

 [IP -- Life is creativity and creativity is life by Anthony J. Marsella](#) by Louise S. [2014, Mar 01]

Just Some Thoughts on Creativity . . . and Life

Anthony J. Marsella
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marsella@hawaii.edu

Cooking Pasta Sauce . . .

My mother, of Sicilian ancestry, stood before the stove making sauce for a pasta dinner. She was uneducated -- a ninth-grade dropout -- a human being of no recognized distinction by society beyond their ascribed status markers -- women, unmarried, middle-aged, lower SE class, white, poor. Certainly, she occupied no status as an artist or person of special talent beyond her role as mother and housekeeper. Yet, I believe that her act of cooking pasta sauce reveals the nature of creativity, and why creativity is reflected in all of our behaviors that are permitted to express and demonstrate our individual uniqueness -- our life impulse to make visible and apparent our distinct endowment of life. She used no recipe, each time she cooked pasta the sauce was unique, but each was always tasty and satisfying in their way. There is a lesson in that fact!

Because of limited scientific and professional limited views on the nature, description, and demonstration of creative impulses, few scientists or professionals would think of her as being highly creative. She speaks as she cooks -- smelling and tasting the sauce, adding a bit more garlic, basil, salt, pepper -- a little bit of this, a little bit of that -- she smiles and gestures with her hand commenting on various topics as she cooks -- children, family, furniture, a score of memories from days of her youth, she jokes and offers wisdom.

My mother's cooking, in this moment, is an entire "creative" package, deserving of praise, recognition, and insight. As my mother brings dimensions of her person -- inherited and acquired (i.e., values, style, skills) to her cooking, she is engaging in creativity -- she is evidencing the life impulse to interact within a situation to encourage, facilitate, improve, expand her individual and our collective effort as human beings after existence. She will receive a hug and kiss, and gestures of gratitude and appreciation from those who eat her pasta sauce. She will smile, and dismiss the words with modesty. In those moments, however, there is so much to grasp and understand about "creativity" in our daily, and how widespread it is, and how much we need to do to encourage and sustain creativity because it is life itself, present in each of us as carriers of the life impulse.

Rethinking Creativity . . .

I say this because, in my opinion, we have become caught in our conventional views

regarding the nature of creativity – its sources, manifestations, and consequences. As psychologists, we have defined creativity, measured it, appraised and evaluated it – and in the process – restrained its meaning and implications. Unfortunately, we make far too many distinctions between “creative” and “non-creative” people, focusing on the wonderful talents of artists, poets, and scientists whose contributions are, indeed, awe inspiring and deserving of reverential praise and respect. But, I believe we are missing a very important point.

Creativity is inherent in the life impulse itself! It is present in all forms and expressions of life that exist across the diversity spectrum from microscopic organisms to exceptional human beings gifted with special talents and skills that enable them with each work to bring novelty, freshness, and wide-spread appeal to their “creations.” Life is creativity, I say again and again, and when we insist on homogenized standards and conformity in behavior via various societal institutions we are, in fact, losing the wonderful evolutionary gift to recognize and respond to the essential need for diversity.

We ask why our schools are failing, and we provide hundreds of answers to the problem. Yet, too often, we forget that our schools have become institutions that are part of a larger system societal system, in which maintaining the system’s order and coherence is more important than the students and their unique needs. I recognize the burdens we face -- especially education system costs, crowded classes, problem students, inadequate teachers and teaching processes that are geared toward mass education and cannot accommodate individual lives – even as our impulses are good and well-intentioned. Yet, if we proceed from the needs of a system to perpetuate its self at any cost, can we begin the process of change?

Lifeism

In essays I have written about “lifeism,” I have come to see -- creatively – that creativity abounds all around us. It is the effort after expression within the limitations of its setting and resources, to survive and to become all it can be within this situation. In my writings on “lifeism,” I have come to see that a “weed” can be motivated by hope to exist -- survive -- under brutal conditions. This is true for all living organisms, and within limitations, each effort to express uniqueness is a creative act. Thus, for me, at this point in my thinking, all expressions reflect creativity (e.g., clothes, speech, gait, style). They are simply, or complexly, an organism’s covert and overt demonstration of its contribution to diversity.

I will close with an editorial comment that I have come to see is a critical challenge in our global era. Diversity, as manifestation of life, is present and widespread. But there are forces, events, and people in positions of power that are destroying diversity in favor of homogenization of our world. Diversity, though life itself, is considered too difficult to accommodate, and so they are moving us toward, uniformity and conformity. How easier

to control! How much easier to dominate! Consider the pantheon of “Big” in our world today – Big Pharm, Big Ag, Big Energy, Big Transportation, Big Auto, Big Med, and on and on. Everything is moving toward massive and disproportionate levels of control – monopolies of products, person, society, nation, and world. These monopolies destroy life because of their power to impose their self-serving interests – their recipes for preserving power, position, and wealth.

Eventually, I fear, had my mother lived in coming decades, they would have destroyed her unique and distinct creative impulses in cooking and other avenues of expression that did not follow recipes imposed on life. Their acts restrict evolutionary possibilities of life to a limited future under their control and service. Dystopia! Buon appetito! Manga!

 [Comment by Paul TP Wong](#) by Louise S. [2014, Mar 01]

Thanks Tony for your inspirational writing. I have always believed that creativity is one of the intrinsic values of every individual. I also share Tony's concern about the trend towards homogenization. By daring to be different and not beholdng to any school of psychology, I pay the price of being marginalized. Life would have been easier for me had I chosen to follow one of the big names. But my life has meaning and values because of my differences and uniqueness.

Paul

www.drpaulwong.com

 [Comment by Maureen O'Hara](#) by Louise S. [2014, Mar 01]

Paul, you are one of the big names! To me you are, anyway.

Like you, I have remained outside the established mainstream my entire career but I don't think of myself (or you) as marginalized. Simply closer to another center--an emergent space inhabited by people who dare to make their own music.

Maureen

Maureen O'Hara Ph. D.
Professor of Psychology
National University
11255 N. Torrey Pines Road
La Jolla, CA 92037

While we cannot eliminate hunger, we can feed each other. While we cannot eliminate pain, we can hold each other. While we can't improve upon the nature of reality, we can

make things better for each other while we're here. Mark Nepo

 [Comment by Michelle Brenner](#) by Louise S. [2014, Mar 01]

I am with you with this. Yes, I think there is a connection between adversity and creativity. In my life I can so see that at my lowest in terms of money and resources I had the most abundant access to being creative. And this was my experience in traveling. The poorer the country, the more 'uneducated' the people, the more unique I found the cultures and the more richness I discovered to take with in my life. Maybe that is why traditionally artists were very poor and very creative.

Michelle Brenner
Holistic Conflict Resolution Consultant
Reg. Family Dispute Resolving Practitioner
Phone Sydney Australia (02) 9389 2005
Email: brennermichelle@hotmail.com

 [Comment by Eckensberger, Lutz](#) by Louise S. [2014, Mar 01]

Dear Tony,

As you know, I always like your thoughts and perspectives. I like to just comment quite shortly on your reflections on creativity, but I like to do so with a critical view on most present day psychology from a content point of view and from its "rules" of creating psychology itself.

(1) It is not by chance that we do not have a definition of creativity agreed upon, that we instead agree upon the "fact" that we can not measure it (compared to "intelligence"). Intelligence measures are oriented towards an output (performance) of cognitive achievements which are conventionally right or wrong, and which are defined by their distribution in a group. They are implicitly replicable. Creative achievements are defined more in terms of its process, and originality/uniqueness, instead of following conventional rules (the cooking of your mother is a brilliant example because she does not use a cookbook) , they may be quite unique and therefore of a limited comparability. So it is the conventional way of defining creativity that prevents us to define it within the rigid frame we use in research. So it is quite unlikely also that creativity is (can be) part of educational institutions (schools/university) which are forced to measure and compare (PISA).

(2) But we also do not allow much creativity in the science of psychology as a whole. This is intrinsic to our understanding of psychology as a science. The methodology follows rigid rules (of securing reliability and "objectivity" and validity). It is not by chance that quantitative methods are the ones which count as scientifically proper. It is still difficult to work with qualitative methods, for which there are not many rules but need creativity. But we also try to publish in Journals which are evaluated by reviews which also have to follow

these rules. They by necessity HAVE to be conventional. Hence creative ideas can only by difficulty get into the traditional Journals.

Of course I am painting a black/white picture and things change. But you are right to point to one basic problems implied in the progress of Psychology as a science about humans.

Thank you for sharing your ideas

Cordially

Lutz

Prof. (emer.) Dr. Lutz H. Eckensberger

Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung (DIPF, BBF)

Warschauer Str. 34 - 38

10243 Berlin

Fon: +49 (0)30 29336060

Fax: +49 (0)30 29336025

 [IP--creativity and life, a rejoinder from Tony Marsella](#) by Louise S. [2014, Mar 02]

Dear Lutz:

Thank you for your comments. As usual, and, as I always expect, they are filled with a wonderful combination of wisdom, erudition, and inspiration. Below find my reply.

The "culture" of conventional (Western) psychology as a "science" and as a "profession" needs to be understood evaluated for its strengths and limitations. An analysis of its history, assumptions, and consequences need discussion and analysis. Its position of dominance -- replete with its impact upon psychology (psychologies) across the world -- needs to be grasped in this time of monolithic domination. There is a "Big Psychology," even as there is a "Big" Ag, Energy, Auto, Banks, Pharm, etc. The consequence of this is homogenization and control. Nothing is farther from the nature of life itself!

Your remarks have given us a good start. Thank you. The march toward uniformity with consideration of its consequences, places our field and its potential role for understanding the very situation we face in jeopardy. At some point, we become the problem by perpetuating a system of thought and organization that is failing to be self reflexive. The challenge before us is not answers, but asking questions that compel us to explore our identity and positions of power.

Tony

ajmarsella@gmail.com

