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Creativity and Spirituality: The Undeniable Connection Between the Two

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Creativity and Spirituality: The Undeniable Connection Between the Two

by

Elizabeth A. Vesneske

An Abstract of a Project
in
Creativity and Change Leadership

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

May 2022

Buffalo State
State University of New York
Department of Creativity and Change Leadership

ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

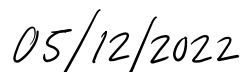
Exploring the Spiritual Nature of Creativity

As a deeply spiritual person I began to notice that as I developed my spiritual practices and grew deeper in my spirituality my creativity started to flourish. Ironically enough, I had chosen a master's program that focused solely on creativity. This is something I would later call a synchronicity, where things in your life magically happen to align. My spirituality, something I am so passionate about started to work its way into my graduate studies. Finding the Center for Applied Imagination through Buffalo State College has not only allowed me to strengthen my creativity and grow deeper in my spirituality, but also allowed me to gain a whole new perspective of how the two are so graciously intertwined. It is my belief that as you intentionally work to understand who you truly are through spiritual and self-development practices you will be gifted the magic of heightened creativity. Throughout my master's project you will find personal reflections of practices and concepts, as well as excerpts from readings that have allowed me to discover this connection.

Keywords: authentic, create, creativity, feminine and masculine energy, Higher Self, soul, spiritual, spirituality, synchronicity



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Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
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05/12/2022



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The Center for Applied Imagination and the Creativity and Change Leadership Master's Program at SUNY Buffalo State. This program has quite literally changed my life. The work being done in this department is cutting-edge and I feel so incredibly fortunate to be a part of it. The knowledge I have gained from the Creativity Scholars in this program will pour over into every aspect of my life. My professor and advisor, Dr. Susan Keller Mathers for your passion and enthusiasm. For being a sounding board and for unknowingly hyping me up with your feedback videos. Your compliments and unwavering support have encouraged and have helped me gain so much confidence in my finding my true, authentic voice.

Last but most certainly not least, my baby girl, Laney. Thank you for inspiring me, day in and day out. You bring magic to my life. You pull out my inner child and even though you keep me busy you have a way of pulling me back into the present moment, the here and now. I promise to continue to share with you the beauty in knowing who you truly are. I hope to always inspire the creative energy that lives within you. I love you beyond words. I hope I make you proud.

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SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Purpose and Description of Project

The purpose of my project is to provide a new perspective for those who are seeking creative fulfillment in their life. Simply put, when one chooses to rightfully align themselves with who they truly are at the core, in turn they will be rewarded with an abundance of creative energy. Turning inward with spirituality allows you to find your authentic voice. Our unique, internal language is then expressed through creativity. This project is intended to be an exploration of my beliefs, findings, and experiences as I have passionately explored and wholeheartedly believe that creativity and spirituality are seamlessly intertwined.

The past couple years I have intentionally chosen to devote time and energy into spiritual practices in hopes of gaining a better sense of self. Little did I know my spiritual journey and master's studies in creativity would soon collide. This is something I would refer to as a synchronicity. For the purpose of this section though, I will discuss synchronicities more in depth later in the project. Throughout my journey I have come to realize that as I gain more awareness of who I am at the very core my creative energy in turn has flourished. In order to fully grasp what I am discussing here I will briefly break down the term spirituality and broadly discuss how it connects to creativity.

It is to my understanding that many people view spirituality as a religious practice. Although spirituality involves a great deal of faith, it should not be considered an organized religion. Spirituality encompasses so much more than the predefined boxes religions typically confine themselves to. Religions are built upon the belief that one must seek answers through text or external sources whereas spirituality encourages you to look inward, for all of the answers

you are seeking lie within your own being. However, I do want to emphasize that I believe that spirituality does involve a great deal of seeking wisdom from many external sources. The difference here is how you choose to interpret and purposefully integrate this newfound wisdom to benefit your mind, body, and soul, consciously, every day.

When explored in depth, spirituality is extremely complex, for this reason there is no one definition that fully defines what this word encompasses. This is because spirituality is unique to every individual. In essence, for me, spirituality is the journey one consciously embarks upon to explore, strengthen, and come to know one's own true Self and the relationship they share with a Higher Power. When we turn inward and begin to explore the true nature of what makes us who we are, unknowingly we are simultaneously or in other words synchronicitically aligning ourselves with our life's purpose. Spirituality allows us to respectfully choose ourselves and pay tribute to our unique abilities, find solace in them, and then share them with the world around us.

This is where creativity comes into play. When I first began exploring this topic in one of my master's courses, *Current Issues in Creative Studies*, I briefly touched on spirituality and creativity and how difficult they can be to define. I find this similarity beautifully ironic because to me this just deepens their connection all the more. When we align ourselves with these broad, yet complex terms they begin to fixate themselves in our lives every day. It is hard to respectfully define them because of how vastly unique they are to each individual.

My personal belief, and one that has stood true for my own spiritual journey, is that when you purposely choose to strengthen your own sense of self through spiritual practices, your creativity; in other words, your unique creative energy expresses itself to the world and encompasses your life. Creativity is the process of sharing with the world who you truly are at

the core. Ernest Holmes, an American Writer, well known for his New Thought Movement and spiritual philosophy once said, “to be spiritual is to create.” (Rattan, 2020). Defining the word *spiritual* as “relating to the spirit or soul or relating to the mind or intellect as distinguished from the physical nature: *a spiritual approach to life.*” (“Spiritual”, n.d.) In addition, when we define the word *create* as “to cause to come into being, as something unique that would not naturally evolve or that is not made by ordinary processes; to evolve from one's own thoughts or imagination, as a work of art or an invention.” (“Create”, n.d.)

When we look more in depth at what defines these two energetic words, we come to realize what Holmes was really saying here. “To be spiritual is to create”; when we create, we are physically bringing the essence of our soul into the physical world. We are making our soul tangible. Creativity is the language of our souls and when we express our creative energy with the world, we are rightfully aligning with who we are at the core. When we adopt these practices, nurture this mindset, and take pride in our unique gifts; this is when the magic happens, and your creativity abundantly flourishes and flows.

Rationale for Selection

“In Chinese mythology, Yin and Yang were born from chaos when the universe was first created, and they are believed to exist in harmony at the center of the Earth.” (Cartwright, 2018). I would argue that the Yin and Yang symbol is most commonly known as the spiritual sign for balance. What some might not know is that it represents almost all “inseparable and contradictory opposites.” (Cartwright, 2018). Some of these opposites include, night-day, dark-light, moon-sun, old-young, and the one that I am going to focus most heavily on is female-male or in other words, feminine and masculine energy. We as spiritual beings all possess within us both masculine and feminine energies. If we stay true to our understanding of the Yin-Yang we know that we must create balance between the two in order for harmony to exist within us.

Much of the history of Yin Yang is still to be discovered but what we do know is that the concept has existed for thousands of years in China. “Around 100 AD. the first dictionary of Chinese characters was created, and it defined yin as referring to "a closed door, darkness and the south bank of a river and the north side of a mountain" and yang as "height, brightness and the south side of a mountain." Another early recorded instance of the terms yin and yang appearing together referred to yin as the shady side of a hill and yang as the sunny side of the hill.” (Sarikas, 2021). The religio-philosophical tradition, Taoism often relies upon the beliefs of Chinese mythology including that of the Yin and Yang.

Each side possess qualities that help make it whole. The Yang (White) is said to be the male or masculine side, where as the Yin (Black) is seen as the female, feminine side. Some characteristics that build up the masculine yang are taking action, assertiveness, physical force, decision-making, leadership, protection, logical thinking and reasoning, achieving, being goal-oriented, providing, etc. The feminine side embodies gentleness, kindness, heart-centeredness,

intuition, acceptance, receiving, emotionality, communication, compassion, empathy, understanding, forgiveness and of course *creativity*.

Every being regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, etc. possess both of these energies. Finding balance between the two is crucial for a harmony driven life. I believe today's culture somewhat steams away from the beauty in nurturing and balancing both of these life force energies that each of us possess. I would argue that for quite some time we have had a large imbalance of the two and we as a collective are operating from a Yang driven side resulting in a lack of creativity. Finding balance between these two life force energies allows us to find balance and harmony within which in turn allows us to live a life full of true expression.

When we express creativity, we are tapping into our feminine desires and are expressing pent up creative energy that we have gracefully allowed to now flow through. Nowadays, unfortunately, it is not uncommon to hear people say, "I am not creative." When I hear these words, my soul instantly cries out for this individual. Hearing people say, "I am not creative" I believe is just another way of saying, "I am not quite sure of who I am" or, "I am not comfortable with expressing my true desires with the world." This may be farfetched; this is however just my belief and one that I wholeheartedly stand behind. For me a lack of creativity is a tall tale sign that I am not catering to both the masculine and feminine energies within me equally. To me, creativity is your soul's expression. We have lost our sense of self, we have lost that harmony and balance within; therefore, we have lost touch with that creative energy.

Many of my beliefs steam from the teachings of these individuals, Maya Angelou, Ronda Byrnes, Julia Cameron, Ram Dass, Joe Dispenza, Joel Fronlich, Alex Grey, Abraham Hicks, Ra Uru Hu, Bernard L. De Koven, Alan Lew, Terrance Mckenna, Mooji, Sky Nelson-Isaacs,

Sadhguru, Dr. Ben Sessa, Eckhart Tolle, David Foster Wallace, Wallace Wattles, and Alan Watts. Everything I have learned from these intelligent, and extremely gifted human beings has allowed me to formulate my own thoughts on the inner workings of creativity and how it directly relates to one's spirituality. There are many avenues I have explored that have influenced my beliefs and practices. Some of the topics that I may cover throughout my master's project that will justify my beliefs are, meditation, flow, play, visualization, daydreaming, synchronicities, feminine and masculine energy, gratitude, imagination, the human electromagnetic field, art, yoga, and more.

Maya Angelou is credited with stating that, "You can't use up creativity. The more you use the more you have." Creativity is energy. If we look at the basic principles of The Law of Attraction, we know that like energies attract like energies. Therefore, when you express creativity and really harness all of that energy, you will attract more of it into your life. Creativity is the perfect combination of the inner workings of your soul, imagination, finding balance within and the sweet spot where our minds pause and allow space for new things to be brought to light.

I have always felt as though I was deeply spiritual, but it was not until the last couple years that I really have poured my heart and soul into learning more about what spirituality really is and how it relates to my life. I believe that everyone's spiritual journey is extremely unique and can be quite daunting for people to explore. However, from my own experience and the principles of the Ying Tang, there is no light without darkness, and when you deepen your understanding of spirituality you are gifted with a greater sense of self as well as an abundance of creativity. Somewhere deep within me knows it is my calling to explore this topic and share

my findings with others in hopes of helping them find the creative light and balance within themselves.

SECTION TWO: PERTINENT LITERATURE AND RESOURCES

Luckily for me, I started the research for this project years ago without even knowing it. I have always been drawn to spirituality, so I often read books that revolve around this topic. I will continue to research this while diving more heavily into the areas that include creativity. A large portion of this research will include my own personal connections and insights that I have gathered along the way throughout my own spiritual journey. I will also continue to review and reference many of the teachings of the people I have listed below. The people listed below have gifted me an abundance of wisdom. I hope to touch on the teachings and insights of each of them in this paper, however if I do not mention all of them I wanted to respectfully those who have helped me on my journey.

Table 1

Supported Literature and Key Influencers

Name	Importance/Significance
Maya Angelou	American Poet
Ronda Byrnes	Australian Writer and Producer / Author of The Secret - Law of Attraction
Julia Cameron	American Author / Author of The Artist's Way
Ram Dass	American Spiritual Teacher & Guru of Modern Yoga / Author of Be Here Now
Dr. Joe Dispenza	International Lecturer
Joel Fronlich	Ph.D. Student / Consciousness Studies
Alex Grey	American Visual Artist
Abraham (Esther) Hicks	American Inspirational Speaker
Ra Uru Hu	Author, Founder and Messenger of the Human Design System

Anodea Judith	American Author, Therapist, Public Speaker / Chakra System
Bernard L. De Koven	American Game Designer / deepFUN.com
Alan Lew	Conservative Rabbi / Meditation
Terrance Mckenna	American Ethnobotanist, Psychedelic Advocate
Mary Morrissey	Author, Public Speaker / Building Your Field of Dreams
Mooji	Jamaican Spiritual Teacher
Sky Nelson-Issacs	Author / Living In Flow
Dr. Gerard Puccio	Creativity Scholar, Founder of Foursight
Sadhguru	Indian Yoga Guru and Proponent of Spirituality
Dr. Ben Sessa	Psilocybin Therapist, Psychedelic Medical Exploration
Eckhart Tolle	Spiritual Teacher, Self-help Author
David Foster Wallace	American Author
Wallace Wattles	American New Thought Writer
Alan Watts	English Philosopher

SECTION THREE: PROCESS PLAN

Overall theme this masters project is a reflection piece that focuses on Creativity and Spirituality. I intend for this paper to be a synthesis of all of these topics and my understanding of the relationship they share with one another and more importantly how they tie into spirituality and creativity. I find them extremely interesting and although I still have a lot to learn myself, I want to share with those interested what I do know and the beliefs I myself have formed along the way.

Below I have listed the project timeline and action plan that I intend to follow to help me stay on track and check off milestones along the way.

Table 2

Project Timeline and Action Plan

Activity	Deadline	Hours to Complete	Support Needed
Initial Meeting	January 6, 2022	2	Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
Conduct research for Concept Paper	January 6th-13th, 2022	30	
Submit Concept Paper	February 14th, 2022	2	
Await Approval and continue research	February 14th-21st, 2022	15	
Synthesize my beliefs	February 14th-ongoing, 2022	10	

Section 1-3 Due	March 21st, 2022	40	
Schedule Meeting to regroup and consider roadblocks or current issues	April 4th, 2022	2	Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
Section 4-6 Due	April 18th, 2022	50	
Compile information, adjust where necessary, review, get feedback	Ongoing	40	Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
Submit Masters Project	May 2nd, 2022	2	
Develop other products (presentation)	Spring 2022 (ongoing)	10	
Await results & Submit to Digitals Commons	May 9th, 2022	2	

Table 3

Evaluation Plan

Table 3 <i>Key Evaluation Assessments Towards Goals</i>	
Goals	Deliverable
Continue growing in my own spirituality, which in turn will enhance my creativity	Keep track of key insights along the way. Pay close attention to my habits and feelings associated with them.
Write an insightful paper for people to gain profound information from	Synthesize my beliefs in a readable, cohesive manner.
Develop an “open journal” dialog throughout my paper so that people can see firsthand how said habits can influence their creativity.	Remain open and honest - share the obvious connections I have found with my readers. Be vulnerable.
Long term goal - Create a creativity mediation platform that interlinks the two more directly.	Long term goal - I am currently getting certified to be a meditation practitioner. When the time is right, I will use the research I have gathered here to help enhance one's creativity through the power of meditation and mindfulness.

SECTION FOUR: OUTCOMES

As I sit down to write this portion of the project, I find myself overwhelmed with excitement and angst. I have so many thoughts circulating my brain that I have been trying to articulately put into full sentences for what feels like years now. There is so much I have to say about these two complex words – spirituality and creativity. As I deep dive into how they connect, I hope I find all of the right words to describe my feelings, thoughts and beliefs surrounding these two profound topics. All that I ask is that you continue to keep an open mind about what it means to be a spiritual person or creative individual. Let go of any preconceived ideas and allow your mind to shut out that part of you that whispers “I am not creative”, or the “I am not spiritual”. Allow yourself to be fully immersed in this moment. If you allow, it is possible you will gain a shift in perspective that may open you up to a whole world of new beginnings and insightful change. We are in fact spiritual beings having a human experience, it is not the other way around. It is your right to be spiritual. It is your right to be creative. Both are innate within you.

Mind, Body, Soul

Before we can even begin to discuss the interconnectedness of spirituality and creativity, we must first explore the three integral aspects of life, that is our – mind, body, and soul. For the purpose of this section, I am going to touch on the mind and body but focus most of my attention on breaking down what I believe *soul* means. You hear the phrase – mind, body, soul ever so often but I believe our understanding of the soul often gets lost in translation and sometimes forgotten all together. Why is that? Why do we as a collective have such an unbalanced, understanding of these three integral aspects of life?

As human beings, we want and crave for things to be tangible. Things that are tangible seem to make the most sense to us. The closest thing to us being tangible, of those three, is our body. We understand this the most, and that makes perfect sense. For most, “seeing is believing”, or so they say... right? Our body is tangible. We can manipulate and move our body and that feels good to us because we as creatures like obvious reactions and real time results. Our society I would argue, focuses most of the attention on the body because it is already present and, in the moment, it is the easiest of the three to focus on. Each of these three counterparts play integral roles, the body being the house and or home of the mind and soul. This is extremely important for obvious reasons. The body is what allows us to participate and experience life, without it, *life* would have a whole new meaning. This is where one may start to question, where do we go when we die, since our body is no longer an option? Now... obviously, I have many beliefs on this but that’s a whole other master’s project in and of itself. For now, I’ll refrain from going down that rabbit hole.

As of recent, our society has been stressing the importance of mental health and the implications it has on our quality of life. The mind is extremely complex. It is the vehicle for our conscious mind and subconscious mind, which gives us the ability to experience and actively participate in life. Our mind allows us to imagine, which I would argue is easily the most impressive and undervalued feature of being a human being. Our mind also houses all of our experiences and stores them as memories. It gives us the ability to learn and retain knowledge to help us grow into a healthy, self-actualized, well-rounded human being.

It is important to note that memories, emotions, and feelings can and often be stored in the body as energy. This is important because stored energy can have varying effects on the mind, body, and soul when ignored. Unresolved trauma can constrict the openness of our

imagination and flexibility of our consciousness. (Domash, 2021, p.5). When we constrict our ability to remain open to novelty and limit the depths of our imagination, we essentially cut ourselves off from the creative energy that resides within us. It is critical that we consider the health of our mind, body, and soul equally. Doing so will allow us to live in the free and fuller, more expansive version of ourselves.

How can one even begin to define the complexity of a – soul. For clarity purposes, I reference soul and spirit interchangeably. Things of this nature are difficult to define, furthermore they can be hard to accept in our culture. It can be challenging gathering *proof* of something that is not obviously verifiable or scientifically measurable. Recently, more and more people are gracefully and sometimes not so gracefully awakened to this inner knowing that there is something greater going on within us. Within the context of spirituality this is often referred to as having a spiritual awakening. “We suddenly see with new eyes, experience profound insight, change our perspective and attitude, or receive a vision.” (Judith, 2006, p. 366). Research has gathered that “Experiences of spiritual awakening, whether gradual or sudden, intentionally induced or spontaneous, typically evoke an ineffable sense of deep inner knowing, understanding, “remembering,” or “unveiling” of one's true nature, as well as experiences of peace and equanimity, bliss, ecstasy and aliveness, feelings of awe, sacredness, gratitude, and reverence, and of abundant, unconditional love. (Corneille, Luke, 2021). Both references touch on this immeasurable truth that one comes to know. We are not our bodies. We are not our minds. Very simply put, we are souls that came here to have an experience. Our body and our mind allow our soul to experience life.

Time and time again you hear people having similar experiences, yet because science has a hard time proving something that is rather outwardly, many things associated with spirituality

often get categorized as “woo woo”. The term spirituality can be off-putting to some because people attribute it to religion, something that as of recent many do not seem to align with. In theory, self-help or personal development are one in the same as spirituality. I sometimes refer to spirituality as the religion of thyself, however it also includes that inner know of something greater than thyself. Spirituality allows us to fall into flow within our mind, body, and soul. It grants us the gift of unwavering faith in knowing that our soul exists and that we are here to revel in the experience of being a human being. We are here to embody all that we are and express it with the world. We are here having an experience such as this to come to know our true nature, our Higher Selves and to live authentically in that.

Authenticity

Coming to know the true power of our soul, and the makeup of our Higher Self, grants us authority. It gifts us the beauty of knowing that our soul is uniquely our own. When we become aware of the fundamental nature of ourselves and what makes us all incredibly unique, we cultivate a deep sense of gratitude for the makeup of who we are.

When you tune in to your spiritual energy you are tuning into your Higher Self. I consider one's Higher Self as the most authentic Self. Authenticity is your absolute truth. Poet Walt Whitman believes, “whatever satisfies the soul is truth.” (Kernis, Goldman, 2006). It feels expansive and satisfying to find comfort in being exactly who you are, does it not? There are many different opinions and perspectives of what defines the Higher Self. American Author, Anodea Judith notes, “How we define it is of little importance, for it remains an unprovable mystery. What is important is that it is an archetype that allows us to *receive information*. That information can be used for healing and guidance to bring us closer to wholeness.” (2006, p.

428). There is a great deal of wisdom in the energy that surrounds our Higher Self. Many refer to this wisdom as an inner knowing. We cultivate an understanding and an impeccable trust bond when we tune in to that force that is greater within us. Our Higher Self is who you were and who you are destined to be in this lifetime. Turning inward to connect with and come to know the true nature of who you are allows you to stand firmly and proudly in what makes you, uniquely you.

Why is authenticity important for creativity? Originality is a requirement of creativity. Authenticity allows us to stand in our originality. Standing authentically in all of your “weirdness” and embracing all that you are allows you to be fully immersed in the moment. Your sense of self is no longer defined by the judgements or assumptions of those around you. Your mind is free because you have found beauty within. When you stand proudly and confidently in your most authentic Self, anything you express or share with the world was first formed in *you*. Therefore, you are what you express. Creativity is an act of true self-expression.

Finding Balance Within

Authenticity empowers you to embrace your originality while also making space for others to embrace theirs. You come to appreciate all of the unique attributes and contributions of every person you interact with, for you now know that we were all destined to be divinely unique. Living authentically allows you to come to know the beauty that resides within you and all that surrounds you.

Authenticity allows us to stand in our own power while also making us aware that it is both necessary and beautiful adhering to societal norms. Why is this important? In 1975 a man by the name Barry Johnson coined the term *Polarity Thinking*. He defines it as, “where there is truth and wisdom on more than one side of an issue; each side is incomplete without the wisdom

and input of the other.” (Kise, 2022). Previously I mentioned Cartwright’s theory of the Yin Yang; “inseparable and contradictory opposites. (2018). Both scholars, although referring to different things here are essentially speaking of the same thing, a connection two interdependent systems share with one another.

Creativity Scholar Dr. Gerard Puccio identified a polarity between conformity and creativity. (2022). Conforming brings stability and predictability whereas creativity cultivates growth and innovation. In order for harmony and evolution to exist we must have both. By conforming we create opportunity for change because we grant ourselves moments of stable ground. Conforming also allows creativity the time to experiment and bloom. Creativity then takes the roots that were formed while conforming and evolves them into something new. Just like that of the Yin Yang we must have both masculine and feminine energies in continuous flow. Conformity representing that of the masculine and creativity representing that of the feminine.

I want to take this a step further and compare the feminine and masculine energies that reside in all of us to the divergent and convergent thinking phases that occur while in the creative problem-solving process. American Psychologist, J.P. Guilford founded divergent and convergent thinking in 1956. Divergent thinking is the expansive part of the creative problem-solving process whereas convergent thinking is more retractive. Generating as many ideas as possible and exploring all options is the foundation of divergent thinking. “There are four key principles that make divergent thinking work in CPS: (1) Defer Judgement; (2) Go for Quantity; (3) Make Connections; and (4) Seek Novelty.” (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2011, p. 86). Residing in that of our feminine side allows us to remain open, be receptive, explore our curiosities, let go of judgement, and intuitively create. Convergent thinking is the process that

seeks to obtain a well-rounded solution to the problem at hand. “There are four principles that guide the convergent phases within CPS: (1) Apply Affirmative Judgement; (2) Keep Novelty Alive; (3) Check Your Objectives and (4) Stay Focused.” (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2011, p. 96). Residing in that of our masculine allows us to think logically, to see things clearly, stay focused, and take decisive action.

When we are able to equally give and take from both our feminine and masculine energies, we find harmony and balance within. It is clear that our feminine energy closely resembles the divergent thinking process and the same could be said for our masculine energy and the convergent thinking process. Research has proven, time and time again that creativity can be learned. I would argue that it is not so much learned as it is enhanced and found within. For I believe creativity resides in all of us abundantly. However, one can be trained to become more aware of these thinking processes that occur when participating in a creative problem-solving session. Furthermore, I believe connecting to one’s spirituality and nurturing both the feminine and masculine energies within will also deeply enhance the ability to think creatively.

Now

Mindfulness, like creativity has many different definitions, what it comes down to is the context in which you are using the word. I define mindfulness as, purposefully choosing to become aware of the exact moment at hand without judgment, intrusive thoughts, or expectations. One intentionally brings awareness to their current reality and state of being. When we practice mindfulness, we set the intention to be present, aware, and receptive to what our environment has to offer. When we consciously do this daily and integrate this practice into our lives, great change takes place and flow states become a habitual routine.

What is flow? Why does it matter? If I define mindfulness as the conscious intention, we practice to fully experience present moments in our lives, then flow must be when we have seamlessly integrated mindfulness into our lives, which results in being unconsciously mindful. Hungarian-American Psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi coined the term *flow* in 1990. He defines it as “a human state of optimal functioning, a dynamic balance of challenge and skill. In the proper activities and under the proper conditions we become one with our lives, enacting “a complete focusing of attention on the task at hand-thus leaving no room in the mind for irrelevant information.” (Nelson-Isaacs, 2019, p. 5). He believes flow to be a state of consciousness and more often than not, this flow state typically involves one’s creative abilities. We become so present in the moment that everything else seems to simply drift away. For this very moment in time nothing else matters, we master the act of just being.

Flow was only discovered thirty-two years ago. There is still so much we have yet to uncover about what flow states fully embody. Author Sky Nelson-Isaacs was so fascinated with the theories Csikszentmihalyi gifted us he decided to elaborate on them further. Nelson-Isaacs believed “flow is intimately tied to the focus of our attention.” (Nelson-Isaacs, 2019, p. 22). He understood that one does not have to just experience moments of flow but rather we could learn to *live in flow*. Living in flow allows us to be fully present and immersed in every aspect of our lives. It is accepting and appreciating that we are exactly where we are supposed to be at this specific moment in time. By living in flow, we allow ourselves to no longer be bogged down by the external standards or expectations of how things should be or should have been. We notice the here and now for what it is. We let go of pressure. We release judgment. We simply just---be. In order to live in flow, we must *allow* things to flow. Spiritual Teacher and self-help author, Eckhart Tolle describes the same theories and or concepts in his book *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. And I quote, “Realize deeply that the present moment is all you have. Make the Now the primary focus of your life.” (Tolle, 1997).

Living in flow allows us to pay tribute to all that is us and all that is one with the universe. Sky Nelson-Isaacs said it best when he stated, “Instead of controlling our environment, we find ourselves in a symbolic exchange, an act of mutual creation” (2019).

Inner Stillness

Contemporary spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle explains, “All true artists, whether they know it or not, create from a place of no-mind, from inner stillness. The mind then gives form to the creative impulse or insight.” (1997, p. 24). We are always creating, which would make each and every one of us an artist. Finding comfort in that inner stillness is the precursor for discovering novel and original ideas. Practicing meditation allows our waking mind time and space free from thought. This practice enhances our ability to focus and concentrate. “To open inner sight requires an ability to calm and control the mind and keep it one-pointed.” (Judith, 2004, p.387). Meditation is a practice that brings us into alignment with that inner knowing. “Its purpose is to train the mind to enter subtler states of consciousness and transcend the petty concerns that usually occupy the mind, allowing us to access a deeper, grander state of awareness.” (Judith, 2004, p. 422).

As I mentioned previously, the health and well-being of our mind, body and soul is needed in order to function as a healthy human being. “Those who practice meditation on a regular basis usually report an increased level of functioning in many aspects of their life, not just their thinking processes. Increased physical health and well-being, greater productivity in their work, better concentration, increased creativity, and more personal satisfaction are some of the effects that have been reported.” (Judith, 2004, p. 422). Meditation enhances every aspect of life. It helps our mind, body, and soul work together in unison, and leads us into the depths of our soul. When we pause and intentionally center ourselves in the present moment, weather that

be through mindfulness or meditation, we allow space to exist within our minds. This space opens up room for new ideas to be birthed into existence.

Meditation positivity impacts the three integral aspects of life. It focuses heavy attention on quieting the mind but in doing our body and soul benefit immensely. Yoga does the same but instead places much of its focus on the body. In turn however, the practice of yoga positively aids in the health and well-being of the mind and soul as well. “Practicing yoga promotes relaxation and flexibility, softly dissolving blocks that bind tension.” (Judith, 2004, p. 216). As I noted earlier, the traumas we experience, whether they be big T trauma or little t trauma, if they go unaddressed, can get stored in the body as energy. These “energy pockets” of stored trauma can cause blockages that repress our authentic creative energy to flow through. Stored trauma can inhibit our ability to *live in flow*. Simply put, from the wise words of Doctor and Author, Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*. (Kolk, 2014). “Yoga (which means “yoke”) is a discipline designed to yoke together the individual with the divine, using mental and physical practices that join our mundane and spiritual lives. This goal is achieved by passing through steps of ever-expanding states of consciousness.” (Judith, 2004, p. 4)

Practicing yoga grants our body the opportunity to clear stagnant energy. We release things that no longer serve us. Our body has the ability to move fluidly and consciously in the present moment. On the other hand, meditation gifts inner stillness. Practicing meditation and yoga create space in your body and mind for your soul to shine through. Both practices require a heightened sense of awareness, after prolonged exposure to these practices, I believe one not only becomes more self-aware, but they are also in tune with the environment around them.

Synchronicities

Cultivating a spiritual practice, whether that be through meditation, yoga, or possibly something different allows us to internalize and connect with the life force energy that resides within us all. Habitual practices allow us to become aware of who we truly are and the environment that surrounds us. “Noticing is the doorway to the transcendental self.” (Morrissey, 2021).

Transcendental signifies the Higher Self. When our awareness is heightened we begin to notice moments in our lives that are quite literally... magical.

Over the past two years I have grown significantly more curious about the science of synchronicities. What are synchronicities you might ask? Well according to author Sky Nelson-Isaacs, synchronicities are “an event that seems meaningfully related to what is going on in our lives, especially related to the choices we have made or are trying to make.” (Nelson-Isaacs, 2019, p. 17). The word coincidence might come to mind here; however, a coincidence would be something like, you brought the same sandwich in as your coworker. This coincidence has no significance or deeper meaning attached to it. Where a synchronicity perfectly aligns with an aspect in your life and that specific moment in time soulfully resonates with you. The moment brought about insight, growth, or change in some way shape or form.

It is my thought that the word coincidence gained so much traction over that of synchronicity because unlike coincidences, synchronicities require a great deal of faith and knowing that this specific experience, this significant moment in time was meant for you. We place so much energy into writing things off as coincidence when really these magical moments happen for a divine reason. It is my belief that when these unexplainable things happen in our lives it is the universe connecting to the energy of our Higher Self, telling us that we are in fact on the right path, we are moving towards living our most authentic truth.

Ironically, the fact that I am sitting here in this moment writing about what I would consider part of my life's purpose is a synchronicity in and of itself. I chose to enter into this master's program truthfully for one reason. That reason being, in order to teach Art Education here in New York State I would have to obtain a master's degree. I never considered that entering this program would have such a profound influence on my spiritual path and the overall trajectory of where I see my life going.

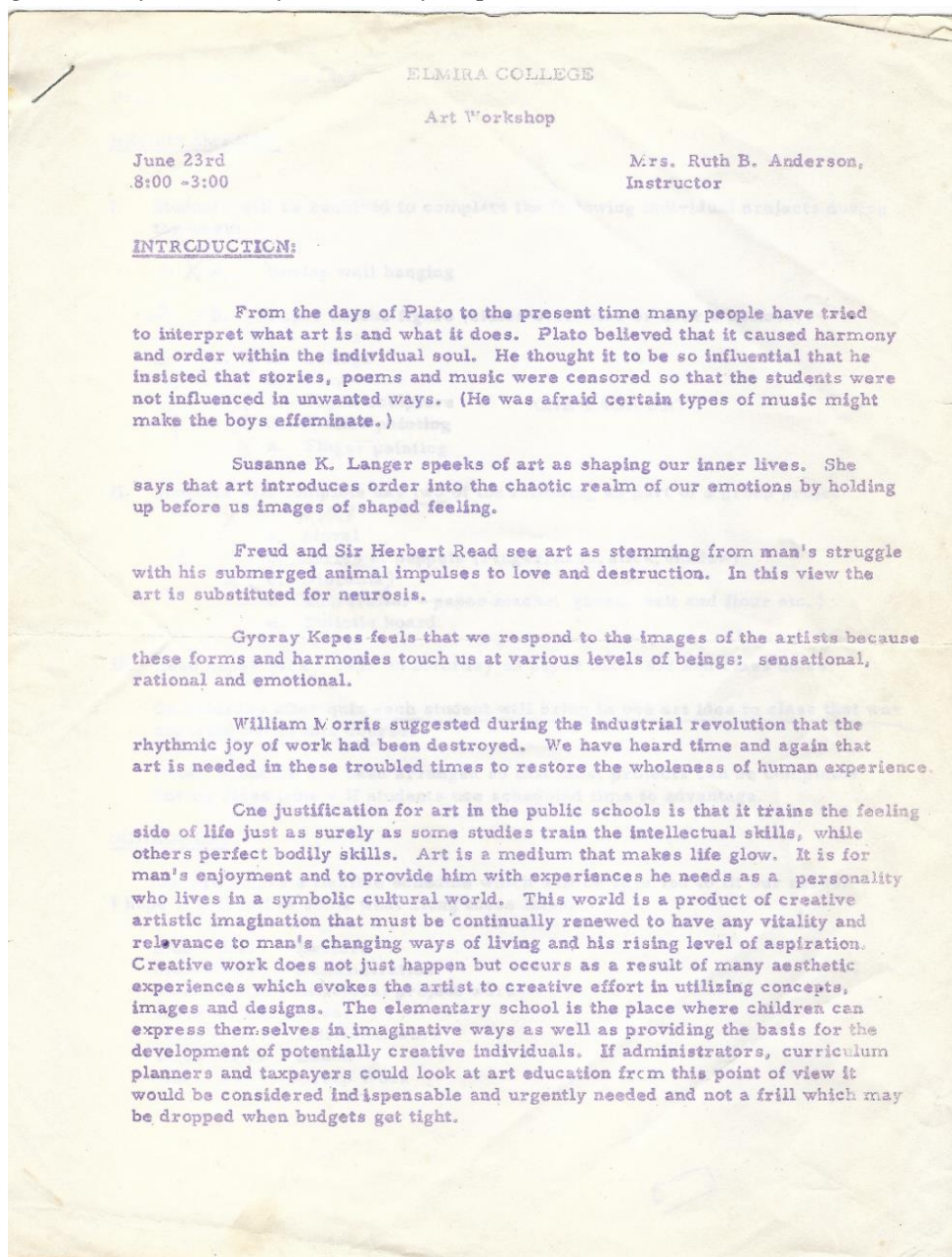
The connection between spirituality and creativity became more apparent and real to me when my *Current Issues in Creative Studies* professor, assigned a project that required us to find a relatively new creativity book. We would later write a blog post for our classmates about the overarching theme of the book. The book I synchronistically stumbled upon was Sky Nelson-Isaacs *Living in Flow; The Science of Synchronicity and How Your Choices Shape Your World*. This is where the two paths collided, and I realized there is a significant relationship between ones spiritually and the strength of their personal creativity.

“Synchronicity and meaningful experiences exist at the crossroads between our sense of purpose (on the inside) and our practical experiences (on the outside).” (The Synchronicity Institute, 2017). Upon entering my final semester of this master's program, I knew in my heart I had to dive deeper into this newfound truth. I wanted to focus all of my attention on studying and forming my own beliefs around the relationship between creativity and spirituality. A couple weeks prior my cousin dropped off a bag of art education books that she had found gathering dust in our grandparents' basement. I am lucky to say that I come from a long line of artists and educators. I am sure my family's history ties into why these two paths are so clear to me and why the passion I have resides so deep in my heart. She figured these books may be of use to me, as I myself am an artist and have my undergraduate degree in art education. Within this stack of

books out falls a weathered, faded piece of paper that reads, "From the days of Plato to the present time many people have tried to interpret what art is and what it does. Plato believed that it caused harmony and order within the individual soul."

Figure 1

The Magical & Mysterious Synchronicity Paper



Excuse me... what? The paper continues on with other statements that magically align with everything I am speaking of here. I gasped and suddenly felt my whole body engulfed in those little goosebump tingles. You know exactly what I am referring to here, we've all felt it. The moment when your body energetically syncs with present reality. This instant change in my physical state – that's my body screaming YES! Your beliefs are real, and your thoughts have meaning. I knew in that moment... I *felt* in that moment that this piece of paper was supposed to find me and this topic that I have so much passion for is as real as I feel it to be in my soul.

“Syn-chron-icity means “arising together in time,” and indicates a situation where surprising events fall into place in meaningful ways.” (The Synchronicity Institute, 2017). Quite literally the synchronicity fell into my lap. What are the chances that a piece of paper, roughly from the 1960s, one in which clearly states a connection between the creative act of art and one's soul finds its way to me? Old me probably would have chalked that moment up to pure coincidence. New me knows that there is no way this significant moment should be overlooked or downplayed, and I must run with my inner knowing and passion behind the connection of these two profound topics.

Previously I mentioned that synchronicities and meaningful experiences exist at a crossroads. This intersection combines “our sense of purpose (one the inside) and our practical experiences (on the outside).” (The Synchronicity Institute, 2017). What is ironic about this definition is that American Psychologist, Carl Rogers also recognizes that “both internal & external conditions are necessary to enhance the creative process.” (1959). Creativity thrives on our ability to notice connections. Coming to know one's true Higher Self opens up room for heightened awareness of both self and external sources. You become increasingly aware, you are able to see things as they are and use them to your benefit. “People who are good at having

creative ideas are good at seeing connections. By training your ability to see connections, you improve your capacity to think creatively.” (Nielsen, Thurber, 2016, p. 18). The more you tune in, synchronistic moments will happen in your life more frequently. Your creativity will flourish because you are able to make connections and find a synergy between your Higher Self within and the external environment around you.

Dreams

It is said that we spend nearly one-third of our lives sleeping or attempting to do so. Sleep is important for obvious reasons. It rejuvenates our bodies and allows us to rest, giving us ample energy to take on the next day. While all that is true and crucial for our well-being, sleep holds within it a lot more power than we give it credit. Specifically creative power. Sleep expert, Neil Stanley explains that roughly twenty-five percent of our night is spent dreaming. (Mckenna, 2020). This is true for everyone. It is said that every mammal dreams, but not every one of us remember our dreams, however with practice and intention this can be achieved.

There is still so much uncertainty about what dreams are and why we experience them. Are they messages? If so, from where? Do our dreams hold meaning? Are they facets of our imagination? Or are they simply just meant to be a mystery, an unexplainable aspect of lives? There is always research being done to better help us understand our dreams. However, it is clear that it can be rather difficult to gather data and attest to the validity of something that is so intangible and personal to every human being. According to Freud, "The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind." (Freud, Strachey, 2010). I believe what he is saying here is that our dreams give us insight to what is happening behind the scenes and how our subconscious minds are interrupting our waking lives.

There are many theories that suggest why we have dreams. Often times, a lot of these theories are very technical and for this reason it is hard for experts to come an agreement that looks at them with a more holistic approach. For something to be deemed valid and true, we expect proof as to what makes it that way. Like creativity, I believe dreams connect us to the soulful nature of being a spiritual being having a human experience. I believe dreams break down the barrier between the spiritual realm and our understanding of waking life. From my spiritual point of view, dreams are extremely personal and hold within them an abundance of creative energy. This creative insight is unique to each and every one of us.

What is even more exciting, from a scientific approach, recent studies suggest that there is a massive link between one's creativity and REM (Rapid Eye Movement) dreaming. In fact, Harvard psychiatrist J. Allen Hobson believes dreaming is the mental state most likely to foster creativity. (Hobson, Pace-Schott, Stickgold, 1970). When dreaming, "we gain access to emotions without the cognitive controls normally present, networks of associated memories that we cannot normally access. In REM, the brain is looking for new ways to connect these associative networks, allowing us to form novel associations. Stickgold et al. hypothesize that the brain identifies and evaluates these new connections, which can lead either to a strengthening or weakening of associations. If a new association is strengthened sufficiently, it gets laid down as new memory. This is the neurological correlate of a new idea or possibility for the patient." (Domash, 2021, p.122).

"Participants who were woken up during REM sleep were able to solve up to 35% more puzzles than participants who were woken during non-REM sleep. Moreover, participants that woken whilst dreaming reported the solution simply "popped" into their heads" (Atherton, 2021). This discovery may attest to why some of the most prominent creative individuals

discovered many of their most potent creative ideas in their dreams. Paul McCartney explains the melody for “Yesterday” was discovered in a dream. He woke up and immediately began composing what is now considered one of the greatest songs of the 20th century. (Safi, 2015).

World renown Surrealist artist Salvador Dali and Inventor Thomas Edison both shared an appreciation for the dream world as well. They both would hold small inanimate objects in their hands over a hard surface while taking a cat nap. Just before they dozed off into a deep sleep, their hand would go limp causing the object to fall and startle them awake. Moments after awakening they would begin the process of bringing that dream to life for, they knew some of their best, most creative ideas were found in their dreamscapes. (Aridi, 2021).2w

Not every idea found in a dream may lead to a New York Times best seller or life enhancing invention, but it is obvious that there is creative vault in our dreamscapes. This creative source has the ability to enhance our lives and deepen our relations to cocreate with the universe. Through conscious intention we can capitalize on this creative energy that our dream state holds.

Imagination

The knowledge we gain and all of our experiences that turn into memories, are stored somewhere in our mind. Many of which are most likely stored in the conscious mind; however, I believe there is something special about the way we utilize our subconscious mind. I like to think of our subconscious as the library to our imagination. Mary Morrissey profoundly said, “The content of my life is the curriculum of my evolution”. (Morrissey, 2019). When we daydream, we pull bits and pieces from the parts of our brain that have stored the memories and perceptions we have gathered throughout our life. We pick apart moments and attach them to other memories

and in doing so we create new visual images for ourselves. We foster new ideas. Carl Jung once said, “These subliminal aspects of everything that happens to us may seem to play very little part in our daily lives. But they are the almost invisible roots of our conscious thoughts.” (Mlodinow, 2013, p. 3). We pick details from these moments, we add to our past experiences, we expand on past perceptions, and most importantly we play with the memories we have stored throughout our life. “The work done by the subconscious is a critical part of our evolutionary survival mechanism.” (Mlodinow, 2013, p. 5) “That which is derived from the subconscious has a powerful effect in our evolution. That sounds a lot like creativity, does it not?” (Vesneske, 2022). Creativity is the vehicle for change. It is innovation and progress. Creativity evolves our way of being. Our imagination allows our creativity to take root.

“Our imagination is a true gift, and it should be utilized to its fullest potential every day. In fact, I believe the imagination is *play* for the soul.” (Vesneske, 2022). “My inner playground was getting pretty interesting when I realized that gravity, scale, color and sound -- and whatever else -- could be controlled by me in an instant.” (Koven, 2005). Bernie De Koven mastered the act of *play*. He knew that stretching and flexing one’s imagination was crucial for the birth of new, authentic ideas. Our imagination is something we can call our very own, for there are no bounds within our own mind.

For a fun and comforting comparison “I see our imagination as a roommate to our soul. In order for them to live in harmony with one another they must interact through play. However, like any living situation, *silence* and moments for *self-reflection* is needed for both parties to exist peacefully. When we pause and center ourselves in the present moment, we allow space to exist within our minds. This space opens up room for new ideas to be birthed into existence.” (Vesneske, 2022).

Boredom and moments of that inner stillness we touched on previously are precursors for our imagination. With the rise of social media our attention span, I would argue has dramatically decreased. I know for myself that the act of being “bored” can be rather unstimulating at times. However, I have learned to change my perception and act upon those moments of both outward and inner stillness. I gift myself the opportunity to visualize, daydream, and imagine whatever I want for we have the power to think about absolutely anything we desire. Psychologist Leanne Domash writes “a goal is to encourage clinicians to explore the varieties of imagination open to them and their patients: the spiritual, the relational, the dreamworld, the aesthetic and the adaptive. Each provides a basis for creative living.” (2021, p.5). She further explains that “Arnold Modell (2008) writes we are meant to express what is unique about ourselves, to self-actualize. This begins with freedom of the imagination, which leads to agency and the creation of new meanings.” (Domash, 2021, p.5).

I believe, “creativity is the perfect combination of the inner workings of our soul, imagination, and the sweet spot where our minds pause and allow space for new things to be brought to light.” (Vesneske, 2022). I know from personal experience that if you desire more creativity in your life allow yourself to daydream. Make up stories, play make believe, connect with your inner child, dance with your sense of wonder, and become aware of the things that intrigue your curiosity. Let your imagination run wild.

The Power of Art

Most people when questioned if they are creative immediately think of their artistic abilities or lack thereof. There is no question that art and creativity connect with one another. Often times people who are... let’s say, incapable of drawing realistically deem themselves not

creative. That is far from the truth. We now know and better understand that creativity is found in relativity every aspect of life. Just because someone cannot draw or paint a realistic figure or image that they consider beautiful does not mean they lack creativity or skill. Art can be and often times is extremely subjective. What one might view as striking another may view as hideous.

One of the many things I have learned having spent the past two years engulfed in the study of creativity is that it thrives in a non-judgmental atmosphere. What is interesting about this statement is... don't we thrive in a non-judgmental atmosphere as well? We do our best in life when we are surrounded by people who fully embrace all of the uniqueness and beauty we possess and express outward. Creativity is virtually the same. Release any limiting beliefs about whether or not you believe yourself to be an artist or creative individual. The truth of the matter is, we are always creating, therefore we are all artists.

“The aesthetic imagination heals. Instead of merely expressing the self, the artist reshapes it. She brings her unconscious thoughts and feelings into the external world and in so doing transforms them.” (Domash, 2021, p.144). Art is healing and full of so much information. It is the gateway into our thoughts, feelings, energy, and emotion. Creating truly is an act of true self-expression. When you immerse yourself in the act of artmaking and do so in a way that is non-judgmental, you give yourself permission to make mistakes. Some of the most beautiful creations in life happened because of happy accidents.

Art quite literally creates a magic portal for us to experience the thoughts and feelings of its maker. It cultivates empathy. It expands our perception, and it touches us in ways we never thought possible. “A real piece of art is a window into the transcendental. And you need that in your life because you're finite and limited and bounded by your ignorance and your lack of

knowing. And unless you can make a connection to the transcendental, then you don't have the strength to prevail." (Peterson, 2017). This quote is a lot to unbox, it touches on the power that art holds, the vulnerability it carries, and the maturity it possesses. Art gifts us the ability to evolve in every aspect of life. It connects us to one another in a personal and deeply meaningful way.

I urge you to spend time creating. Make a conscious intention to leave all judgment at the door and color just for the sake of coloring. Go and get your hands super messy. Experiment. If all of this seems a bit too daunting right now, then set aside time to go and view art instead. Spend the day at the museum. Sit in front of works and ponder them. Formulate your own beliefs about what it means or why it was created. Read the artist statement. Be open to being pleasantly surprised. Return the following week and do it again. I can almost guarantee that you will gain new insights and acquire an appreciation for works you were not drawn to the last time. Allow yourself to shift perspectives. Art is a window into the souls of those walking beside us. Appreciate the power of art and all of the beauty it possesses.

SECTION FIVE: KEY LEARNINGS

Creativity & Spirituality

“Creativity, on the other hand, is developed through the investment of energy over the long term” (Nelson-Isaacs, 2019, p.174). As I mentioned above, I believe spirituality is the religion of thyself. It is the intentional practice of coming to know who you truly are. Deepening one’s spirituality is the golden ticket to unlocking the unique creative energy within you. Spiritual Teacher, Lada Ray is credited with stating, “Spiritual growth and creativity are two sides of the same coin.” When you strengthen one the other strengthens equally as much. They go hand in hand.

Spirituality brings us back to the core; it aligns us with who we are. When we put forth the work to gain a better understanding of our true nature, we are then able to stand confidently and proudly in that truth. Anything we share with the world thereafter reflects that, that is within us. I believe creativity is the language of our souls. When we express our creative energy with the world, we are rightfully aligning with who we are at the core. In doing so we are physically making our soul tangible.

“Creativity is cyclical. It is as individual as it is universal.” (Tilley, 2013). This quote very much resonated with me because I believe that we have an ever-flowing abundance of creativity within us and all around us. Living authentically is living creativity. Authenticity is not only additive because you have learned to stand in your power, but it is also magnetic. When we express our creativity with the world, we inspire others to do the same. It is a never-ending cycle. The more we give and express the more we receive it back in abundance.

Spirituality is a lifelong practice. There are many beautiful ways you can connect with your Higher Self which will allow you comfort in knowing who you truly are. I have only

touched on a handful of practices and teachings one can implement into their lives but for a recap lets quickly refresh our memory.

Feed your *mind, body, and soul*, every day. Start by doing even just one thing a day that focuses on each of these integral parts of life. Embrace your weirdness! Release fear of what others think. Fear kills *authenticity*. Nurture both the masculine and feminine energies that reside within you. *Find balance within*. Focus on the present moment. Set the intention to be mindful at least once a day until you can make a habit of it. Set the goal to live in flow. Be here. Be *Now*. Mediate and find home within that *inner stillness*. Stretch! Dance! Throw your headphones on and have a silent disco with yourself. Be silly, be goofy, move your body! Become aware of the connections and *synchronicities* in your life. Be receptive to them. Turn to nature, she will show you the patterns. Keep a dream journal. Instead of checking your phone first thing in the morning, grab a pen, record your *dreams*. Pay attention to what they are showing you, your Higher Self is coming through to communicate. Get inspired. Daydream! Utilize the power of your *imagination* every single day. Cultivate empathy. Get messy!! Go create something rad and share it with the world! Go look at *art*. It is powerful. Gain a new perspective and then buy it and hang it on your wall to be inspired every day. Share your vibrant, creative, authentic self with the world and watch the magic of your life unfold.

SECTION SIX: CONCLUSION

What better way to end this than in a “synchronistic” fashion? As I was sifting through YouTube for TEDx talks related to my paper topic I grazed at the comments under the video I was watching and came across this, “In order to be open to creativity, one must have the capacity for constructive use of solitude. One must overcome the fear of being alone.” (May, 2009, p. 101). Psychologist, Rollo Reece May put into words, very simply the essence of what my paper explored.

Taking the time to discover who you truly are is the best gift you could possibly give yourself. I would argue it is the best gift you can give those around you as well. Your courageous action to live authentically will inspire everyone you come in contact with to do the same.

It is never my intention to bestow my beliefs upon anyone. All I can do is share my truth and hope that my voice and perspective find those who need it most. Wayne W. Dyer is quoted saying, “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” I believe creativity is undoubtedly linked to our innate spiritual nature. The depth at which one knows thyself is the depth of one’s creativity. When you search to discover the truth of who you are, your Higher Self and creativity will meet you on the other side. It is your right to be spiritual. It is your right to be creative. Both are innate within you, and I hope you share them both with the world.

“Make me a channel for Divine creativity, use me as an instrument for a Higher Will.” (Baron-Reid).

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