed by Ryff (1989), the autonomy dimension would be rather weak within this sample. However, by paying attention to the nuances that might inform the perceptions and experiences of the participants, further explanatory aspects can be evaluated. Participants expressed that others' opinions and external feedback is essential in order to improve one's creative product, or their artistic abilities overall. In addition, it has also been expressed, that due to the domain they have chosen, the audience's opinion is important and valuable, as succeeding within the art work industry depends on pleasing the audience. Furthermore, considering others' values or opinions is also important in terms of ethics and illustrating political neutrality. Therefore, whereas being uninfluenced by others and expressing one's opinions regardless of the

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opposition would suggest high levels of PWB within the autonomy dimension, it might not always be the best course of action in this specific context of artistic creativity.

Furthermore, the theme of perceived achievements and self-attitude, which reflects personal growth and self-acceptance dimensions of PWB, has also been evident amongst all eleven participants. It illustrates predominantly consistent findings, with only a few exceptions. As high markers of the personal growth dimension, all 11/11 acknowledged creativity's contribution to their development, whereas 7/11 expressed awareness of their achievements, and 4/11 perceived creativity as a means of continuously learning and growing. This implies that the personal growth dimension has been very strongly and consistently represented within the sample, suggesting a high level of PWB on the personal growth spectrum. However, an interesting element that has been observed, brings together the theme of social interactions with the perceived achievements element. More specifically, based on the statements of a participant, awareness of one's achievements is context-based. To be more precise, creativity is perceived as an achievement only when it is not compared by other people to other domains that appear more important. Thus, this shows that negative external perceptions from the theme of social interactions, can play a role on undermining an individual's ability of acknowledging their achievements. This shows the interaction between the social interactions theme (representing positive relations dimension), and one's perceived achievements (representing personal growth dimension). Nevertheless, the consistency of the codes from the theme of perceived achievements and self-attitude show that creativity has positive implications on one's perceived personal growth.

However, the second represented dimension, that of self-acceptance, has not had such unvarying findings among the sample. Self-accepting attitudes have been identifiable among 4

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out of 11 participants, whereas non-accepting attitude towards the self or self-critical attitudes have been expressed among 3 out of 11 participants. Thus, the positive versus negative duality or polarity is again emphasised, and the prevalence of the codes show a stronger tendency of high levels of self-acceptance rather than self-critical perceptions. In addition, an interesting element that has been discovered, is that one's lack of self-acceptance in relation to their creativity, can be either caused by one's own fault-finding attitude, or can be caused by others' critical attitude towards one's creative expression. This can have various implications, as it suggests that although one might be pleased with the outcome of their creative expression, their self-acceptance levels might be diminished due to others' judgemental or fault-finding attitude. This might be linked with aspects that have been discussed above within the volition theme, showing that others' opinions are also valued and taken into consideration for various reasons. Thus, considering the importance of others' opinions, it might explain why others' opinions of one's work can determine the creative individual to be rather self-critical and not so self-accepting, despite being intrinsically pleased with their work. In summary, beyond finding that self-accepting attitudes were more prevalent, it's also suggested that there might be an interaction between one's self-attitude (self-acceptance dimension), social interactions (positive relations dimension), and volition (autonomy).

Last but not least, the final theme of self-efficacy and lifestyle reflects certain aspects of the environmental mastery dimension of PWB, as found amongst all eleven participants. More precisely, it reflects the ability to arrange one's home or lifestyle to their own preference (10/11), or the wish or desire to do so (1/11), and their perceived efficacy in handling a specific situation (9/11). Thus, this means that a large proportion of the sample expresses a high degree of PWB regarding the environmental mastery spectrum, implying their ability to take charge and not

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become overwhelmed by life demands and responsibilities (perceived self-efficacy), as well as their ability of arranging their lifestyle and home in a way that is satisfying to them.

All of these findings are partially supported by previous research. Specifically, part of these findings is consistent with those of Papagiannaki and Shinebourne (2016) who have also found that creativity would increase the participants' self-confidence and self-acceptance. In addition, the current findings are also consistent with those of Zubala and their colleagues (2017), which have found that creativity increased participants' sense of purpose, sense of personal growth, sense of achievement and awareness of self and others. An important aspect is that both of these two studies have used a qualitative methodology, although neither of them has used Ryff's scale in any way.

However, the current findings have not been entirely supported by previous research. Peculiarly, findings are unsupported by those previous studies which have specifically investigated the creativity and PWB relationship using Ryff's (1989) scales. A noticeable aspect about these few studies (Arshad, & Rafique, 2016; Bharti, & Bhatnagar, 2017; Samreen, & Rafja, 2016) is the fact that they have all quantitatively found that creativity does not predict PWB. This would represent a weakness of previous research, and a strength of the current study: its chosen methodology.

It is being argued that previous studies (Arshad, & Rafique, 2016; Bharti, & Bhatnagar, 2017; Samreen, & Rafja, 2016) might have had negative results due to their method of enquiry. As shown in the current study, having a qualitative design allows for more nuanced or detailed results to be found, which lead to a different interpretation of the results. To give an explicit example, quantitatively, a low score on autonomy would play a role in determining the overall score of PWB. But a quantitative methodology does not explore the underlying criteria that

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informed their answers. As shown in the current study, a reason why others' opinions are valued is that one's artwork might change based on the feedback, to ensure a better quality of the artwork and a better illustration of what they are trying to portray. To provide an analogy for this, a student that does not follow the guidelines and suggestions from the teacher's feedback, might perhaps score high on autonomy, as he's refusing to conform, but their learning and grades would suffer. This analogy serves as a way of explaining why in specific contexts, quantitative measures might not suffice in truly understanding the participants' answers.

Thus, the strength of this study was that through its chosen methodology, the issues of interest have been able to be examined in detail and depth. Therefore, the obtained data highlighted the subtleties and complexities about the topic of creativity in relation to PWB, which might have otherwise been overlooked by quantitative methods.

However, this study has also had a number of limitations: the subjectivity of qualitative research (which has been attempted to be diminished through self-awareness and creating the table mentioned in the reflexivity section), the researcher's presence during the gathering of data (and thus to help diminish a social desirability effect, the information form states that there are no right or wrong answers), the lack of demographic data (which although might have helped observe cultural trends or make generalisations, might not be too big a limitation considering it was not the current study's purpose) and the sampling methodology (which poses the possibility of having a underrepresentation or overrepresentation not a particular group within the sample). Whilst the first 3 limitations have been attempted to be addressed in the ways mentioned above, the last limitation could be something that future research could address. For example, instead of interviewing only art students and missing the experiences and perceptions of other creative individuals that might be enrolled at other creative courses or simply participants outside of the

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educated class of society (who might self-define as creative), future research could explore the phenomenon within a more diverse and inclusive sample.

To conclude, the current study has found that creativity's perceived impact on PWB is both positive (regarding purpose in life, positive relations, personal growth, self-acceptance, environmental mastery), and negative (regarding autonomy). However, the qualitative methodology allowed to discover that considering or valuing others' opinions or values is relevant in terms of improving one's artistic work and abilities, or aesthetically pleasing the audience, or regarding ethics and political neutrality. In addition, the interactions of the themes and their codes have been considered, finding two effects: that social interactions might affect one's perceived achievements, and that there's an inter-relationship between volition, social interactions, and self-attitude. Thus, in spite of the noted limitations of the study, it's been argued that qualitative methods of enquiry might be more suitable when addressing the topic of creativity. Nevertheless, it's been suggested that future research explores the topic within a more diverse sample.

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Table 1

Table of themes with constituent codes and their prevalence

Theme	Codes	Prevalence
Compass (11/11 participants)	Creativity as guidance, as a sense of direction, purpose/ as a goal	Elisa, Ezra, Markus, Orion, Athena, Caiden, Semaj, Guava, Zara (9/11)
	Creativity as a means of finding oneself or becoming self-aware	Zara, Semaj (2/11)
	Creativity related to one's future, career aspirations or wishes	Guava, Athena, Zara, Navaeh, Ezra, Markus, Patrick, Semaj, Guava, Caiden (10/11)
Social interactions (11/11 participants)	Predominantly negative external perceptions or being judged	Elisa, Guava, Navaeh, Athena, (4/11)
	Being labelled or being seen as different (not necessarily negatively, rather neutral).	Ezra, Caiden (2/11)
	Positive external perceptions	Markus, Orion, Semaj, Zara (4/11)
	Acknowledgement of positive interpersonal relationships or	Elisa, Semaj, Navaeh, Zara, Ezra, Markus, Orion, Patrick (8/11)

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	conversations	
Theme III: Volition (11/11 participants)	Creating because of one's personal will and personal choice / the perseverance to create in spite of obstacles /the need to be productive	Zara, Elisa, Caiden, Athena, Ezra, Orion, Navaeh, Guava (8/11)
	The wish to express one's creativity in spite of others' opinion	Guava, Navaeh (2/11)
	Creating based on own values but also considers others' values or their feedback	Orion, Markus, Semaj, Caiden, Elisa, Athena, Ezra, Patrick (8/11)
Theme IV: Perceived achievements and self-attitude (11/11 participants)	Acknowledging that creativity has contributed to their personal development and growth	Elisa, Guava, Navaeh, Athena, Ezra, Markus, Orion, Patrick, Caiden, Semaj (11/11)
	Awareness of one's achievements	Zara, Navaeh (*in specific context), Athena, Markus, Orion, Patrick, Elisa, (7/11)
	Creativity-related self-attitude is predominantly critical	Elisa, Navaeh, Markus (3/11)
	Creativity-related self-attitude is predominantly accepting or adjusting towards acceptance	Guava, Caiden, Semaj, Ezra (4/11)

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	Seeing creativity as a continuous process of learning, growth and development	Zara, Athena, Semaj, Navaeh (4/11)
Theme V: Self-efficacy and lifestyle (11/11 participants)	Expressing one's creativity in their home or lifestyle	Semaj, Patrick, Ezra, Caiden, Athena, Guava, Zara, Elisa, Markus, Orion (10/11)
	Looking forward to expressing one's creativity in their own home once the living circumstances are appropriate	Navaeh (1/11)
	Perceived ability of being able to succeed in a specific task	Semaj, Ezra, Caiden, Athena, Guava, Zara, Elisa, Orion, Markus (9/11)

Table 2

Interview questions

1.	What does creativity mean to you?
2.	What kind of method do you enjoy working with?
3.	For how long have you been working like this?
4.	When you are creating something, whose values matter the most to you?
5.	What role do you feel that creativity plays in your self-confidence?
6.	How does your creativity affect your sense of fitting in with the community?

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7.	How important is creativity in building a lifestyle and home satisfying to you?
8.	To what extent do you feel that your creativity has made you change or grow in any way?
9.	How do you feel that creativity helps you manage new or challenging experiences?
10.	How do you feel that creativity influences your relationship with others?
11.	To what extent do you feel that creativity affects others' perception of you?
12.	How do you feel creativity helps you achieve your goals and dreams?
13.	To what extent does creativity impact your sense of direction in life?
14.	How do you feel that your creativity influences your attitude towards yourself?
15.	To what extent does creativity affect your sense of achievement in life?

Note. A full list of measures used is available by contacting the author.