

Opening the Door to Creativity: A Psychosynthesis Approach

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Abstract

Given the great importance of creativity in society, and in health psychology in particular, investigating how creativity can be enhanced is a valuable area of research. Interventions that enable individuals to become more creative vary in their focus from increasing divergent thinking to task reactivation during sleep. This article introduces psychosynthesis psychology as an additional theoretical and therapeutic approach for enhancing creativity through its concept that creativity originates from different levels of the unconscious. We show that the subpersonality model, one of the fundamental psychosynthesis techniques, is an effective intervention for aiding creative expression as it helps people connect to different levels of their unconscious creativity. It is assumed that through the use of this technique, clients are able to release and unblock energies that not only allow them to rebuild their personal identities but also become actively creative in their daily lives. We support this assumption with qualitative findings that include testimonies from eleven clients in The Netherlands who received psychosynthesis counseling. In addition, qualitative data of a case study demonstrates subpersonality integration and its role in helping clients to become more creative in their personal and professional lives. The

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present article is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to demonstrate the beneficial effects of using psychosynthesis to facilitate creativity. The framework of psychosynthesis psychology, its techniques (which include the subpersonality model), and its therapeutic approach are viable methodologies for anyone searching to unblock and activate new creative energy and achieve personal and professional growth.

Keywords

creativity, psychosynthesis, subpersonality, personal growth, self-actuation, self-individuation

Introduction

The creative process has been of interest to great thinkers since the time of Plato and Aristotle, yet after more than 2,000 years, no general consensus exists for its definition. It is, however, generally accepted that creativity involves a novel product, idea, or solution that is of value to the individual and/or larger social group (Amabile, 1983). One of the essential abilities fundamental to creativity is cognitive flexibility (Chi, 1997; Jausovec, 1991, 1994; Müller, Gerasimova, & Ritter, 2016; Runco & Okuda, 1991; Thurston & Runco, 1999). Cognitive flexibility is the ability to break cognitive patterns, to overcome fixed association patterns, and to avoid a reliance on conventional ideas or solutions (Guilford, 1967). Researchers describe cognitive flexibility as the cognitive core of creativity and an important component of “real life” creativity (Baghetto & Kaufman, 2007; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). In addition, studies have shown that high cognitive flexibility relates positively to better and even exceptional creative achievement (e.g., S. H. Carson, Peterson, & Higgins, 2005).

As creativity has been suggested to have many positive outcomes for health and well-being (for a review, see Stuckey & Nobel, 2010), techniques to foster creativity are well investigated. Well-known techniques to enhance creative thinking and cognitive flexibility are, among others, practicing divergent thinking and metaphor generation (for a review, see Scott, Leritz, & Mumford, 2004). Perhaps three of the most broadly applicable tactics are (1) *a shift of perspective*, (2) *questioning one's own assumptions*, and (3) *the use of analogies* (e.g., Cropley, 1997; Nickerson, 1999; Scott et al., 2004). Often these three tactics can function in sequence. For example, it is assumed that by questioning our assumptions, we begin to release our expectations and open up avenues for new ideas, activities, and possibilities (i.e., new

perspectives) and, consequently, begin to engage more readily in analogical reasoning.

A change of perspective can occur outwardly in a literal and sensory way or inwardly in how the individual thinks about or defines a problem. For example, a current tactic often used in programs designed to enhance creative potential is to ask participants to “stand the problem on its head,” that is, turn the issue upside down to obtain a different point of view (Runco, 1999). Often our perceptions of a problem are held in place by our assumptions. While assumptions can be beneficial in directing our daily behavior and allowing us to be free from thinking through every detail of routine issues, they can also inhibit creativity by limiting our perceptions. Too often assumptions are patterns of thinking that are difficult to break away from and even incorrect when facing new problems (Davis, 1999). Once we are able to change our assumptions and open up our perspectives, analogical reasoning can also occur. Analogical reasoning involves the active construction of coherent relational mappings, such as metaphors. Studies in this field have focused on how people use existing knowledge to draw inferences about new situations and, in particular, the successful combination and reorganization of ideas to generate new understandings (e.g., Mumford & Porter, 1999).

This present article shows that psychosynthesis, until now lacking in the creativity literature, is a needed framework and therapeutic approach to enhancing creativity. One of the concepts of psychosynthesis is that creativity not only emerges from the lower unconscious but also from the higher unconscious. Psychosynthesis therapy includes techniques, such as the subpersonality model, that encourage clients to connect to their different levels of unconsciousness and, consequently, to a broader range of their creative energies. This article is a qualitative study showing how psychosynthesis counseling works to enhance creativity. In the next sections, we introduce psychosynthesis concepts, its views on creativity, and its therapeutic techniques, in particular the subpersonality model, used to foster creativity.

Surprisingly, notions of creativity are not widely found in the counseling literature. However, research has shown parallels between creative training processes and counseling methods (Cole & Sarnoff, 1980; Frey 1975; Schubert & Biondi, 1975). Similarly, studies have shown that outcomes of both creative training as well as counseling include an increase in participants’ personal growth, enjoyment, and self-confidence in a variety of nontechnical areas; increased levels of functioning in relationships, communication, and problem solving; and improved performances in divergent thinking and feeling (Mansfield, Busse, & Krepelka, 1978; Parnes & Noller, 1973). Although correlation studies have shown evidence that creativity and self-actualization are

related, there is some uncertainty about the direction of effect (Buckmaster & Davis, 1985; Runco, Ebersole, & Mraz, 1991).

Divergent thinking is a central feature of creativity and tends to be tentative and exploratory, oriented to multiple possibilities, including the ability to hold contradictory ideas simultaneously in one's mind while incorporating and modifying new ideas. In fact, for many clients in counseling, their first step toward positive growth and change can be learning and practicing divergent thinking and feeling (e.g., D. K. Carson, 1999). In line with this assumption, Milenković (2007) has stated that "psychotherapy is a scientific discipline but also an art of re-creation for people, their personality and behavior, . . . implying new attitudes towards oneself, others, and the future that involves awakening the creativity in the client" (p. 56). Rogers (1961) also argued that "the mainspring of creativity appears to be the same tendency . . . as the creative force in psychotherapy" (p. 351). Jung (1922/1966) believed that creativity plays a pivotal part in the process of self-realization, and Maslow (1971) concluded that self-actualization and creativity are interdependent, with each one facilitating the other, and may in fact "turn out to be the same thing" (p. 57). As such, the counselor and client can be seen as coproducers of ideas and solutions that are both novel and useful in that they create a new way of being for the client that is more satisfying, empowering, and ultimately creative.

Despite psychosynthesis psychology having the possibility of providing a holistic framework for the enhancement of creativity, this approach remains, for the most part, missing from the creativity literature. Psychosynthesis is an integrative transpersonal psychology that provides a universal framework to incorporate an understanding of one's body, feelings, attitudes, and behavior into a harmonious and synthesized whole that includes all the human dimensions—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. Psychosynthesis also provides a therapeutic approach that focuses on enabling clients to work toward such a synthesis. Psychosynthesis differs from psychoanalysis in that psychosynthesis emphasizes personal and spiritual synthesis, not analysis (Assagioli, 2000, 2002; Nguyen, 2002). Before introducing how psychosynthesis can increase creativity, we first provide an overview of the psychosynthesis model of the human personality followed by a brief description of its therapeutic techniques, in particular, the subpersonality model. We then present our qualitative findings, including a case study, of how the subpersonality model enhanced creativity for eleven international clients who received psychosynthesis counseling.

An Overview of Psychosynthesis

In 1933, Assagioli (1888-1974) first published in English his model of the human psyche (Figure 1), which he described as a:

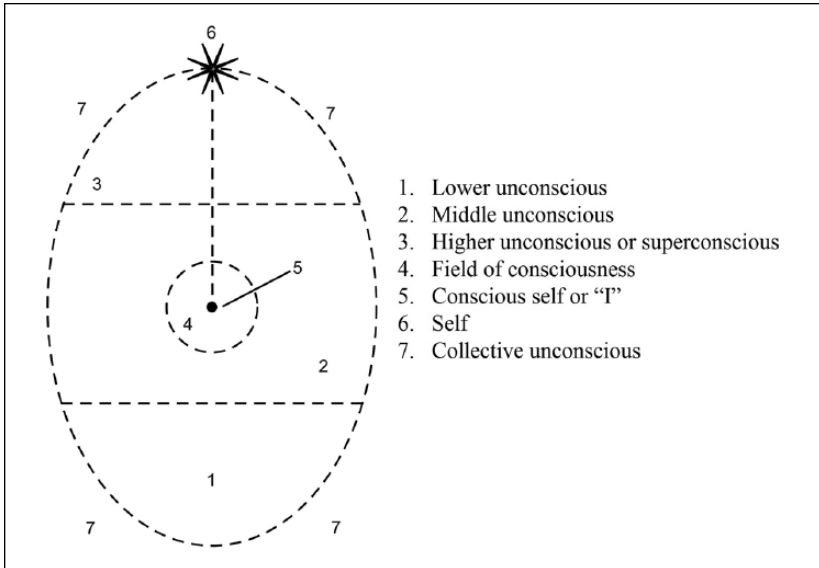


Figure 1. Assagioli's (2000, p. 15) model of the structure of the psyche.
Note. Dotted lines indicate permeable boundaries.

Conception of the constitution of the human being in his living concrete reality . . . It is, of course, a crude and elementary picture that can give only a structural static, and almost "anatomical" representation of our inner constitution, while it leaves out its dynamic aspect, which is the most important and essential one (Assagioli, 2000, p. 14).

As Assagioli was quick to recognize, his model of the human psyche may appear "crude and elementary," but one could view it in the same light as, for example, the Pythagorean theorem, the mathematical abstraction that provides an equation for a perfect right triangle. Even though no triangle in the physical world actually exists that equates to its formula, this theorem helps our understanding of right triangles. We propose that Assagioli's model of the human psyche is similar, providing an abstract formula for the human psyche—a working model for the structure, mechanisms, and processes triggering personal and spiritual growth.

The Self and I-Self Connection. According to Assagioli (2000), the Self is a transpersonal center, a "unifying and controlling Principle of our life" (p. 21). The Self (6) is represented in Figure 1 as a star, and stands in relationship

with the “I” (5), the “inner still point that we experience as truly ourselves” (Hardy, 1987, p. 28). In addition, every individual has a field of “I” consciousness (4), which contains our conscious sensations, images, thoughts, feelings, desires, and impulses. The Self and the “I” are ideally aligned as indicated by the vertical dotted line, and the connection between them is referred to as the I-Self. Both the Self and the “I” have two central functions: consciousness and will. From a psychosynthesis point-of-view, our life’s journey is to seek, reconnect, and synthesize the consciousness and will of the “I” with the consciousness and will of the Self—in other words, to synthesize the personal with the transpersonal. With the Self incorporated into his model, one could assert that the Self, as defined by Assagioli, has a more systematic role than the Self as defined by Jung. The Self, as proposed by Jung (1979), is a fundamental transcendent archetype that expresses human wholeness and the union of opposites, most generally, the union of the polarity of the conscious and unconscious. What is strikingly different from Assagioli’s concept of the Self is that, according to Jung, the Self (like all archetypes) cannot be directly experienced by the individual but is rather a guide and attractor through the process of individuation. In contrast, Assagioli believed that the Self is a reality that can be directly experienced by the individual, and is actually the key part of the individual (as opposed to outside the person) that connects the transpersonal with the personal and, hence, the personal with the universal. For a full comparison of Assagioli and Jung, please refer to Rosselli and Vanni (2014).

Different Levels of Personal Unconsciousness. Psychosynthesis subdivides the personal unconscious into (1) lower, (2) middle, and (3) higher. The lower unconscious contains basic psychological activities which coordinate bodily functions, fundamental drives, and primitive urges, as well as complexes containing intense emotion (Assagioli, 2000). Although on first sight comparable to Freud’s psychoanalysis, psychosynthesis goes beyond analyzing the human personality and its dysfunctionalities by placing an emphasis on fostering synthesis. Like psychoanalysis, psychosynthesis also aims to develop a healthy ego and heal (childhood) trauma, however, its ultimate goal is to create a well-integrated whole that encompasses the client’s personal and spiritual levels (Assagioli, 2007).

The middle unconscious contains the awareness that lies within the periphery of our consciousness and remains “easily accessible to it” (Assagioli, 2000, p. 15). This is where memories are held that are easily retrievable and where “imaginative activities are elaborated and developed in a sort of psychological gestation before their birth into the light of consciousness” (Assagioli, 2000). The higher unconscious or superconscious holds our

greater human potential and is the region from which we receive our “higher intuitions and inspirations—artistic, philosophical or scientific, ethical ‘imperatives’ and urges to humanitarian and heroic action” (Assagioli, 2000).

Personal Psychosynthesis and Spiritual Psychosynthesis. What distinguishes psychosynthesis from most other psychologies is the understanding that the Self relates to the higher qualities within human beings allowing them to foster their I-Self connection and grow toward their authentic personality. One’s authentic personality is defined as an “expression of the natural, authentic sense of self, of who we truly are” which is more than the sum of one’s social roles (Firman & Gila, 2002, p. 48). The reestablishment of the I-Self connection can occur along two lines: *personal psychosynthesis* and *transpersonal or spiritual psychosynthesis*. Human growth that involves work with either the middle unconscious or the lower unconscious is referred to as personal psychosynthesis while spiritual psychosynthesis is aimed at integrating material from the higher unconscious (Firman & Gila, 2002). These two developmental paths correspond with Maslow’s (1968) recognition that some individuals are “self-actualized” and other “transcending self-actualizers,” the latter distinguished as people in touch with superconscious material or peak experiences.

Psychosynthesis Psychotherapy. While psychosynthesis counseling sessions might look similar to other forms of counseling such as Psychodynamic, Person-Centered or Gestalt, what is distinct to psychosynthesis is the idea that there is a Self and all counseling is ultimately trying to achieve the recovery of the Self (Whitmore, 2004). Fluent in Sanskrit and a scholar of Eastern religions, Assagioli (n.d.) understood that the realization of the Self was a “supreme paradox” which could manifest through three distinct attitudes: (1) the Buddhist understanding of “No Self,” (2) the mystical merging in Another, in God, and (3) the Vedanta philosophical realization of the true Self, of one’s true Being. He wrote,

If one identifies “Self” with the empirical personality, then the attitude is either 1) or 2), according whether one is mystical or not. If one identifies oneself with the emerging spiritual consciousness and transfers the self-identity to each higher level, then 3). There are advantages and drawbacks of each attitude. What is important is to recognize that the three attitudes are three ways of realizing the same glorious Reality, of attaining the same sublime goal. (Assagioli, n.d.)

Perhaps this inclusion of such distinct attitudes and their equal potential in helping us reach great inner freedom and joy is what makes psychosynthesis

so fruitful. By including a higher consciousness within the psyche's framework and a Self to which we all have a universal and yet personal connection, psychosynthesis concepts and techniques provide a framework in which the realization of the Self is not only permitted but also nurtured, anticipated, and longed for.

On a practical level, psychosynthesis counselors work within a flexible yet structured framework helping clients to examine and ruminate over the situations that trigger their problems, interpersonal relationships involved, physical sensations and emotions evoked, attitudes and beliefs stimulated, and the values which may be hidden and implicit (Assagioli, 2000; Nguyen, 2002; Whitmore, 2004). Problems and obstacles are seen not as pathological states to be eliminated but rather as creative opportunities that "at their deepest level are inherently meaningful, evolutionary, coherent, and potentially transformative" (Whitmore, 2004, p. 11).

Psychosynthesis View of Creativity

Psychosynthesis literature on creativity and the creative process have mainly focused on methods to foster, regulate, and direct children's and young adult's education and creative expression (Assagioli 1963, 1988; Whitmore, 1986). The psychosynthesis perspective regarding creativity is that the creative process often starts and is almost wholly carried through our three different fields of unconsciousness (1, 2, and 3 in Figure 1) as opposed to our field of consciousness (4 in Figure 1). This idea corresponds precisely with Maslow's (1962) statement that the generation of new ideas—what he defined as primary creativeness—is derived from the unconscious and is a "heritage of every human being" (p. 95).

One's creative imagination and its subsequent creative expression differs according to the level of unconsciousness from which it originates. Assagioli (1963) states that the most frequent sources of creative expression are drives, urges, desire, and emotions that spring from the lower or middle levels of the unconscious. In addition, creative expression that originates in the higher consciousness or superconscious, while often dormant, holds the potential for more meaningful and life-enhancing results, including the energy to creatively rebuild one's identity through the integration and synthesis of various aspects and functions of the personality. Assagioli (2000) differentiates superconscious material from middle and lower unconscious material in that superconscious material often arrives intact and new with very little connection to previous experiences. Superconscious material does not arise "in the usual way from the lower unconscious as the result of now released but previously repressed experiential contents; it is something new" (Assagioli, 2000,

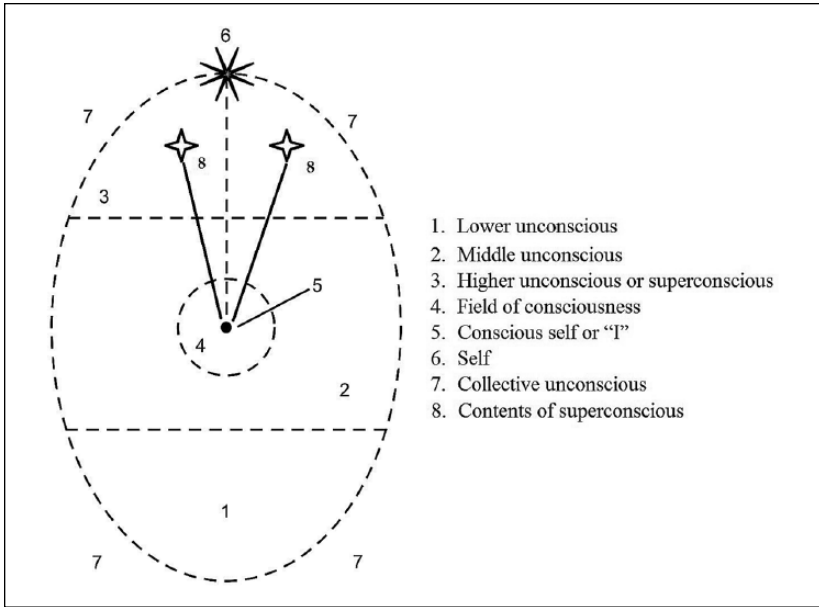


Figure 2. Stars or clusters (8) in the superconscious indicate creative activities (e.g., literary or musical) as they project their outcome into the field of everyday consciousness (4) (Assagioli, 2000, p. 178). Dotted lines indicate permeable boundaries.

p. 175). This idea matches Maslow’s (1962) definition of primary creative-ness as that “which is a source of new discovery—of real novelty—of ideas which depart from what [already] exists” (p. 94).

Assagioli continues by explaining that there are two ways that creative superconscious material is received and experienced. The first way is when the creative material descends into the field of “I” consciousness (see Figure 2). In other words, the creative activity is projected by the superconscious onto the personal “I,” and this everyday “I” consciousness “remains practically unchanged and merely receives—sometimes surprised and intrigued—the new and unexpected contents or the results of something working within” (Assagioli, 2000, p. 178).

The second way superconscious materials enters consciousness is by the “I” ascending to superconscious levels which can occur either spontaneously, for example, during heightened moments of danger or through strenuous inner exercise such as prayer, meditation, or focusing on an abstract thought. At these moments, individuals often receive intuitive flashes of understanding and

profound meaning. Several studies have, in fact, investigated the link between meditation and creativity (e.g., Colzato & Ozturk, 2012; Cowger & Torrance, 1982; Horan, 2009; Müller et al., 2016; Orme-Johnson & Granieri, 1977) and suggested that meditation is a means to enhance creativity.

It is important to note that an individual can have access to creative superconscious material without having developed a well-organized, harmonious personality. Mozart is an example of someone with an extraordinary gift for creating music, yet whose personality was not necessarily integrated or synthesized with the higher unconscious. Jung (1952) also clearly points out that development of the personality is not an absolute prerogative of a person of genius. On the other hand, Assagioli (2000) differentiates those individuals who like Mozart are creatively gifted but whose personalities remain unaltered from those like Pythagoras, Plato, and Dante, whom he sees as “great universal geniuses who have an all-round expansive self-realization” and successfully demonstrated “their greatness through their creative action in various fields” (p. 176).

Any exchange of content between the superconscious and “I” can often result in a transcendent experience, or what Maslow (1954, p. 164) referred to as a “peak experience” that can occur along a continuum from intense to mild intensity. According to Assagioli (2000), such peak experiences are of “great importance and value for fostering creativity and for achieving psychosynthesis” (p. 35). This exchange of creative material between the individual’s superconscious and “I” can yield a source of joyous self-revelation regarding unforeseen aptitudes and gifts that an individual has yet to creatively realize, such as mathematical skills, artistic talent, or leadership ability (Assagioli, 1963). In line with this, Maslow (1954, 1962) also observed that self-actualized persons were more creative in their everyday activities, and those who had peak experiences were more apt to be creative in the fields of poetry, music, philosophy, and religion. James (1982) also defined mystical experiences as always providing “insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect” (p. 380), that is, a novel poetic quality.

Psychosynthesis Techniques for Fostering Creativity

While psychosynthesis counseling techniques are numerous and varied, particular to psychosynthesis are the self-identification exercise and the subpersonality model. Briefly, the goal of the self-identification exercise is to guide the client through a meditation that systematically connects and brings awareness to the physical, emotional, and mental aspects of his or her personality. Once this occurs, the client is then guided to dis-identify from each aspect and ultimately to connect to the personal “I,” the source of pure consciousness and

will. In the present article, we focus on whether the subpersonality model increases creativity (see also, Cole & Sarnoff, 1980). The subpersonality model describes a process by which the roles that we play in our lives become synthesized into a unifying center of authenticity. Once the “I” disidentifies from each subpersonality, it becomes the director and observer of all the individual’s subpersonalities, enabling them to function in a harmonious and balanced way. The self-identification exercise is often used in conjunction with the subpersonality model to help clients effectively recognize and dis-identify with their different subpersonalities. As integration of an individual’s subpersonalities proceeds and personal psychosynthesis develops, less energy is lost in managing conflicting subpersonalities—instead their potential strengths and capabilities become available. With subpersonality integration, one’s personal field of consciousness expands to include those subpersonalities that were previously acting unconsciously and, consequently, the individual gains more access to creative material in his or her middle and lower unconscious. Like the model of the human psyche, the subpersonality model might initially appear simplistic. However, the actual process of psychosynthesis is essentially dynamic, and spiritual psychosynthesis, in particular, “a long and arduous journey . . . full of surprises, difficulties, and even dangers [involving] a drastic transmutation of the ‘normal’ elements of the personality, an awakening of potentialities hitherto dormant” (Assagioli, 2000, pp. 35-36).

Ultimately, synthesis of one’s subpersonalities allows for the greatest freedom of expression, as creative intuitions that exist in the unconscious can be more readily actualized by the directing “I.” For example, the subpersonality model has been shown to help international student sojourners come into relationship with themselves and others, rebuild their personal and social identity, and develop into more fully integrated human beings (Lombard, 2014). This current article examines how subpersonality integration also resulted in the students’ increased creative activities in both their personal and professional lives. The subpersonality model is further described in the “Research Method” section. For a full explanation about the self-identification exercise and subpersonality model, please refer to the psychosynthesis literature (Assagioli, 2000; Carter-Harr, 1975; Ferrucci, 1982; Lombard, 2014; Vargiu, 1974).

The Aim of this Study

The aim of this study was to ascertain if the psychosynthesis technique of the subpersonality model might aid clients in The Netherlands to grow personally and creatively. In this part of the study, we hypothesized that, as the clients through psychosynthesis counseling were able to grow in personal “I”

consciousness, stymied energies formerly engaged in managing stress and inner conflict would then be released for higher goals. These newfound energies could then come into contact with unconscious material which would then be expressed through new creative activities. Maslow (1954) has noted that “creativity . . . seemed to be an epiphenomenon of . . . greater wholeness and integration,” and that “the extent that creativeness is constructive, synthesizing, unifying, and integrative, . . . depends in part on the inner integration of the person” (pp. 140-141).

Research Method

The source of data is psychosynthesis counseling work conducted in The Netherlands from October 2008 to November 2013. The data gathered and analyzed in this study are qualitative, and the following is a brief outline of the research method used for this current study (for a more detailed explanation, see also Lombard, 2014).

Participants

Eleven clients (two male, nine female, ages ranging from 25 to 36 years) voluntarily sought counseling, with nationalities from the following countries: Austria, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, and South Africa. Four were married and the rest single; none had children. Except for three, all were midway through their doctorate degree. The exceptions were two postdoctoral researchers and the spouse of a PhD candidate. Clients' fields of research included philosophy, tissue engineering, nanobiology, physiochemistry, computer science, geoscience, and technology and sustainable development.

Psychosynthesis Clinical Methodology

Clients met the counselor from 10 to 55 times, two to four times per month, with each session lasting 1 hour (>280 hours counseling work). Sessions were conducted in English. In addition, clients were invited to self-reflect and write about any critical issues they faced or emotions they felt between sessions and to e-mail their observations to the counselor. While the subject for self-reflection remained open at all times, the client would sometimes be directed to reflect and write on a specific topic and e-mail that reflection before the next session. All clients were assured of confidentiality and anonymity and permission from all clients to quote them in this article has been obtained.

Subpersonality Model

Psychosynthesis assumes that we all have multiple subpersonalities that help us to function in the world, mostly without much reflection or conscious choice, such as Mother, Father, Teacher, and Leader. Often these subpersonalities are polar in nature, acting contrarily with antagonistic traits. We might be carefree and spontaneous in one situation and frozen in another. Perhaps most essential is the notion that a higher quality lies at the core of each subpersonality, no matter what its outer behavior might be. These higher qualities, like truth, strength, and courage, are considered to be transpersonal, universal, and timeless. However, these qualities can often be degraded or distorted when expressed through a subpersonality. The challenge is not to repress or eliminate any subpersonality's behavior, but rather to recover its higher quality and express that gift in a more positive and holistic way. Psychosynthesis is about synthesizing all of one's subpersonalities into a unifying center of authenticity where the "I" becomes the director and observer of all subpersonalities, enabling them to function in a harmonious and balanced way. The subpersonality model includes the following stages: recognition, acceptance, coordination, integration, and finally synthesis of one's numerous subpersonalities.

During psychosynthesis counseling sessions, clients initially recognized their subpersonalities by assessing, alongside the counselor, what subpersonalities might be playing a dominant role in their presenting issue(s). These subpersonalities were revealed through the different roles clients played in different situations with different people. Once the subpersonality was recognized, the next step was to give it a name, for example, the Rebel or the Joker. Humor was used during this stage to facilitate dis-identification, allowing the client to playfully engage in relationship with that subpersonality. Once naming the subpersonality, the client then created its character sketch including a drawing of the subpersonality, and was asked to continue reflecting on it in a personal journal.

After recognition, the next step for the client was to accept his or her subpersonality. The client was asked to observe what triggered each subpersonality's appearance and to watch and allow that subpersonality to exist. This exercise helped strengthen the observer "I." Alongside acceptance was the complementary stage of coordination, which had the basic purpose of identifying and becoming more conscious of the subpersonality's wants and needs to find acceptable ways in which the needs could be fulfilled. Therefore, clients first identified how the needs of a subpersonality were typically fulfilled. Subsequently, clients were asked to imagine how they might fulfill their subpersonalities' needs in new, objective, and creative ways in order to transform inner conflicts.

The final stages of the subpersonality process—integration and synthesis—are lifetime endeavors. While coordination deals with the development and understanding of specific subpersonalities, integration is concerned with the relationship between subpersonalities as well as each one's activity within the personality as a whole. Synthesis involves the culmination of individual growth that allows for balance and harmony of the entire personality and is essentially interpersonal and transpersonal. As a result of synthesis, the life of the individual and his or her interactions with others become "increasingly characterized by a sense of responsibility, caring, co-operation, altruistic love and transpersonal objectives" (Vargiu, 1974, p. 89).

To initiate these final stages, clients were presented an opportunity for their subpersonalities to interact. Numerous techniques were used to allow for such interactions including guided visualization, role play, imaginary meetings, and/or letter writing from the observer to the subpersonality (and vice versa). Throughout such interactions, clients were encouraged to strengthen their role as the observer and, consequently, to consciously and more creatively fulfill any conflicting needs. Clients were ultimately guided to assess, appreciate, and come into relationship with the higher quality held by each of their subpersonalities. Once the need of the subpersonality was met in a new creative way, clients were asked to reflect on, practice, and observe their expression of the subpersonality's higher quality in the world.

Data Collection and Analysis

Clients played a central role in the process of data analysis to check for counter-indications of the emerging theses (Yin, 2003). First, at regular intervals, the counselor and client held an evaluation of how the psychosynthesis counseling was working for the client and what techniques he or she found particularly useful. In addition, all clients held a self-evaluation with the counselor during their last session; long-term clients self-evaluated their meetings every 6 to 9 months. Prior to these evaluation meetings, clients were asked to reflect on the turning points of their inner process, which were considered changes in behavior or attitude that led to the resolution of any presenting issues. Turning points were discussed one-by-one to reach consensus. In this way, clients were able to correct, reshape, or contextualize the counselor's perceptions as they deemed appropriate.

Data collected and analyzed from the counseling sessions included e-mailed reflections, drawings created by all clients during the sessions, verbal testimonies of the participants who were recorded, and the researcher's reflections carefully written and compiled immediately after a session. For those clients whose sessions were recorded, tapes were listened to by the

researcher and reviewed. In particular, subpersonalities of each client were collected from the researcher's notes and clients' e-mails with the following details noted: the subpersonality name, the client's description and drawing of the subpersonality, the subpersonality's wants and needs, its higher quality, what triggered the appearance of the subpersonality and its response(s) to the trigger(s). Also noted, if appropriate, was the subpersonality's first appearance, past expressions, and possible origin within the context of the client's personal history. In addition, the researcher noted over time how the subpersonalities' needs were being met, how its higher qualities were expressed, and how the different subpersonalities of an individual were interacting. After a session during which turning points were reviewed with the client, the researcher carefully noted the agreed-upon items, allowing clients' reflections and adjustments to be integrated into the final data collection and analysis. Consequently, the narrative of each client was carefully held, reflected on, observed, and analyzed with the aim of garnering themes or patterns in each client's psychological process.

Results

To show how the subpersonality process enabled clients to more actively engage with their creative process, the results are first presented through the case study of Rudy,¹ followed by direct quotes from the other clients. Rudy's narrative was chosen to demonstrate the findings and subpersonality model because (1) his process best represents the processes of the other clients and (2) his inner and outer journey best represents the process of personal psychosynthesis and how it can lead to an increase in creativity.

Reactivating Creativity Through Subpersonality Integration: A Case Study

Rudy's presenting issues were feelings of being stuck, both in his scientific research and personal relationships. In the laboratory, he felt that his experiments were not yielding any useful data. For the past 6 months, he had been struggling with a particular experiment that he "couldn't seem to make happen." In addition, 16 months earlier he had ended a relationship but was afraid to start dating again. He admitted:

I feel like [the relationship] never ended or ended unsatisfactorily because I couldn't fix it. . . . Since grammar school, I've always had goals and I always worked towards them. But then when my girlfriend left, I felt lost. Nothing seemed to work anymore. I lost interest in my life.



Figure 3. Mr. Fix It (left) and Mr. Freeze. Two subpersonalities identified and drawn (in separate sessions) by the client.

Identification and Recognition of Two Subpersonalities. By the seventh session, Rudy identified a subpersonality he called Mr. Freeze (Figure 3, right), who wanted to connect to others but needed space and time to feel safe. For example, recently at a friend's wedding party, Mr. Freeze felt unable to join the dancing, despite his skill and love for dancing. To feel safe in unfamiliar company, Mr. Freeze immediately disengaged and remained "frozen" outside the group. By Session 18, another more dominate subpersonality called Mr. Fix It was identified (Figure 3, left), who wanted everyone to be happy and also needed to feel safe (the same need as Mr. Freeze). This subpersonality was connected to a deep unexpressed anger Rudy had recognized toward his former girlfriend and also his younger sister. For example, in an attempt to fix his relationship with his former girlfriend, Rudy had bought a house and "fixed it up." Mr. Fix It was happy when he could fix everyone's problems, but would become angry and frustrated when he could not. Whenever conflict arose around an unresolvable problem, to repress his anger and, consequently, feel safe, Mr. Fix It would immediately disconnect from the person whose problem(s) he could not fix. Disconnecting from the other was the same strategy Mr. Freeze employed when he felt unsafe. Part of Rudy's unconscious reason for entering counseling was to find a way to feel safe with his feelings of anger and to learn how to express his anger without disconnecting from the conflicted relationship.



Figure 4. The Lion (symbolizing anger) is waiting for the door to open. Drawing by client.

In other words, Rudy’s feelings of anger were blocked, which manifested in as an overall feeling of “being stuck.” This connection between his unexpressed anger and feeling of inertia became clear after Rudy was led through a visualization during which he was asked to imagine his anger to be an animal. Rudy imagined his anger as a lion, waiting to be let out of a door, which Rudy was unable to open, even in his imagination (see Figure 4). After this visualization, Rudy remarked:

It was just a visualization, so why couldn’t I even visualize opening the door?
I even felt a bit stupid! What is this? If my imagination cannot open the door,
how can I myself open the door?

Exploring the Origins of Rudy’s Subpersonalities and How He Learned to Repress Anger. Rudy agreed to more closely explore the epistemology of these two subpersonalities as well as his attitude toward anger. Until the age of 5 years, Rudy lived and traveled with his parents on a freight ship that transported 350 tons of cargo around northern Europe. His mother and father would take shifts captaining the ship 24/7. Rudy related Mr. Fix It to learning at a young age the need for everything to be shipshape on the boat. However, more profoundly, before Rudy’s birth, his mother was initially unable to become pregnant because of a hormonal problem. His parents began adoption procedures for a child from India, which was expected to take 5 years to complete. During this time, the doctors provided Rudy’s mother with medicine, but still insisted that she should not expect to become pregnant. However, Rudy was

soon conceived and born. In a profound and mysterious way, Rudy had “fixed” his mother’s infertility problem. When Rudy was 3 years old, his adoptive sister arrived from India, and 5 years later an adoptive brother (also from India, but unrelated to his sister).

Rudy recalled his first experiences of Mr. Freeze when he was 10 years old. Upon moving to a new school, Rudy remembered being very distraught and crying in his room. He was having difficulty making new friends as he found them harsh and deceitful. In addition, every summer his family would vacation in caravan holiday parks where Rudy found himself “frozen with dread” and unable to connect to the other children his age. As much as Mr. Freeze longed to make new friends, he never felt safe enough.

Regarding his experience of expressing anger as a child, Rudy said that anger was not allowed to be expressed in his family. He related an experience from childhood when he was 8 years old, which happened three times. While watching the news on TV and seeing all the injustice in the world, he became very angry because he could not fix or change anything: “I went to my room and shut the door. I didn’t want anyone to see me.” His mother and/or father then would enter his room to console him. “Yes, we don’t like it either,” they would say, “but there’s nothing we can really do about it.” Rudy quickly learned that anger “doesn’t do any good” and “is a waste of time” and to reason it away, instead of learning how to feel, accept, integrate, and express it. These childhood incidents further crystallized Mr. Fix It’s behavior; as a child, Rudy learned that whenever he could not fix a problem, “it was better” to repress his feelings, especially those of anger.

Rudy described another example of a frustrated and angry Mr. Fix It who learned to disconnect. When he was between 15 and 16 years, his sister (13-14 years) managed to evoke anger in the family by choosing to date boy-friends that Rudy’s family felt were unacceptable and/or abusive. Rudy recalled his parents holding long frantic discussions with him every night about what to do about his sister. Finally when Rudy was 16, he told his parents that he refused to deal with his sister’s issues. Whenever they started talking about her, he would go to his room, thereby disconnecting himself from the family.

Identifying the Higher Qualities of Each Subpersonality. In both cases, two weeks after he first identified Mr. Freeze and Mr. Fix It, Rudy was able to identify each subpersonality’s higher quality. The higher quality held by Mr. Freeze was a deep and sincere commitment when in relationship. And the higher quality of Mr. Fix It was care for the other. “Care is the biggest and strongest tool in Mr. Fix It’s toolbox,” said Rudy (see black box in Figure 3).

Coordination and Integration of Mr. Freeze and Mr. Fix It. Once Rudy was able to recognize and accept his two subpersonalities, he was also able to start to observe what triggered their appearance and meet their needs in a new and more creative way. For example, by accepting his Mr. Freeze subpersonality, Rudy was able to consciously choose not to attend large social gatherings that required quick and spontaneous connections and, consequently, triggered feelings of being unsafe. Instead, he chose to frequent smaller more intimate functions, like PhD association evenings, where he could take his time to connect to others. In addition, he began to invite friends to also attend different functions with him in order to provide the social safety he felt he needed.

The more dominant Mr. Fix It subpersonality, however, was more difficult to integrate as it required that Rudy also recognize, accept, and coordinate his feelings of anger and frustration which could occur when Mr. Fix It was not successful in managing or repairing a social situation. The key to learning to fulfill Mr. Fix It's need for safety in a new way was to learn how to manage and express (that is "to fix") his anger in a new way (other than simply disconnecting). Gradually, Rudy was able to learn to stay connected to the other and express his anger in what felt to him as a safe manner. For example, Rudy (as Mr. Fix It) had volunteered to maintain all the laboratory equipment for his department. During one session, he explored with the counselor his inability to express anger in an appropriate way with a colleague who had broken a scientific instrument. Immediately afterward and on returning to the lab, the exact same colleague broke the exact same instrument again, providing Rudy with a new chance to express his anger with this colleague. Rudy said that despite initially feeling extremely angry, he and the colleague were able to have "a good talk and things are good between them now." He also observed:

It's funny because this hour together just seems like we talk about things, but it's really about the awareness that comes and that carries out through the rest of the week. I know now that I can still become angry, but realize that it's because I cannot fix the situation or I don't agree with the ideas being talked about. I am learning not to judge my anger, but to judge how I express my anger.

Ultimately, within the therapeutic alliance, Rudy felt safe enough to also express his past anger against his ex-girlfriend, sister, and parents. During the ninth session, Rudy heavily sobbed and was finally able to relieve his grief for not having experienced in past relationships his deep longing for connection and safety, the two fundamental needs of his two subpersonalities. Along with this physical and emotional release, Rudy's counseling work continued around balancing, coordinating, and integrating his two subpersonalities as well as his anger.

Activating Synthesis and Experiencing a More Creative Life. To work toward the ultimate stage of synthesis, Rudy was asked to reflect on, practice, and observe the expression of his subpersonalities' higher qualities in the world. For example, once reflecting on the higher qualities of Mr. Freeze, Rudy was better able to acknowledge, appreciate, and enjoy his deeper relationships with friends and family. Right after the session during which Rudy sobbed, he called his mother and together they cried on the phone about their past broken relationship. Rudy also made the effort to visit his sister and managed to reconnect to her. Midway through the counseling sessions, Rudy was dating again and had enrolled in a new dance class. A month before counseling sessions ended, Rudy ran into his ex-girlfriend at a party by chance. Rudy was able to approach and chat with her amiably, without feeling any anger even though he felt her aloofness. This encounter allowed Rudy to finally accept the ending of their relationship.

During Rudy's last meeting, he noted,

I don't feel stuck anymore. I thought the reason I was stuck was because I hadn't finished my relationship with my girlfriend. Then I found out I was really angry, and I didn't even want to say that word. Now I can recognize situations where I freeze and can work with them. This frees up space in my mind.

I also learned that I was always trying to fix things. In some cases, I would do better to . . . just care about the person. Just to listen or say some comforting words. Now I recognize situations where I am not responsible to fix things, but I can care.

Coming into relationship with these subpersonalities and working with them gives me more confidence. I feel more connected to myself, my body and feelings. I really see that when I am not connected to myself, I lose myself, and then I lose the connections to my work and to my relationships.

This new connection to his work was evident through the fact that Rudy felt his research was also unstuck. By the end of the counseling work, Rudy was able to more clearly discern that data collected before the meetings were actually of value:

I can now look at past data and actually see that it works and proves that [my project] works. But I used to think this data was rubbish. It never looked good enough because I didn't trust what I was doing. I felt frustrated and de-motivated. Now I can see publications that I can write using this data. I even presented this data as a keynote speaker at a conference. This data didn't change. I changed!

Now I have the confidence and trust in what I'm doing. It makes things more clear. Everything comes more together instead of diverging into infinity.

Finally, Rudy returned to the image of the lion waiting for the door to open:

That was a very strong, striking visualization. Now I am opening the door—wide open. I learned that if I feel stuck, there are ways to get myself unstuck. Now I am looking for opportunities instead of past failures.

In sum, Rudy's case study shows that by working with the subpersonality model, creativity can be increased in three areas: in relationship with others, in one's personal life, and by enhancing professional achievement. First, through the act of rebuilding a more conscious identity or "I," the client was able to explore more creative ways to deal with certain social situations and develop new strategies for responding to conflict, thereby enabling him to more effectively engage with others when confronted with difficult circumstances instead of disconnecting from the people around him. This implementation of new strategies for social interaction and the healing of past conflicts helped foster more creativity in his personal life, as can be seen by his participation in new dance lessons and his dating once again. Finally, through the recognition, coordination and integration of different subpersonalities, the client was able to unblock repressed emotions, which, in turn, enabled him to open up new perspectives when reviewing previously collected scientific data.

Reactivating Creativity Through Subpersonality Integration: Other Client Examples

Rudy is one example of how clients were able to engage and work with the subpersonality model in order to open up new creative approaches in their personal and professional lives. In fact, all but one of the clients in this study readily grasped the concept of subpersonalities and quickly incorporated and applied the various techniques to manage and integrate them. As each client began to build a relationship with their different subpersonalities, all were able to better direct their energies toward their creative lives, personally and professionally. For example, another client began counseling sessions feeling depressed, lonely, and even fearful of the town and his local environment. After 15 sessions during which he began to recognize and, subsequently, coordinate and integrate numerous subpersonalities, he was making new friends, had been elected president of a professional association, and received two international awards for his presentations and articles. He said:



Figure 5. Painting by a client who was prompted to attend art classes after working with the subpersonality model.

My work is going so well. I am producing so much more than last year and I have more concentration and energy.

Personal artistic creativity was the result for many clients once they learned how to relate and work with their subpersonalities. For example, one client decided to follow through on her long-held desire to take artistic photographs. Similarly, another client was encouraged through the actual act of drawing her subpersonalities to pursue and develop her artistic talent. Here, she reflects on her enrollment in drawing and painting classes (see Figure 5):

Indeed [my drawing] was very much related to our work, especially around my subpersonality Miss Perfect. I took the classes, in part, to give myself a chance to not be perfect. I also discovered that if I was missing art [in my life], I didn't have to look to somebody else, [but to] myself.

Here are other remarks by clients in recognition of their newly released creative energy:

Our sessions helped me to grow personally far beyond what I could have predicted. Now, I have more creative energy. It's more "green" to be myself! I see the post-doc that I want. And I have the energy to grab it. And it feels exciting and so much better. (Portuguese client)

What I have done . . . is a journey into self exploration. It has been a process of understanding, acceptance and management of different aspects of myself. This is a lifelong journey that I think everyone should begin. The counseling helped me immensely not only in dealing with such a process, but also in growing as a person and as a researcher. (Italian client)

As clients were able to objectively recognize their subpersonalities and direct them from a stronger center of their personal “I,” they also discovered new creative ways to engage in relationship with others. The follow testimonies demonstrate clients’ new perspectives on relationships:

Through the [psychosynthesis counseling] . . . , I learned how to address my difficult supervisor and found a solution that has proved to be more successful than I could have imagined. (Canadian client)

The ongoing therapy was very helpful to my personal growth. I’ll continue to cultivate the strength, calmness, peace, passion and love I have learned with care, and let them stay and grow deep inside me to illuminate my life and loved ones. (Chinese client)

I’ve changed so much. . . . I’m now not just a better student, but also a better friend, son, and brother. And the change is deep inside me. I know in the future that I will also make a better husband and father. . . . And no one can ever take these things away from me. (Brazilian client)

All these results show that clients expressed their new creativity in three ways: (1) more artistically (as expressed through dance, painting, photography), (2) in their behavior and relationships (i.e., when confronted with both intra- and interpersonal conflict), and (3) professionally (increased divergent thinking, problem solving, analysis of data, and creative expression through writing and presentations).

Discussion

Psychosynthesis counseling and, in particular, the subpersonality process has shown to help clients become more creative in their personal and professional lives. Through the integration of previous unconscious subpersonalities, clients were able to release blocked emotions, more creatively resolve personal and interpersonal conflicts, access higher qualities, and engage more readily in ordinary creative activities in their daily lives.

In short, clients showed increased creative thinking and cognitive flexibility through their subpersonality integration process, which required them to

continually question their assumptions, shift their perspective, and use analogies. As Thurston and Runco (1999) have pointed out, flexibility is an essential aspect of the cognitive process and can facilitate creative problem solving. Flexibility, which reflects a capacity to redefine the task at hand, reinterpret the goal, see a new way to use information, and/or change one's strategy, is also an important scoring index on most divergent thinking tests (Runco, 1991). Flexibility also allows an individual to see the whole of a situation or problem—not just the parts, an ability that is fundamental to synthesis, in general, and psychosynthesis in particular (Assagioli, 2000, 2003). As Maslow (1968) stated, creative people are able “to bring separate and even opposites into unity,” and creativity is “constructive, synthesizing, unifying, and integrative” (p. 147). Assagioli (2003) also believed that all forms of human creation are a result of a dynamic synthesis between polar elements, and that “an essential attribute of wisdom is the power to ‘play with opposites’” (Assagioli, 2000, p. 104).

The subpersonality process is fundamentally concerned with creatively bringing separate, often conflicting and opposite inner subpersonalities into relationship and ultimate synthesis. Through the practice of active imagination, drawing, and humor, clients were able to first recognize and accept their subpersonalities. As more awareness of each subpersonality grew, clients then became active observers of their subpersonalities' appearance, wants, needs, and higher qualities. By searching and identifying new creative ways to meet each subpersonalities' needs, clients began to overcome fixed association patterns between the subpersonalities' triggers and reactions, and thus enhanced their cognitive flexibility. Clients were also prompted to question their assumptions about their own behavior and choices, worldview, and perceptions of others. Over time, clients were able to move away from old patterns and solutions that they typically held regarding both inner and outer conflicts. Consequently, their rebuilt identity enabled them to engage more freely and creatively in the world.

Psychosynthesis counseling and the subpersonality process not only helped increase clients' divergent thinking through the active questioning of their assumptions but also broadened their perspectives. Examples include Rudy being able to suddenly see valuable data he had previously collected and had thought worthless, and the clients who began to spontaneously pursue and develop their artistic skills such as photography and drawing. Finally, the subpersonality process required clients to use, at times, profound and deeply meaningful analogies. A subpersonality's behavior in the here-and-now was often reflected on, compared with, and formulated alongside its first appearance in the life of the client. In addition, fairy tales, dreams, and visualizations were regularly introduced to help the client draw certain

understandings of their identity and behavior in a wider context, all of which required clients to activate their creative imagination and draw analogical parallels between symbolic representations and the reality of their lives.

Ultimately, throughout the subpersonality process, clients focused and worked toward synthesis of their inner life and, as a consequence, emotional energy was released. As clearly stated by Davis (1999) emotional barriers interfere with creative thinking “by making us ‘freeze’” (p. 168). This phenomenon is easily recognizable in Rudy’s Mr. Freeze subpersonality. Through the unblocking of emotional barriers such as anger, anxiety, fear of failure, and even dread, other clients were also able to assess creative energy that not only helped them rebuild their inner identity but also manifest creative acts in their outer lives. This new creative energy appeared through their improved work performance, daily activities, and their ability to more creatively engage in relationship with themselves and others.

Of interest from a psychosynthesis perspective is the fact that none of the clients related transpersonal or peak experiences during their time spent in counseling. This result seems to indicate that all the clients developed along the level of personal psychosynthesis, which, as stated earlier, focuses on growth that involves work with either the middle or the lower unconscious (Firman & Gila, 2002). Therefore, we assume that the creative activity later revealed by all the clients came from those specific levels of consciousness. For further research, it might be interesting to investigate whether and how creative activity from higher levels of the unconsciousness is facilitated through the subpersonality model.

Limitations and Future Research

This article has some limitations that need to be addressed. First, the findings rest on the presumption that clients’ increased creative activity are the direct effect of the subpersonality model and not other influences during the psychosynthesis counseling sessions. It might be possible that other used techniques, such as the self-identification exercise, also enhanced creative processes. Based on the literature, it is possible that other techniques such as expressive movement, music, and the use of symbolic images have an influence on creativity (Assagioli, 1963). Because of the counseling setting, it was not possible to disentangle these influences, and future research is needed to look at possible interactions. In addition, this small client sample, while culturally and demographically diverse, makes it difficult to draw any general conclusions, and future research in this area should try to increase the number of participants. However, we think that, together with the literature, our data nicely demonstrate the positive influences the subpersonality model can have for some clients.

Another limitation exists because of the fact that this study was conducted using a qualitative research method. There is a long debate in the literature on whether or not qualitative research can or cannot indicate causal relationship (see, Maxwell, 2004a). In line with the realist position (Maxwell, 2004b), we think that, especially when it comes to the process of giving meaning to certain events like psychosynthesis does, cause–effect relationships can be drawn. Nevertheless, future research should investigate the effectiveness of the subpersonality model for increasing creativity alongside the collection of empirical, quantitative data, through the use of well-established divergent thinking tests (such as those by Christensen, Guilford, Merrifield, & Wilson, 1978; Torrance, 1974) to further support our conclusions. Nevertheless, the qualitative methodology did allow for intimate conversations over many months with clients, bringing depth and breadth to this analysis, which would be lost when applying solely quantitative analyses. With only a handful of published articles on psychosynthesis methodology and techniques, there remains no doubt that more research is needed to explore its theory, tools, and practice for the enhancement of creativity.

Conclusion

This research indicates that the subpersonality model might provide an effective means for fostering creative thinking and cognitive flexibility within the context of counseling. As such, the model could also be offered outside this context as part of a larger training program on an individual, small group, or team basis. Psychosynthesis is one means for individuals to come closer to their own personal consciousness and will and, consequently, more easily in touch with their emotions, intuitions, and imagination—all fuel for creative activity.

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