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Creativity: Process and Personality

Larry Gross

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with a new
preface by
Larry Gross



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CREATIVITY

Process and Personality

A MEDIASTUDIES.PRESS PUBLIC DOMAIN EDITION

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Preface

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If a Poincaré or an Einstein is willing to share his experience, why shouldn't a Bruner or a McClelland? It seems to me that it is with old-fashioned self-observation that the inquiry (of the creative process) should begin. (MacLeod, 1962, p. 183)

IT WAS SUCH A feeling that prompted the following study.¹ Deciding that the creative process was an area that was not as clear to me as I thought it should be, I began by looking at the work that had been done on this field, and I was impressed by one fact. Namely that most studies concentrated on the creative personality, as distinct from the process, and that they tended to be either very broad or even when they were detailed it was usually in a factor-analytical, statistical way. The common approach seemed to be to choose a sample and give them a battery of tests, and then to isolate the important variables of the creative personality, which turned out to be pretty common-sensical at that.

What I decided to attempt was firstly to find some ground between the broad and superficial and the sort of detail possible only in a type of study that was beyond my capability and resources. Secondly, I was interested in investigating the interrelations of the creative process and the creative personality, in the production of clearly identifiable creative products. And I decided to do this in the form of case-studies. To make it even more involved, I determined to choose psychologists who had produced products of recognized creative merit. This was so that I could feel reasonably acquainted and familiar with the nature of their products. As it happened, they were all psychologists with some definite views on the creative process, so I was attempting a creative study of psychologists involved in creative study of creativity.

After an initial pilot interview with Herbert Simon, I developed a tentative definition of the creative process (cf. Chapter I) based on the theories of two of the subjects in the research; and I prepared an outline of question-headings that would structure the interview (cf. Chapter III). The method I had decided to use was one of open-ended, extended interviews, structured only by this outline. In the course of the interview I tried to say as little as possible, and to have the subject interviewed determine the relevance and extent of any topic he chose to discuss. To this extent I tried to prevent my tentative conclusions from prejudicing my results, and I hope I succeeded.

My initial plans called for one or two such interviews and the preparation of case-studies on the personalities and creative processes of these subjects. But, as I realized that once having the outline I could interview a greater number of subjects, my aspirations grew. In the end I interviewed six psychologists, all of whom can be termed creative thinkers, at least to my satisfaction. The six were: Herbert A. Simon, Abraham H. Maslow, Milton Rokeach, David C. McClelland, Jerome S. Bruner, and B. F. Skinner; and it is these six who are dealt with in the six case-studies that form the major part of this paper.

In presenting the case studies I have relied heavily on the data from the interviews, often presenting large sections verbatim. One reason for this is that, while of necessity I had to select only part of the accumulated data, I felt that any selection I did would impose my own views and criteria on material that had been given according to the criteria of my subjects. And that such imposition of my criteria was a bias, and the sort of bias that would be impossible for the reader to readily detect. Such is the limitation of the interview method. Therefore, where possible, I have let the subjects tell their own stories. In any case they tell it better than I could, and this only makes the paper more interesting to read, I hope.

I had no hypotheses in the usual sense of the word. Rather there were certain areas and attitudes that I was interested in and certain facts that I suspected might be there, and it was this sort of feeling that determined the nature of the outline. I did not include my tentative definition in the outline. The conclusions and definitions have played a larger role in the presentation, but here, too, I have structured the case studies according to the outline, which, besides giving them a degree of comparability, lessen, I hope, the biases of my own views. In presenting the data, it was necessary to make minor editing changes, to clarify some points, and to provide clear punctuation. In these, too, there is a risk of deforming the data. but I hope I have avoided it.

What is presented in this paper is, then, a group of case-studies dealing with the childhood and early experiences, the intellectual development, and the creative processes as well as various aspects of the personalities of six creative psychologists. All of which will be, I hope, interesting and informative. I, certainly, have learned from this study. In every instance I have found myself identifying with the subject and learning from his example about myself and about the nature of the processes I would like to be engaging in. I hope my readers will feel something of this same intellectual empathy.

NOTES

1. [Though we have corrected typographical and other smaller compositional errors, we have otherwise preserved the original formatting, capitalization, and spelling throughout, with an occasional *sic* to indicate an uncorrected error that is potentially confusing. We have also updated the citation style to accord with the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th Edition, with references collected at the end of each chapter, rather than—as with the original—a collected, end-of-thesis References list—mediastudies.press].

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