

Uniquely Creative: Developing a New Outline for Positive Outcomes

James C. Kaufman

Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut, USA

E-mail: james.kaufman@uconn.edu

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Creativity
Conscientiousness
Grades
Work performance
Improving creativity

Article history:

Received 20 December 2018
Received in revised form 25 December 2018
Accepted 28 December 2018

ISSN: 2354-0036

DOI: 10.1515/ctra-2018-0018

ABSTRACT

There were four broad takeaways from the commentaries by the distinguished contributors. First, there was a caution on focusing too much on the positive outcomes. Second, there were several important considerations noted that can enrich the discussion. Third, people made a strong case for revisiting old outcomes with new methods and theories. Finally, there were suggestions for “new” positive outcomes that creativity may predict. I build on these and my own thoughts to offer an outline to cover a (hopefully expandable) list of potential outcomes. I end with a call for open commentaries to be considered for a future special section in this journal.

I have already discussed how one of the most influential moments in my career was a supervisor’s lack of interest in a possible creativity assessment (Kaufman, 2018c). Instead, I’ll tell the story of another person who helped change my approach to the field. I’d finished giving a job talk for an education position and had answered several softball questions when the first hint of trouble began. “Motivation and reading are clearly part of education,” my soon-to-be-nemesis asked. “But how about creativity? If you got a million-dollar grant, how would it practically help students?” I could answer that question now, but at the time all I could do was visualize the odds on my getting the job plummet to zero. I’ve met many, many people like her since that time (such as the grants person who suggested I not use the word “creativity” in my application).

Even as a current “hot topic,” creativity remains something people want abstractly but not in reality. As an academic discipline, researchers are split across multiple fields.

We glom onto related areas such as giftedness, cognition, individual differences, or leadership, or else we find cover under larger topics such as business or education. When I crawl out of my academic silo to visit the real world, I talk to principals, managers, non-profit heads, and the occasional person in the arts. The people who seek me out do not need to be convinced that creativity is important, but they need to be able to justify it to the person in charge.

As I argued in my earlier piece in this issue (Kaufman, 2018a), creativity offers scant competition to personality (especially conscientiousness) or intelligence. Both are better predictors of academic and occupational success. Both have notably better measures available. With this state of affairs in mind, I offered a challenge to other scholars: Help me offer a map of sparsely chartered areas where we might find genuine reasons to say “You should spend your time and resources valuing creativity.”

Reviews and Remarks

Two commentaries question whether creativity does lead to positive outcomes. Jauk and Sordia (2018) discuss creativity’s relationship with narcissism, and Reiter-Palmon (2018) notes the growing work on malevolent and negative creativity. I do not dispute such notions - indeed, I was one of the people who first helped coin “malevolent creativity” (Cropley, Kaufman, & Cropley, 2008). I have done extensive work on creativity and mental illness (Kaufman, 2014), including the ill-advised “Sylvia Plath Effect” (Kaufman, 2001), which inspired at last count four terrible songs and one good one.

Of course, creativity is not only associated with positive outcomes. There is a reason why negative layperson beliefs exist. Creativity is a double-edged sword, and at the everyday level the liabilities are more salient than potential benefits. I am in no way suggesting we adopt a Pollyanna “creativity is only good” attitude (nor do I believe I advocated one in the original paper). Creativity is what it is, and it comes with baggage both positive and negative. We are quite proficient at focusing on the negative. Creativity and mental illness or malevolence represent vast areas of research. They do not need special encouragement or guidance; scholars will always study and debate these issues. In contrast, creativity holds a relatively low place in the positive psychology pantheon (Bacon, 2005). We’re not getting too much support for the “creativity is good” message from outside our field, and we are not particularly active at advancing this area ourselves (Forgeard & Kaufman, 2016).

A number of commentaries touched on some general concepts that are relevant to the discussion; I agree that these are key issues that need to be considered. For example, Barbot (2018) observes that the distinction between predictors and outcomes may be

a bit of a false dichotomy. Creativity's relationship with other variables may be dynamic and reciprocal. Consider how creativity can appear in models of intelligence and intelligence can appear in models of creativity – and they can both appear in models of completely different constructs (Sternberg, Kaufman, & Roberts, in press). Forgeard (2018) points out we need more research conducted in clinical or naturalistic settings. Indeed, beyond wondering how much we can extrapolate laboratory work into the real world; another question is to what degree current measures capture what we actually mean by "creativity." Reiter-Palmon (2018), Sternberg, (2018) and Beghetto and Karwowski (2018) all raise the issue of the need for better assessments (both of creativity and in general).

Several commentators highlighted that beyond demonstrating that creativity can lead to a variety of positive outcomes beyond school and work success, it is crucial to understand *why*. Forgeard emphasizes that there could be distinct processes on cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. Although openness as a state variable may be relatively constant (as I discuss), she correctly counters that it is possible to increase openness in the moment (such as through an intervention). In addition to leading to higher creativity, these bursts of openness are also associated with positive well-being. Glăveanu (2018) also mentions the importance of openness, as well as cognitive flexibility (which is also mentioned by Groyecka, 2018). Just as there are multiple dimensions to creativity, so too are there multiple displays of creativity. Domain differences (e.g., Kaufman, Glăveanu, & Baer, 2017) are one example; another, as Barbot raises, is creative thinking, participation, or expression.

Revisiting Educational Achievement

Before we propose a new agenda, it is important to not dismiss previously-used positive outcomes out of hand. Both Sternberg and Beghetto and Karwowski make compelling cases that educational success is still a crucial metric, but there is still a great deal of progress to made. Sternberg reviews an impressive body of research that shows that when creativity was included as part of a battery of admissions, it did predict college success above and beyond traditional standardized tests. Beghetto and Karwowski discuss the concept of creative learning, which envisions learning as an active, creative act as opposed to the more traditional academic conception.

I should start by saying I firmly agree with both commentaries. Schools that adopt the principles of Beghetto and Karwowski's creative learning and those that use creativity selection assessments as developed by Sternberg will be in a position to have students who are more creative, engaged, and (I believe) academically successful. Unfortunately, we do not live in a world filled with such schools. These methods and tests are used at schools that are already predisposed to embrace creativity - whether there is an adminis-

trator who understands its importance or a creativity researcher nearby with access and influence. A school whose only exposure to creativity scholarship is (as Beghetto and Karwowski mention) the TED talk by Ken Robinson accusing them of being creativity-killers may not be terribly excited to find out more.

As both commentaries argue, creativity does not have to barrel through education like an elephant in an Apple store. Creativity enhances engagement, is rooted in domain knowledge, and goes hand in hand with learning goals (Beghetto, Kaufman, & Baer, 2014). You, the reader, know this. The commenters know this. I know this. But many administrators and decision-makers do *not*. Deciding for creativity means investing time, money, and resources - even if it will pay off in the end tenfold. What motivated me to write my original piece is that this decision, to the uninitiated, is not a straightforward one. The tests, methods, and theories discussed by Sternberg and Beghetto and Karwowski represent strong support to choose creativity. But if an administrator is looking for cold, hard facts, there is much more support for intelligence and conscientiousness. Again: You, the reader, may understand the many reasons why this work is flawed and the many studies showing limited support for creativity do not capture the possibilities of its impact. But without an existing impetus or passion, it is hard to imagine a large percentage of decision-makers choosing creativity over current fads like “grit” (Duckworth, 2016) - or simply deciding to let inertia maintain the current system.

If we’re going to reclaim educational achievement as a positive outcome for creativity (above and beyond other measures), we need more work like Sternberg’s program of studies and Beghetto and Karwowski’s theoretical perspectives. I remain hopeful, but we’re not there yet.

Toward a Positive Agenda of Outcomes

Five of the commentaries suggested positive outcomes worthy of additional study and consideration. Adding to them my own thoughts, I would propose three broad categories to begin the discussion: (a) societal growth and benefit; (b) personal development and health; and (c) personal growth that helps others.

Societal Growth and Benefit

Simonton (2018) and Glăveanu offer very different commentaries, yet both approach the same broad concept from opposite sides. Simonton discusses creative geniuses, whose contributions have shaped (and will continue to change) our world. As he states, if you take away Steve Jobs (and others of his level), then you take away the smartphone and every other major advance. From technology to medicine to invention to the arts, Big-C creativity does not need to seek out relevance; it demands it. From Nobel Prizes to the Academy

Awards to MacArthur Genius Grants, Big-C creators are recognized and rewarded, usually during their lifetimes (Simonton, 2009), and, if not, eventually (Sternberg, Kaufman, & Pretz, 2001).

Big-C creativity drives our society forward (usually - as Reiter-Palmon and Jauk and Sordia point out, creativity is not always beneficial). Businesses tend to be more interested in creativity (or innovation) because of its potential to change everything. Whether the potential and promise of Big-C is enough to inspire people to nurture mini-c and little-c (e.g., Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009, 2013) is a different matter. Most creative geniuses may not, as Simonton adds, have had explicit creativity training, but nearly all were encouraged, mentored, or at least tolerated by someone. If mini-c is crushed before it can blossom (e.g., Beghetto, 2014), it can't become Big-C.

Simonton proposes how creativity works in a top-down manner; a great creator can advance society. Glăveanu takes a bottom-up approach, seeing creativity as a builder and shaper of society itself. The existence of society he argues, is itself a creative act, from our everyday encounters to the activism and evolution that enables societal transformation. Our ability to co-exist, communicate, and change - in some ways our humanity itself - comes from creativity. How many different ways might this connection reveal itself? One way that protests, causes, and political campaigns get press coverage is through creative (and often funny) signs or slogans. I am sure that readers can suggest many more.

Personal Development and Health

For all of the similarities of the two fields, Waterman (2013) notes a fundamental split between humanism (which emphasizes individual expression and freedom) and positive psychology (which is more pragmatic, focusing on strengths that lead to group harmony). A similar distinction could be proposed between individual benefits from creativity. On one hand, there are ways that creativity helps the creator. Forgeard discusses art therapy's connection with mood repair (e.g., De Petrillo & Winner, 2005); regular expressive writing is also connected with positive mental and physical health (Pennebaker, 1997). Creativity is further associated with post-traumatic growth (Forgeard, 2013).

Barbot highlights the connection between identity and creativity. Just as creative activity across domains can help mental health in different ways, so too can different manifestations of creativity enhance identity development. Divergent thinking - so often (incorrectly) used as a synonym for creativity - can be also used to explore a variety of possible identities. Actually doing creative things, as Barbot discusses, helps self-definition (I understand his example quite well, having thought at different points in my life, "I am a journalist," "I am a playwright," "I am a psychologist," and "I am an idiot").

Creativity can help us discover who we are (and vice versa). For all of the hyped connection to mental illness, creativity can also be a vehicle for improved mental health. As I have written earlier (Kaufman, 2018b), creativity can also be a source of meaning. Martela and Steger (2016) propose three facets of finding meaning in life: coherence, significance, and purpose. Creativity is one such vehicle for the reflection, joy, interconnectedness, and symbolic immortality that can help us achieve meaning

Personal Growth that Helps Others

Barbot's comment that predictor and outcome distinctions can become blurred is also true for this proposed agenda. These are not three mutually exclusive dimensions, but rather they feed into and enhance each other. A society driven by creativity can produce people who are enriched by creativity, and such people may also use their creativity to help others.

The relationship between creativity and social justice has long been of interest to me. After growing up with IQ tests (or, more literally, IQ test developers), the issue of cultural and ethnic differences on such high-stakes measures was always one of great personal concern. As I became immersed in creativity, I was struck by the lack of differences on creativity tests (Kaufman, 2005, 2010; Kaufman, Baer, & Gentile, 2004). Moreover, creative self-beliefs pointed to results often the direct opposite of intellectual self-beliefs (Kaufman, 2006; Ivcevic & Kaufman, 2013). Groyecka (2018) observes the relationship between tolerance and creativity is often studied in the opposite way (with stereotype-challenging interventions and activities boosting creativity), whereas there is much theory but scant evidence offered to support the idea that enhanced creativity can help break stereotypes, increase equitable thinking, or otherwise help tolerance. She's absolutely right (and if this article were a Facebook post, my response to her commentary would simply be, "This"). We have lots of correlational studies and even more theoretical reviews and papers (exactly like this one). More data would be fantastic.

Sternberg's work, in addition to showing that academic excellence can be predicted by creativity assessment, also found evidence for a more diverse (yet no less accomplished) cohort. Calls for creativity to be continued to be used for gifted, college, or graduate school admissions (Luria, O'Brien, & Kaufman, 2016; Sternberg, 2010; Sternberg, Bonney, Gabora, & Merrifield, 2012) are largely unheeded. One reason, harkening back to a recurring theme in the commentaries, is that creativity measurement needs an overhaul. Another, I would contend in a circular manner, is that existing data portray a muddled and inconsistent view of creativity's power in predicting college success - especially given the inclination of decision-makers to look at short-term results instead of long-term success.

Now What?

This point would typically be when I would wrap things up with a “next steps” paragraph. Instead, however, I want to keep the conversation going. I don’t want to end this essay with a “conclusion” because that implies the dialogue is over. With the permission of editor Maciej Karwowski, I would like to invite readers to submit their own ideas for how the outline and agenda can be fleshed out and further developed by submitting essays up to 2000 words for consideration for a future special section of *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*. We will then offer an expanded outline reflecting these ideas, which will ideally inspire the empirical studies needed to see which outcomes may be worth exploring further.

REFERENCES

- Bacon, S. F. (2005). Positive psychology's two cultures. *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 181-192.
- Barbot, B. (2018). “Generic” creativity as a predictor or outcome of identity development? *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*, 5, 159-164.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2014). Creative mortification: An initial exploration. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 8, 266-276.
- Beghetto, R. A., & Karwowski, M (2018). Educational consequences of creativity: A creative learning perspective. *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*, 5, 146-154.
- Beghetto, R. A., Kaufman, J. C., & Baer, J. (2014). *Teaching for creativity in the common core classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press
- Cropley, D. H., Kaufman, J. C., & Cropley, A. J. (2008). Malevolent creativity: A functional model of creativity in terrorism and crime. *Creativity Research Journal*, 20, 105-115.
- De Petrillo, L., & Winner, E. (2005). Does art improve mood? A test of a key assumption underlying art therapy. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 22, 205-212.
- Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. New York: Scribner.
- Forgeard, M. (2018). Creativity for mental health: Seeking new answers to an old question. *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*, 5, 165-169.
- Forgeard, M. J. C. (2013). Perceiving benefits after adversity: The relationship between self-reported posttraumatic growth and creativity. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 7, 245–264.
- Forgeard, M. J. C., & Kaufman, J. C. (2016). Who cares about imagination, creativity, and innovation, and why? A review. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 10, 250-269.

- Glăveanu, V. P. (2018). Creativity in and for society. *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*, 5, 155-158.
- Groyecka, A. (2018). Will becoming more creative make us more tolerant? *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*, 5, 170-176.
- Ivcevic, Z., & Kaufman, J. C. (2013). The can and cannot do attitude: How self estimates of ability vary across ethnic and socioeconomic groups. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 27, 144-148.
- Jauk, E., & Sordia, N. (2018). On risks and side effects: Does creative accomplishment make us narcissistic? *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*, 5, 182-187.
- Kaufman, J. C. (2001). The Sylvia Plath effect: Mental illness in eminent creative writers. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 35, 37-50.
- Kaufman, J. C. (2005). Non-biased assessment: A supplemental approach. In C. L. Frisby & C. R. Reynolds (Eds.), *Children's handbook of multicultural school psychology* (pp. 824-840). New York: Wiley.
- Kaufman, J. C. (2006). Self-reported differences in creativity by gender and ethnicity. *Journal of Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 20, 1065-1082.
- Kaufman, J. C. (2010). Using creativity to reduce ethnic bias in college admissions. *Review of General Psychology*, 14, 189-203.
- Kaufman, J. C. (Ed.) (2014). *Creativity and mental illness*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaufman, J. C. (2018a). Creativity's need for relevance in research and real life: Let's set a new agenda for positive outcomes. *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*, 5, 124-137.
- Kaufman, J. C. (2018b). Finding meaning with creativity in the past, present, and future. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13, 734-749.
- Kaufman, J. C. (2018c). What creativity can be, and what creativity can do. In R. J. Sternberg & J. C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Nature of human creativity* (pp. 125-133). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaufman, J. C., Baer, J., & Gentile, C. A. (2004). Differences in gender and ethnicity as measured by ratings of three writing tasks, *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 38, 56-69.
- Kaufman, J. C., & Beghetto, R. A. (2009). Beyond big and little: The Four C Model of Creativity. *Review of General Psychology*, 13, 1-12.
- Kaufman, J. C., & Beghetto, R. A. (2013). In praise of Clark Kent: Creative metacognition and the importance of teaching kids when (not) to be creative. *Roeper Review*, 35, 155-165.

- Kaufman, J. C., Glăveanu, V., & Baer, J. (Eds.) (2017). *Cambridge handbook of creativity across domains*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Luria, S. R., O'Brien, R. L., & Kaufman, J. C. (2016). Creativity in gifted identification: Increasing accuracy and diversity. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1377, 44-52.
- Martela, F., & Steger, M. F. (2016). The three meanings of meaning in life: Distinguishing coherence, purpose, and significance. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1-15.
- Pennebaker, J. W. (1997). Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process. *Psychological Science*, 8, 162–166.
- Reiter-Palmon, R. (2018). Are the outcomes of creativity always positive? *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*, 5, 177-181.
- Simonton, D. K. (2018). Creative genius as inherently relevant and beneficial: The view from Mount Olympus. *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*, 5, 138-141.
- Simonton, D. K. (2009). *Genius 101*. New York: Springer.
- Sternberg, R. J. (2018). Yes, creativity can predict academic success. *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*, 5, 142-145.
- Sternberg, R. J. (2010). *College admissions for the 21st century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sternberg, R. J., Bonney, C. R., Gabora, L., & Merrifield, M. (2012). WICS: A model for college and university admissions. *Educational Psychologist*, 47, 30-41.
- Sternberg, R. J., Kaufman, J. C., & Pretz, J. E. (2001). The propulsion model of creative contributions applied to the arts and letters. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 35, 75-101.
- Sternberg, R. J., Kaufman, J. C., & Roberts, A. M. (in press). The relation of creativity to intelligence and wisdom. In J.C. Kaufman & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *Cambridge handbook of creativity (2nd Ed)*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Waterman, A. S. (2013). The humanistic psychology–positive psychology divide: Contrasts in philosophical foundations. *American Psychologist*, 68, 124-133.

Corresponding author at: James C. Kaufman, University of Connecticut, Neag School of Education, 2131 Hillside Road, Unit 3007, Storrs, CT 06269-3007
 E-mail: james.kaufman@uconn.edu

