

The subjective experience of creativity and posttraumatic growth after the loss of a loved one

K Pretorius
22844554

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Supervisor: Prof AW Nienaber

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DECLARATION

I, Karen Pretorius, declare that this research project *The subjective experience of creativity and posttraumatic growth after the loss of a loved one* is original work done by myself.

Submission is for the requirements of the partial fulfilment of Magister Science in Counselling Psychology, North-West University. This work has never been submitted for examination. The necessary consent and authorization was given to me to carry out this research. Further it is important to note that appropriate acknowledgement is given to all the reference material.

Karen Pretorius

Date

Student number: 22844554

Prof. A. W. Nienaber

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SUMMARY

The subjective experience of creativity and posttraumatic growth after the loss of a loved one.

The purpose of this research was to explore the subjective experience of creativity and posttraumatic growth (PTG) after an adult had lost a loved one, and to explore whether creativity might contribute to PTG. Creativity is seen as the ability of an individual to develop novel and pioneering ideas. Ordinary people incorporate creativity to overcome everyday problems, this is regarded as everyday creativity. PTG is the process of people being faced with trauma, but then grow in the aftermath of it. This is further described in a literature review that had been performed.

The compulsory approval was obtained from the Research Committee, as well as the Board of Faculties of North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. Each participant also gave their verbal and written consent regarding their participation in the study.

The participants ranged from 20 years to 26 years of age, and males as well as females were included. The races represented in this study were black, coloured and white.

A qualitative approach was followed in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with these participants. The two questions posed were: *Which, if any, aspects of thinking about life in new ways did you experience as a result of losing a loved one* and *How did these new ways of thinking possibly relate or contribute to a sense of change in yourself?*

Upon receiving answers to these questions the researcher probed further. The data were then analysed according to Braun and Clarke`s linear model.

The results of the study showed that PTG had taken place after the loss of their loved ones. The areas in which the participants mentioned the most growth are: They had gained a

sense of maturation in which they feel they have more responsibilities and they feel as if they now were more resilient. Then they incorporate more emotional support, as well as give more emotional and financial support, and they also report taking part in community service activities. Furthermore, the participants also reported an increase in self-awareness, and they now have a better understanding of what their needs are, and in addition to this they experience a heightened spiritual awareness. They also try to find meaning for the trauma, and have a deeper appreciation for life and their loved ones. The last theme that emerged is the idea that participants feel humbled.

From the results it is clear that participants do attempt creative expeditions in order to grow. This is seen in the two aspects of creative problem solving which links up with the area of PTG in the heightened sense of maturation as well as feeling more resilient. The other aspect of creativity is that of spirituality, which could contribute to PTG.

KEYWORDS: Creativity, everyday creativity, posttraumatic growth, adults, losing a loved one

OPSOMMING

Die subjektiewe ervarings van kreatiwiteit en posttraumatiese groei na die verlies van 'n geliefde.

Die doel van die studie was om die subjektiewe ervarings van kreatiwiteit en posttraumatiese groei (PTG) nadat 'n volwassene 'n geliefde aan die dood afgestaan het, te ondersoek, en om verder ondersoek in te stel daarna om vas te stel of kreatiwiteit tot PTG kon bydra. Kreatiwiteit word beskou as 'n individu se vermoë om nuwe en baanbrekende idees te ontwikkel. Gewone mense inkorporeer kreatiwiteit om alledaagse probleme te oorkom. PTG is die proses waartydens mense groei ervaar na hul traumatiese ervarings. Hierdie aspekte word verder verduidelik in die rapportering van die literatuurstudie wat uitgevoer is.

Die nodige goedkeuring is van die Navorsingskomitee af ontvang, asook van die Raad van die Noordwes-Universiteit, Potchefstroomkampus. Elke deelnemer het verbaal en skriftelik ingestem om deel te wees van die studie.

Die deelnemers was tussen die ouderdomme 20 en 26 jaar, en mans sowel as vroue het deel uitgemaak van die studie. Die rassegroepe wat verteenwoordig was, is blank, swart en Kleurling.

'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingbenadering is gevolg, en semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is met die deelnemers gevoer. Daar is twee vrae in die onderhoude gestel: *Hoe, indien enige, aspekte van dink oor die lewe in nuwe maniere het jy ervaar as 'n resultaat van die verlies van 'n geliefde, en hoe hou hierdie nuwe maniere van dink moontlik verband met, of het bygedra tot, 'n sin van verandering in jouself?* Nadat antwoorde op die vrae ontvang is, het die onderhoudvoerder verder uitgevra en ondersoek ingestel. Die data is aan die hand van Braun en Clarke se liniêre model ontleed.

Die resultate van die studie dui daarop dat PTG wel plaasgevind het na die verlies van hul geliefdes. Die areas waarin deelnemers die meeste groei ervaar het, is: Hulle het 'n verhoogde gevoel van volwassenheid ervaar waarin hulle voel dat hulle nou meer verantwoordelike is, asook dat hulle nou oor meer veerkragtigheid beskik. Verder inkorporeer hulle meer emosionele ondersteuning, hulle gee meer emosionele en finansiële ondersteuning en hulle noem ook dat hulle meer betrokke is by gemeenskapsdiensorganisasies. Verder rapporteer die deelnemers 'n verhoging in bewustheid van hulleself waardeur hulle 'n beter begrip van hulle eie behoeftes bekom. Gepaard hiermee is daar 'n dieper spirituele bewustheid. Verder poog hulle ook om betekenis vir die trauma te vind, en het ook 'n dieper waardering vir die lewe en hul geliefdes. Die laaste tema wat na vore gekom het, was dat deelnemers gevoel het die trauma het hulle nederig gemaak.

Uit die resultate is dit duidelik dat die deelnemers op kreatiewe wyses gepoog het om te groei. Dit is herkenbaar uit die twee aspekte van kreatiewe probleemoplossing wat verband hou met PTG waar 'n verhoogde gevoel van volwassenheid plaasgevind het, asook die gevoel dat hulle nou veerkragtiger is. Die ander aspek van kreatiwiteit is dié van spiritualiteit, wat moontlik ook tot PTG kan bydra.

SLEUTELWOORDE: Kreatiwiteit, alledaagse kreatiwiteit, posttraumatiese groei, volwassenes, verlies van 'n geliefde

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SECTION A

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1. ORIENTATION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Creativity is defined as the development of unique and innovative ideas that is valuable. It is seen to be an essential trait among people who create artwork, music or writing, and includes the capability to have flexible thoughts (Boden, 1998; Weiten, 2010). Feldman (1988), mentions that creativity can be a singularly occurring, great notion, but is usually a long-term process. Associational fluency is also regarded as an important feature in a creative mind. Gabora (2002), mentions that associational fluency is the ease in observing numerous details or stimuli in a certain situation.

In research it is clear that trauma can be an inspiration to creativity (Weiten, 2010). Trauma is also an inspiration for growth (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2014).

PTG (posttraumatic growth) is when trauma is the means through which someone grows in a positive manner (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014). Tedeschi and Calhoun (1998) theorise PTG as suffering that produces the possibility for growth and improvement. Thus PTG focuses on a higher quality of life, and positive alterations, not just the return to pre-trauma levels of functioning (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014).

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996, 2004) differentiate between five domains for PTG. These include new possibilities, relating to others in a more sincere manner, appreciation of life, change of priorities, and spiritual and existential change.

Research mentions that adversity provides the necessary inspiration and notion for the initiation of a creative project or creative conception (Forgeard, 2013). Baumgardner and

Crothers (2014) indicate that there is a link between very creative individuals and the experience of adversity in their lives (Miller, James, Johnson, & Read, 2012).

Creativity is far more than innovative ideas and creating. Ripple (1989) hypothesizes this idea of everyday creativity as the way in which regular people think in unique ways when they face problems in their everyday lives.

When looked at growth after trauma, Shakespeare-Finch and Armstrong (2010) found that the bereaved group had the highest correlation with PTG.

This understanding provides the theoretical groundwork for exploring the idea of everyday creativity contributing to PTG after the loss of a loved one.

2. AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aimed at exploring experiences of creativity and the degree to which this contributed to a sense of posttraumatic growth (PTG) after adults had suffered losing a loved one.

3. STRUCTURE OF THE MINI-DISSERTATION

The mini-dissertation will be submitted in the format of an article, in line with the General Regulation A.13.7 of the North-West University. The article will be submitted for publication in the Journal of Psychology in Africa. The editorial approach and referncing style of Section A, Section B and Section D is in accordance with the guidelines of the Publication Maual of the American Psychological Association (APA). The article (Section C) follows the requirements of the Journal of Psychology in Africa. Each section ends off with a references list. A total reference list is also included. The structure will be:

Section A: Orientation and statement of the problem is discussed. Attention was given to the literature available on the ideas of creativity in everyday life, posttraumatic growth, and how creativity may contribute to a sense of posttraumatic growth. The rationale for the study was explained.

Section B: Literature overview: Creativity is defined and explored, then attention is given to trauma, where after posttraumatic growth is explained. Everyday creativity is then explored. Lastly adversity providing the means for creativity is looked at. This section ends off with an overview of positive psychology as the theoretical basis for this study.

Section C: Research Article: *The subjective experience of creativity and posttraumatic growth after the loss of a loved one.* The article is written according to the guidelines given by the Journal of Psychology in Africa.

Section D: Personal reflection, strengths, recommendations and limitations.

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SECTION B

INTEGRATED LITERATURE REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

In this section the definition of creativity, as well as how it comes about will be discussed. Trauma is occasionally seen as an inspiration to creative thinking, and this aspect will receive attention. This will then be discussed as a component of Posttraumatic growth (PTG), while PTG will be explained in broader terms and placed into context. For purposes of this study creativity will then be narrowed down to everyday creativity and adversity as the provider of the means of everyday creativity. PTG is vastly influenced by the different types of trauma that occur, and this will then be scrutinized. This section will be concluded with a broad overview of why positive psychology was used in this study as the theoretical basis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining creativity

Creativity comprises the development of innovative, unique and beneficial ideas, and it is seen to be an indispensable trait among artists, writers, and musicians. This includes the ability to have flexible thoughts (Weiten, 2010). According to Feldman (1988), creativity can be a singularly occurring, great notion. However, in the majority of times a creative eruption comes from extensive time spent with an idea. It usually happens in an analytical manner, where something grows over time from a small idea to a huge concept (Weisberg, 1993). Weisberg (1999) mentions that creativity requires a thorough study and training of the implicated area of expertise.

2.2 Divergent thinking as a component of creativity

For many years divergent thinking was depicted as the essence of creativity (Weiten, 2010). Barron and Harrington (1981) carefully mention that some tests that score divergent thinking do successfully predict creativity. The research field of creativity is, however, not a modern one and dates back as far as the 1950s. Guilford (1958) points out that divergent thinking is the cognitive ability to come up with a wide array of choices from thoughts that run off in different directions. Guilford associates divergent thinking with four major components which include fluency, which is the ability to quickly generate many solutions to a problem; flexibility, which is the deliberation of many solutions to a problem at the same time; originality, which is the skill to produce ideas that are different from other ideas; and elaboration, which is the capability of thinking through the specifics of an idea and carrying it out. Opposed to divergent thinking is the idea of convergent thinking where a single correct answer is required. Convergent thinking refers to the deductive generation of the optimal solution to a given problem, usually where there are persuasive inferences (Weiten, 2010). Therefore divergent thinking is more popularly associated with the idea of creativity.

2.3 Intelligence as part of creativity

When creativity comes to mind one is inclined to think of intelligence. The correlation between intelligence and creativity is not very strong, although a threshold hypothesis has been developed by Torrance (1962), which displays the relationship between creativity and intelligence. This hypothesis states that only a minimum level of intelligence is desirable for a creative invention (Torrance, 1962). Sternberg (1985) studied intelligence, wisdom and creativity, and concluded that measures of intelligence and creativity are mainly independent of each other. Contemporary literature has successfully built on this concept (Weisberg 2011).

2.4 A creative personality

A further exploration of creativity needs to address the question as to whether or not a creative type of personality exists. Weisberg (2011) states that no particular personality type accounts for creativity, although some studies show stronger links with personality qualities (Weiten, 2010). Maslow (1968) mentioned that out of the two types of creativity that exist, namely special talent creativeness and self-actualizing creativeness, the latter does come directly from the personality, and is displayed in normal everyday life. Psychologists researching personality found that *personality* can be accurately summarised in relation to five wide-ranging characteristics, namely Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience (Costa & McCrae, 1997).). The aspect of Openness to Experience is the most renowned predictors of creativity (Feist, 1998). A study done by Cheng, Hee Kim and Hull (2010) compared the creative styles and personality types of 169 American and Taiwanese college students. Their study was based on Jung`s theory of personality types. Jung (1971) believed that personality type is stable but the person`s own report of it changes, because the mental processes of people change in the different stages of life that they are in. Jung then acknowledged eight personality types; Extroversion, Introversion, Feeling, Thinking, Intuition, Sensing, Judging and Perceiving. According to this theory the study yields results to show that Intuition, as well as Perceiving are essential characteristics for creativity. Feist (1998) found, in a meta-analysis of more than 80 studies, that extremely creative individuals have a tendency to be more autonomous, norm-doubting, open to new experiences, self-confident, ambitious and impulsive.

2.5 Trauma

Research has focused on trauma as an inspiration to creativity (Weiten, 2010). But the consequences of traumatic events yield two sides to a coin. Extremely stressful events (such

as accidents, death of those one cares about, financial struggles, divorce, physical impairments etc.) have the potential of creating negative behavioural, psychological, and emotional consequences to the disruptive and adverse circumstances (Forgeard, 2013). This can also lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Ramos & Leal, 2013). PTSD is a well-known term, by which a person is diagnosable after being exposed to a traumatic occurrence that has resulted in a response of forced fear, helplessness, or horror. It is classified as an anxiety disorder (Burke, 2012). The other side of the coin is the fascinating concept of posttraumatic growth (PTG), which can be viewed as a counterpoint to PTSD (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014).

The loss of a loved one is seen as a very traumatic event, and may change the way in which an individual views the world (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014). Shakespeare-Finch and Armstrong, (2010) found that this traumatic event has a strong link to PTG.

2.6 Defining posttraumatic growth

PTG is the positive growth that can be produced from the repercussion of trauma (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014). This is different than resilience. Bonanno (2012) refers to positive adjustment and healthy functioning following trauma as resilience. The term posttraumatic growth is also known as stress-related growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), perceived benefits (McMillen & Fischer, 1998), benefit finding (Tennen & Afleck, 2002), positive adaption (Linley, 2003), and growth through adversity (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Many people report a superior appreciation for life and the ones they care about, an amplified sense of personal forte, and a sense of what is important in life (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014). Tedeschi and Calhoun (1998) conceptualize PTG as personal suffering that produces the potential for growth and enrichment. Thus PTG focuses on a higher quality of life, and positive alterations, not just the return to pre-trauma levels of functioning (Baumgardner &

Crothers, 2014). When considering the development of PTG, it is important to consider the individual's characteristics. The subjective understanding of the traumatic event is one of the main influences (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1998). Thus the event is only traumatic if it alters the cognitive way in which the person sees the world, and destroys the assumptive world of the person. The person has to put his/her world back together, through cognitive processes. This then paves the way for PTG (Ramos & Leal, 2013). Tugade, Fredrickson and Feldman Barrett (2004) mention that PTG includes flexibility in response to changing situational demand. Other elements that must be considered when PTG is discussed include management of emotional distress, self-disclosure and rumination (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1998). Emotional distress refers to the distress or anxiety suffered as a response to a sudden, severe, and saddening experience (James & Gililand, 2013). Self-disclosure consists of a wide range of phenomena, which includes simple details of facts to a complex meaningful narrative. It includes both positive and negative emotions (Purves & Erwin, 2004). Rumination refers to the fixated attention on the symptom of one's suffering in a compulsive manner. It also includes focusing on the consequences as opposed to the solutions (Taku, Cann, Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2009).

Furthermore it is important to acknowledge the contribution of personality to PTG. Bonanno et al. (2002) mentions that certain personality traits are associated with coping efficacy. These include emotional stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, perceived confidence in coping, and the propensity to introspect.

2.7 Posttraumatic growth and meaning-making

Prieto and Altmaier (2012) theorize that meaning-making is an important part of PTG. This includes making sense of the incident, and discovering the benefits or beneficial outcomes. Nolen-Hoeksema, Davis and Larson (1998) studied these two progressions of

meaning-making. They conducted a prospective and longitudinal study in which they interviewed 200 participants who had to cope with the loss of a family member. The participants were interviewed before the loss, and again at 6, 13 and 18 months subsequent to the loss. Results indicated that in the first year following the loss, making sense of it correlated highly with less distress. After that it was found in the interviews conducted 13 and 18 months after the loss, that benefit-finding associated strongly with adjusting.

The contrary to finding meaning supports the importance thereof for experiencing growth after a traumatic event. Bonanno et al. (2002) conclude that there are people who look for but are unable to find meaning after the loss of a loved one. These individuals are then more prone to experience prolonged grief compared to the other people in their study.

2.8 Domains of posttraumatic growth

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996, 2004) distinguish between five classifiable domains for PTG. These include a greater sense of personal strength (new possibilities), relating to others in a warmer and more intimate manner, appreciation of life, changed sense of priorities, and spiritual and existential change. These domains do not all need to be met for PTG to occur, and can be accompanied by some distress (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

2.9 Models of posttraumatic growth

Janoff-Bulman (1992) developed the Shattered Assumptions Theory for PTG. It speculates that adjustment is introduced by a traumatic event by means of the shattering of a core set of fundamental assumptions. This theory underlies the subsequent theories. A few years later Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) introduced the Transformational Model, also known as the Posttraumatic Growth Model. This model states that trauma challenges the core and assumptive beliefs of a person, and consequently the emotional distress of that person is

heightened. The assumptive beliefs additionally provide the context for the trauma. The emotional distress is alleviated by the beliefs. Posttraumatic growth then occurs when the changed world is accepted, and a more intricate narrative or increased wisdom is attained. Joseph and Linley (2005) introduced the Organismic Valuing Theory. People have an innate predisposition to incorporate and comprehend in a significant way while striving towards ideal well-being.

2.10 Trauma as an inspiration to creativity

Past research reveals a link between exceedingly creative individuals and the experience of adversity throughout their lives. Barker (1995) illustrates this in her book on the renowned writers Emily, Anne and Charlotte Brontë, who experienced the death of their mother and older sisters early in their lives. Regardless of the tremendously sorrowful events they experienced, they managed to create masterpieces through their writing. In the qualitative study done by Reynolds (2004), the reflections were taken of 24 female textile artists on the process of creativity (all struggling with a chronic illness). The conclusion was drawn that the experience of chronic illness may contribute to the artists' experiences of creativity in their work. Additionally, Zausner (2007) studied this particular field of illness and its relation to creativity, and mentions that a physical illness that feels overwhelming at times can support a fresh and more creative existence. A connection has also been made between mental illnesses and creativity. Psychological disorders may also pose as an adversity throughout one's life. Ludwig (1995) conducted a study that estimates the occurrence of mental disorders among people that accomplished creative greatness. According to Ludwig, between 70 and 80% of writers and artists fell prey to a psychological disorder, as opposed to about 30% of the general population. A more focused aspect of this study includes the link between depression and creativity. Results yielded that the prevalence

of depression is close to 60% in writers and about 50% in artists, as opposed to the general population in which between 10 and 20% of people suffer from depression. In accordance with this, Kaufman, Bromley and Cole (2006) suggest that poets particularly display high occurrences of psychological disorders.

2.11 Openness to experience as a construct of posttraumatic growth and a predictor of creativity

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996; 2004) as mentioned above, distinguished five domains in which PTG occurs. Not all of these domains need to experience growth in order for overall PTG to exist. Self-reported PTG could be explained by two domains (Forgeard, 2013). These two domains is thus relevant when viewing PTG. A correlation was found between the personality trait of Openness to Experience and the PTG domains of new possibilities for one`s life and insight of improved personal strength (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Feist (1998) also found that Openness to Experience is one of the greatest recognized forecasters for creative thinking. Openness to Experience includes imagination, intellectual curiosity and aesthetics (Feist, 1998). Forgeard (2013) thus states a hypothesis, based on the research of above-mentioned studies, that the perceptions of increased creativity in the aftermath of trauma constitute a manifestation of PTG. This hypothesis proved to be accurate.

2.12 Everyday creativity

Contrary to popular belief, creativity is far more than crafting and novel ideas. The idea of everyday creativity is not modern, but rather dates back to 1962 when Maslow first introduced self-actualizing creativity (Maslow, 1962). Maslow first broke the tradition of calling creativity by its products, but rather as a facet of self-actualization. Maslow (1962) referred to self-actualization as the need for personal growth and discovery which exists

throughout a person's life. A person therefore never becomes static, and searches for something that brings meaning to his/her life. Further he indicates that creative individuals do not succumb to the idea that society is an inhibitor, but they rather surpass it. According to Maslow (1962), these creative individuals are not worried about what others might say, their own impulses frighten them less, they accept themselves more, they are not as much controlled, and not very self-conscious. Richards, Kinney, Benet and Merzel (1988) found that there is no measuring instrument for determining everyday creativity, and they developed the Lifetime Creativity Scale (LCS). This measuring device is based on the assumption that every person retains a certain degree of creativity, and this is displayed through a variety of outcomes which is not constricted to an explicit area of endeavour (Richards et al., 1988). Ripple (1989) postulates this idea of everyday creativity further as the way in which ordinary people think in inimitable ways when they stumble over problems in their everyday living circumstances. Mumford (2003) distinguishes between performance and potential, where performance is the product delivered of something innovative, but he does not elaborate on potential. Runco (2003) is in accordance with the idea of performance and potential as two separate constructs, but detects a problem when productivity is associated with creativity. Runco (2003) mentions that creativity is much broader than productivity, and he views it as a personal voyage. Additionally, productivity does not always encompass creativity. Examples are fame, reputation and numerous kinds of achievement.

2.13 Adversity providing the means for creativity

Linking this to PTG is the idea that adversities provide the necessary inspiration and notion for the initiation of a creative project or creative conception (Forgeard, 2013). It is a very well-known concept that trauma may lead to creativity (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014). Examples may include a scientist who pursues the roots of a problem he has to

overcome, people who lost a loved one and have to think of new ways to go on with life without the help of the deceased, and people who lost the use of a body part due to an accident or sickness and needing to find different means to carry on. Creative missions such as these brought on by past adversities may be explained as a practice of “survivor mission” (Eskreis-Winkler, Duckworth, & Shulman, 2014). The survivor mission is a kind of voyage a person takes on to help others or him/herself, and in this manner it can bring healing to a person after a traumatic event. The social action of survivor mission may take on many forms, such as helping others through a similar trauma, or taking action to raise awareness of a social problem. In this way a person makes a positive contribution to the environment, but also reaps benefits him/herself (Jirek, 2011).

2.14 The influence of different types of trauma on posttraumatic growth

Triplett, Tedeschi, Cann, Calhoun and Reeve (2012) found in a study performed with undergraduate Psychology students in the south-eastern United States that deliberate rumination is most highly correlated with posttraumatic growth. This designates that constructive cognitive determinations which follow challenges to the assumptive world will likely produce more growth. In agreement with this, Kira et al. (2013) confirmed their hypothesis in a study done with a Palestinian sample. Type 1 trauma, where constructive cognitive determination efforts were made, correlates positively with PTG. Type 1 trauma is a single occurrence of the trauma (Kira et al., 2013). A more in-depth view of the results by Kira et al. (2013) yielded that cumulative traumas represented a positive correlation with overall growth, survival, secondary and uprootment traumas. Cumulative traumas refer to six main types of trauma which are attachment (e.g. abandonment by parents), collective identity (e.g. discrimination, slavery-targeted massacre), secondary (e.g. compassion fatigue, first responders or witnessing traumatic events), personal identity (e.g. self-autonomy is

dishonoured, betrayal by rape, incest, physical and/ sexual abuse), survival traumas and gender discrimination (Kira et al., 2008; Kira et al., 2013). Furthermore, Shakespeare-Finch and Armstrong (2010) researched three groups of survivors of trauma to establish which group had experienced the most posttraumatic growth. The three distinguishable groups were the survivors of sexual abuse, motor-vehicle accidents, and a mourning group that had experienced loss of a loved one. Shakespeare-Finch and Armstrong (2010) found that the bereaved group had the highest correlation with PTG. Likewise Shear et al. (2011) mention in a study performed that explored the possibility of a bereavement diagnosis included in the DSM-5, that bereavement is a hurtful stressor that normally inflicts painful and debilitating symptoms of acute grief. This then frequently evolves to restoration of a satisfactory, if changed, life (Shear et al., 2011).

3. POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

This research is embedded in the Positive Psychology paradigm. A paradigm is important to direct the pursuit of knowledge according to a specific theory or viewpoint (Wilber, 2001). Positive psychology originated from the humanistic psychology, with its innovators being Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), to study positive character, emotion, and intuitions (Edwards, 2015). The Humanistic approach looked at human nature from a positive viewpoint, and sees the inner potential in every person to reach self-actualization (Rogers, 1961; Maslow, 1962). Positive psychology is defined as the scientific study of conventional human fortes, virtues, life circumstances and choices, and sociocultural condition that enhances a good life, as prescribed to principles of happiness and meaningfulness (Sheldon & King, 2001; Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014). According to positive psychology, cognitions, traits, and behaviour are seen in a new light. The focus is shifted from the negative focus that was often seen as more genuine (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001) to flourishing and optimal development throughout the entire course of a person's life (Sinnott, 2013). It emphasizes the way in which hope, resilience, and growth supports one in dealing with the adversities of life. Seligman (1998) made an appeal for psychology to move away from the devotion to the worst in human behaviour and shifting to promoting the best in human behaviour (Seligman, 1998). Sheldon and King (2001) mention that positive psychology motivates psychologists to be more open to the prospect of human potential, abilities and motivations, and it is in this light that the idea of posttraumatic growth (PTG) is viewed.

When looking at the creativity, it is clear to see why this construct is embedded in the positive psychology paradigm. Everyday creativity is the innovation of new ideas. Not necessarily creating, but also thinking in unique ways (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014).

Trauma is viewed as a motivation for creativity in certain circumstances (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014).

Traumatic life events that lead to positive change and growth are viewed as PTG. People are entangled in cognitive processing, they let go of their positive illusions, and pay more attention to existential matters (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This is then viewed as growth (Yeung, Celia, Wong, & Huynh, 2016). The idea of growth and moving closer towards self-actualization is again embedded in the roots of positive psychology.

4. SUMMARY

Creativity is far more than generating or producing a product. Everyday creativity can be viewed as thinking in novel and unique ways. Trauma has been regarded in literature as a significant motivation for creativity, but falls short when the concept of everyday creativity is discussed.

Posttraumatic growth (PTG) is the idea that individuals not only return to the previous level of functioning after experiencing a traumatic event, but exceed beyond that.

This knowledge provides the theoretical groundwork for exploring the idea of everyday creativity contributing to PTG after the loss of a loved one.

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SECTION C**THE ARTICLE****THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF CREATIVITY AND POSTTRAUMATIC
GROWTH AFTER THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE****Author: *K. PRETORIUS**

School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences: Psychology

North-West University

Private Bag X6001

Potchefstroom Campus

Potchefstroom,

2520

South-Africa

Tel no. +27 18 285 2454

E-mail: karen.pretorius69@gmail.com

Co-Author: A. W. NIENABER

School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences: Psychology

North-West University

Private Bag X6001

Potchefstroom Campus

Potchefstroom,

2520

South-Africa

Tel no. +27 18 299 1731

E-mail: Alida.Nienaber@nwu.ac.za

Corresponding AuthorCompres, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, Potchefstroom 2531, South Africa*

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Abstract

Purpose: The objective of this study is to explore experiences of creativity and the extent to which these experiences contribute to posttraumatic growth after adults have lost a loved one.

Method: A qualitative study was performed in which eight participants were recruited by means of the snowball sampling method where after they recruit others through word of mouth. The participants consisted of six females and two males with whom semi-structured interviews were held.

Results: The results indicate that posttraumatic growth was prevalent. The areas include: gained sense of maturation, incorporation and giving support, increased self-awareness, meaning-finding, and humbleness. Aspects of creativity were also displayed: creative problem solving and spirituality.

Conclusions: It is concluded that these creative aspects contributed to the following areas of posttraumatic growth: a gained sense of maturation with a sense of having more responsibilities, as well as increased self-awareness and meaning-making.

Keywords: Creativity, posttraumatic growth, losing a loved one, young adulthood, middle adulthood.

Introduction

Defining creativity

Creativity is a well-known theme in research (Kern, 2010), and defined by San (1985) as the method of sensing difficulties in information, forming and modifying hypotheses, where after the results are communicated (Sali & Akyol, 2015). It is a psychological construct that was both defined recently as well as very long ago as a thought, behaviour and output that is innovative and useful (Feist, 1998; Guilford, 1950; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). It is also associated with adaptability and flexibility (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Reiter-Palmon, Mumford, & Threlfall, 1998; Kienitza et al., 2014). In research creativity is mostly depicted as a static construct, but more recent literature also hypothesizes the idea of creativity as a fluid construct (Kienitza et al., 2014).

Intellectual and emotional experiences are expressed in creative undertakings (Argun, 2004; Turla 2007). When conceptualizing the construct of creativity it is important to bear in mind that it is a process influenced by different factors (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). These factors include affective, cognitive, neurological, motivational and environmental factors (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010), as well as interpersonal and social factors (Byron & Khazanchi, 2012).

A long-standing debate in literature seems to be divergent versus convergent thinking as the drive behind creativity, where it seems that the idea that divergent thoughts are mostly related to creativity is the answer (Claxton, Pannells, & Rhoads, 2005; Schmidt, Soper, & Facca, 2012). Divergent thinking can be defined as the capability to generate numerous alternative explanations or solutions to a problem (Treffinger, 1971; Treffinger, Solomon & Wyothal, 2012; Guilford, 1958).

Numerous researchers endeavour on a journey to outline the creative individual (Feist & Barron, 2003). When the Five-Factor personality model is considered, the traits of Extraversion and Openness are connected to creativity (Costa & McCrae, 1997; Batey & Furnham, 2006; Furnham & Bachtiar, 2008). These traits seem to be connected to the ability of forming innovative ideas, connections through synthesis, as well as the incentive for creation (Ivcevic & Mayer, 2007). Additional to personality, it seems as if life events, especially adverse life events may play a part in creativity (Lynch, Sloane, Sinclair, & Basset, 2013).

Creativity and resilience

Research indicates that individuals who foster the potential for creativity may have higher potential for resilience after having faced traumatic events (Coholic, Eys, & Lougheed, 2012; Greene, Hantman, Sharabi, & Cohen, 2012; Lynch et al., 2013; Metz, 2009). Resilience is a pattern of healthy functioning and positive adjustment following a traumatic event, and could be viewed as a buffer (Bonanno, 2012). Trauma poses as a threat to personal beliefs, fundamental schemas and life goals. This then causes considerable emotional distress, which in return then initiates the cognitive effort to find meaning for the event and reconstruct the core beliefs (Cann et al., 2011). When resilience is taken a step further, posttraumatic growth may be the result.

Posttraumatic growth (PTG)

In light of this, research recently shifted attention from investigating the negative consequences after an individual had suffered a traumatic event to rather concentrating on the positive personal growth following adversity (Davis, Wortman, Lehman, & Silver, 2000; Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006). This traumatic event a person has suffered states that the core beliefs of the person must have been challenged, and the assumptive world of the

person must have been shattered (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Posttraumatic growth (PTG) refers to the positive outcomes a person experiences due to cognitive and psychological alterations an individual makes when faced with this new reality of challenging life events or circumstances. This is thus viewed as a higher level of functioning as before the trauma (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001). Zoellner and Maercker (2006) refer to PTG as the opportunity for an individual to further grow and develop out of trauma.

Domains of Posttraumatic growth

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) further mention that this growth occurs in five domains, namely personal strength, relations to others, spiritual change, new possibilities and an appreciation for life. The domain of personal strength refers to the individual's changed perception about him/herself that he/she is able to cope with more than was previously believed about him/herself, but accompanied with this is the idea that the individual remains vulnerable (Lindstrom, Cann, Calhoun, & Tedeschi, 2013). Relations with others is the increase in self-disclosure after an individual has experienced adversity that strengthens his/her relationship with others, and these relationships are then perceived as warmer and more intimate (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). A closer connection with religious matters may be the result of dealing with these traumatic life events (Pargament, Desai, & McConnell, 2006). The domain of new possibilities mentions that when an individual's life is shattered, he/she finds new paths to follow which were not always known to him/her (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The last domain, namely appreciation for life, refers to the idea that an individual who is faced with trauma experiences a new sense of his/her vulnerability as well as a new sense of the unpredictability of life. This may then lead him/her to then experience things that were previously thought of as not important, to rather be significant (Forgeard, 2013; Lindstrom et al., 2013).

Trauma as a motivation for growth

PTG has been reported by people who have experienced a variety of different traumatic events. These include combat (Maguen, Vogt, King, King, & Litz, 2006); sexual assault (Grubaugh & Resick, 2007); cancer (Cordova, Cunningham, Carlson, & Andrykowski, 2001; Weiss, 2004); natural disaster (Cryder, Kilmer, Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2004); and HIV/AIDS (Milam, 2004). An adversity is seen to be traumatic if it causes significant distress, and if the person's psychological resources are momentarily not enough to deal with the trauma (Briere, 2004).

Davis, Wohl and Verberg (2007) found that individuals who had lost a loved one also reported high incidents of PTG. In a study performed by Shakespeare-Finch and Armstrong, (2010) to determine which trauma leads to the most PTG, found that it was the bereaved group that had the highest association with PTG.

Linking creativity to adversity

Additional to growth after trauma, research indicated that trauma may contribute to people being more creative. Foregard (2013) indicates that there is a strong link between perceived creative growth and the amount of adversity a person is plagued by. Studies have shown acuties of increased creativity after a trauma had been experienced. This may establish an expression of PTG (Kim, Vincent, & Goncalo, 2012; Kaufman & Sexton, 2006; Johnson et al., 2012).

Earlier it was mentioned that creativity is the idea that a person can come up with original and innovative ideas for solving a problem. Everyday creativity is a concept explored by Richards and Kinney (1990). They explain it as meaningfulness and novelty being expressed. Richard (1998) further clarifies everyday creativity as a construct every individual

is born with, and meaning can be generated in our ordinary lives. This can then serve as an intimate fortitude for interacting with the world.

Hence the question this research project aims to answer will be: Which, if any, aspects of creativity do adults experience as a result of losing a loved one and how do these experiences relate or contribute to a sense of PTG after the loss of a loved one?

This study will therefore “go” on a mission to explore everyday creativity, and the possible contribution it may make to PTG after the loss of a loved one. The findings of this study can be used to assist in therapy of grieving patients.

Method

Research design

A qualitative research method was used. Snape and Spencer (2003) mention that qualitative research aims at uncovering the feelings and experiences of individuals. This study was exploratory in nature and aimed at exploring the experiences of creativity in individuals resulting from the loss of their loved ones. Furthermore the link was explored between creativity and PTG after an individual had lost a loved one.

Participants

Eight adults took part in the research study. They were recruited by means of a snowball sampling method in which word of mouth was implemented and the participants were recruited by other participants already taking part in the study (East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2006). The participants included two men and six women, who were fluent in English or Afrikaans. They were between the ages of 20 and 26 years. Two participants were black, two were coloured and four were white.

Data collected

Semi-structured Afrikaans and English interviews were conducted in this study. Comprehensive data were gathered through probing and elaboration where the participants' experiences of the occurrence being studied are focused on (Maree & Peterson, 2009; Greeff, 2011). These interviews aimed at obtaining rich, in-depth and descriptive data to assist in attaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants (Seabi, 2012). The researcher conducted the interviews, listened to participants, and asked relevant probing questions (Maree & Peterson., 2009). With the consent of the participants, the interviews were audio recorded. Verbatim transcriptions were made of the recordings by the researchers to ensure the accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2009).

Analysis of data

The data were analysed in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were the data used. The researcher as well as the co-coder separately analysed the data repeatedly, and independent themes were generated. These themes were compared with each other and the themes generated by both the researcher and the co-coder correlated. The analysis, as prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2006), was performed in six phases. These include that the researcher familiarised herself with the data. This entailed transcribing, reading and re-reading of the data. A co-coder assisted in the coding of the data. Thereafter initial codes were generated in which the significant aspects of the data were coded by systematic means. The third phase included searching for themes, during which all data applicable to each theme was gathered. Then the themes were checked to determine whether they work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, and a thematic map of the analysis was created. The fifth phase entailed that

the themes were defined and named, and finally the report was produced. This is the final opportunity for analysis, where clear and persuasive examples get extracted.

Results and findings

Results are offered in terms of participants' experiences of thinking about life in new ways after having experienced the loss of a loved one, and how this possibly could have added to a sense of change in themselves. Five main themes developed, which are as follows: the participants gained a sense of maturation; they incorporated, as well as extended, more emotional support; their self-awareness increased; they experienced meaning-making; and they became more humble after having lost a loved one.

Gained sense of maturation

The participants mentioned that they felt that they had more responsibilities, and this gave them a sense of rapid maturation.

“So I sort of grew up there, and saw things differently.” (“So ek het half groot geraak daar en anderster goed gesien.”)

The participant refers to the time in which the traumatic incident happened.

“You must make it broader and think bigger. You can't look at it like a child would anymore.” (“Jy moet dit verbreed en groter dink. Jy kan nie meer soos 'n kind dink nie.”)

In this comment the participant refers to life in general, and the choices he had to make in life.

“...as if I sort of have to take a more responsible role where my father messed up,...”
(“...asof ek half meer verantwoordelike rol moet begin vat waar my pa opneuk,...”)

With this they indicate that they had to incorporate creative problem solving where they had to measure up the negative aspects against the positive aspect before making a decision.

“I think about certain things more thoroughly and more, more, on a high, higher level than I would’ve in the past.”

When the participant refers to a higher level, they refer to making difficult choices that seems more responsible than the choices he would’ve usually made.

After the trauma the participants had gone through they reported experiencing a sense of being more resilient, stronger, and living their loved one’s lessons.

“...but now I can just take a lot more punches and I cannot break.” (“...maar nou kan ek net soveel meer punches vat en ek kan nie breek nie.”)

The participant refers to hardships as punches.

“It feels to me as if I became stronger.” (“Dit voel vir my dat ek sterker geraak het.”)

“I would not have been where I am today if it were not for the fact that I learned out of her mistakes.” (“Ek sou nie gewees het waar ek vandag is as dit nie was vir die feit dat ek uit haar foute uit geleer het nie.”)

The participant is referring to her mother when she is referring to her.

Emotional support

The participants conveyed that a lot was learned about support. They learned to incorporate support from friends and relatives close to them. This was done through self-disclosing regarding the negative feelings that accompanied the trauma they suffered, as well as an increased willingness to share general negative emotions and feelings

“... did I learn to climb out of my shell more often.” (“... het ek geleer om bietjie meer uit my dop te klim.”)

The participant is referring to being more extroverted.

“...I share quickly with people...” (“...ek deel baie gou met mense...”)

This sharing refers to being more open emotionally and sharing feelings more often.

“We just really talk about things we feel; emotionally we are more aware than normal people.”

When using we, the participant refers to friends.

“To talk about everything.”

“So we make time for each other, we even opened a group so that we can chat to each other more often...” (“So ons maak tyd vir mekaar, ons het even nou `n group oopgemaak sodat ons meer met mekaar kan gesels...”)

In this comment the participant is referring to family members.

“It brought our family closer to each other in a way where we were not before.” (“Dit het in `n mate ons gesin bietjie nader gebring waar ons nie was nie.”)

They also reported becoming more comfortable giving support. The support they extended was in various forms such as emotional support, practical support and advice, financial support and community service on a larger scale. They gained a sense of compassion towards others.

“...I am the ear, I am the comforter...” (“... ek is die oor, ek is die trooster...”)

This refers to giving emotional support and listening to others.

“Can I uhm give advice about, see here, you don’t have to do that because that now happened you see,...” (“Kan ek uhm advies gee oor kyk hierso jy hoef nie dit te doen nie omdat dit nou gebeur nie sien,...”)

“...feel then that I am going to help the person. I`m like, joh, R20, but I took it out and gave it to the person,... the fact is I tried to make a difference in someone else`s life...”
(“...voel toe ek gaan die persoon help. Ek`s soos in joh, R20, maar ek haal dit net uit en gee dit vir die persoon, ... die feit is ek het probeer `n verskil maak in iemand anders se lewe...”)

The participant mentions the person when referring to an unknow person she walked past on the street.

“I want to be able to help them have to deal with the idea that you do not have somebody, ..., and still move forward in life and have a better outlook in life and not be stagnant because of your situation.”

“I then also started doing community service.” (“Ek`t toe ook begin gemeenskapsdiens doen.”)

Increased self-awareness

The participants explained that they learned more about themselves through their experience of loss, and they became more aware of what their needs were.

“So I have different outlet mechanisms...” (“So ek het verskillende uitlaatmeganismes...”)

“I felt that I needed it.” (“Ek het gevoel ek het dit nodig gehad.”)

The participant refers to it as the coping she incorporated in her life.

Some individuals realized that spending time alone was very important for them.

“Then I walk with the dog like for kilometres. Then I come back and I feel better, or I listen to my music or I just do my own thing.” (“Dan loop ek met die hond soos kilometres. Dan kom ek terug dan voel ek beter, of ek luister net my musiek of doen my eie ding.”)

“...I need my alone time,...” (“...ek kort my alone time,...”)

Through this they relied on their spirituality, and this became a very important aspect for some individuals.

“...do it in faith with him...” (“...doen ek dit in geloof met hom...”)

The participant refers to her uncle in this comment.

“...my connection with the Lord then started to pick-up and stuff...” (“...connection met die Here weer soos begin pick-up en goeters,...”)

Meaning-making

Discovering meaning out of the trauma became an important feature for some.

“...I think God maybe took away the idea of having parents for me so that I could be able to help others.”

“I feel it was necessary for me. Thing is if I didn’t grow, or took that year I wouldn’t have made it here.” (“Ek voel dit was nodig vir my. Ding is as ek nie gegroei het nie, of daai jaar gevat het nie sou ek dit nie gemaak het hier nie.”)

Some people also nurtured a deeper appreciation for loved ones, as well as living in the now.

“..., and started treating people with respect because if you don’t you’re almost not going to have anyone left in your life.” (“..., en mense met respek begin hanteer want as jy nie gaan nie gaan jy omtrent niemand in jou lewe oorhê nie.”)

“...people that you love are not going to be in your life for ever...” (“...mense wat jy liefhet nie vir ewig in jou lewe gaan wees nie...”)

“I did realize that relationships with the people around us is very important...”

“And then, then in between I lost other people as well and the one day I decided but what am I actually doing... I am going to be more committed...” (“En toe, toe het ek intussen ander mense ook verloor en die een dag toe besluit ek wat doen ek nou eintlik...Ek gaan nou meer committed wees...”)

“And I was very driven to succeed. I had a clear vision of where I wanted to go...”

“So it kind of inspired me to live in the now.”

In this comment the participant is referring to it as the trauma of losing a loved one.

Humbleness

Humbleness also emerged as a theme for some individuals. This was not expected when looking at the literature.

“Used this to make me humble...” (“Hierdie gebruik om my nederig te maak...”)

The participant refers to this as the trauma of losing a loved one.

“...humbled me a lot...”

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore experiences of creativity and the extent to which these experiences relate or contribute to a sense of PTG after people had suffered the loss of a loved one. The central findings from this study were that PTG did occur, and that creativity, in some aspects, did contribute to the phenomenon of PTG in the participants after they had

lost a loved one. The main areas in which change and growth did occur was a feeling of a gained sense of maturation in which they felt heightened responsibility, and they felt stronger and more resilient. They incorporated and gave more support; this linked up with their growing ability to identify emotions in others and their emerging altruism. Their self-awareness increased and they became more aware of what their own needs were. The third aspect that had grown was the idea of finding meaning out of the trauma, and with that finding a deeper appreciation for loved ones, as well as for life. The last feature that was noticed was the idea that participants were more humble after the trauma.

From the results of this study it is evident that growth did indeed occur. Participants had to find novel ways to go on with life and fill the gaps the loved one always filled. It is in line with the findings of Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995), namely that growth takes place in three broad categories. The perception of the self-change, the experiences of relationships with others change, and one's overall philosophy in life changes. Subsequent to this Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) broke down these three broad categories to the five domains in which PTG occurs. From the data yielded from this study it is clear that participants experienced growth in these domains.

After the trauma the participants had suffered, they reported experiencing a sense of maturation and being more resilient, stronger, and living their loved one's lessons. It links directly to one of the five domains of posttraumatic growth mentioned in the literature by Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006). The literature clearly reflects the idea of personal strength, which is the idea that the self had survived the worst, which may have been thought to be impossible, and thus the self is stronger than thought of as before the trauma (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2004; Ford, Tennen, & Albert, 2008). Richards (2001) further mentions that individuals may gain a sense of maturation following adversity.

Emotional support was incorporated from friends and relatives by talking and opening up to them about the emotions they experienced. This supports what is known in the literature as one of the domains of PTG that refers to closer relationships with others that are formed in the aftermath of trauma (Westphal & Bonanno, 2007). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) mention that supportive environments motivate individuals who had suffered trauma to self-disclose. The self-disclosure helps them to deal with the intrusive thoughts and involuntary rumination due to the trauma on a cognitive level. This then leads to PTG.

They also became more at ease giving emotional or financial support. Prati and Pietrantonio (2009) remark that the prospect of more compassionate behaviour originates from the idea that growth can occur in numerous areas of the person's life. Kallay (2006) explains that individuals who experience PTG may also experience a sense of altruism, as well as increased compassion with others (Zoellner & Maercker, 2006).

The participants came to know themselves better, and were more attuned to what their own needs were, like spending increasing time by themselves. Individuals' self-perception, experience recognition and approval of the self with their own limitations and inadequacies may change (Kallay, 2006; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Zoellner & Maercker, 2006). This may explain why they have a better understanding of what their needs are.

Through increased self-awareness they realized that they also need their spirituality. Research on PTG suggests that the idea of a closer connection with the spiritual dimension forms part of experiencing growth after traumatic events (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Pargament et al., 2006).

Finding meaning and a reason for the trauma contributed to some people's growth. Helgeson et al., (2006) mention that following a very stressful life event, people do

sometimes see positive effects or benefits that result from the trauma. This is viewed as benefit finding.

Some people also cultivated appreciation for living in the now, as well as appreciation for their loved ones. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) mention that to create deeper relations with others, an individual can think in a reflexive manner about the important relationships in his/her life.

In line with the five domains of PTG as mentioned earlier, people regain focus on certain aspects, and attribute a new sense of urgency to it. Thus they experience a changed sense of priorities, and tend to have a deeper appreciation for life (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001; Ramos & Leal, 2013). Individuals then become more goal orientated. The goals that become a focus point may be new goals, or it may be facets that were previously seen to be small or insignificant (Lindstrom et al., 2013).

These notions all support the idea that PTG did occur in these participants' lives. The idea that creativity can contribute to PTG is also supported by literature. This link is not very evident from the findings, but certain elements did emerge.

The participants revealed that they felt they rapidly matured during this experience. They had to learn to solve problems by weighing up the positives against the negatives. When individuals have an increased positive perception about exasperating situations, their problem-solving skills are better, according to Falat (2000). He argues that this is a creative process and individuals need to incorporate and rely on their own creativity in order to increase their problem-solving skills.

When looking at the idea of spirituality leading to growth after adversity it is seen that creativity and spirituality have been linked as theorized by some authors (Bray, 2010; Raab-

Mayo, 2009; Rockwood Lane, 2005). Literature supports the idea that creativity is considered a form of spiritual expression. Research also indicates that the reason why spirituality fulfils an important role is that the function thereof is to create meaning (Johnston & Mayers, 2005; McSherry & Cash, 2004). Thus it can be argued that in order to grow spiritually, an individual has to incorporate their own creativity. The effect there off is then PTG.

Lastly it is important to mention that humbleness also emerged as a theme. People became more humble after having experienced the loss of a loved one. This idea is not widely supported by literature. When reviewing these findings it is evident that the participants felt they let go of their pride and arrogance to a certain degree, and appreciated loved ones more.

Conclusion

The principal objective of this study was to explore which, if any, aspects of creativity adults experience as a result of losing a loved one and then how these experiences relate or contribute to a sense of PTG after the loss of a loved one. It is clear from the results that participants do experience PTG after the trauma they had suffered. Creativity does support this growth. The aspects of creativity that especially were tapped into, were meant to showcase creative problem solving which participants incorporated in their lives. This linked up with the idea that participants experienced a sense of rapidly maturing, and having added responsibilities. The second area of creativity that contributed to PTG is spirituality. Spirituality helped participants create meaning for the trauma they had experienced. This then contributed to the experience of PTG in participants.

When interpreting these results, it is important to take into consideration the influence certain limitations in this study could have had. The results could have been limited in that the sample was not widely scattered within the age group represented. It is also important to note that the gender was not evenly represented, and the sample was over represented by

women. More women were willing to form part of the study. Lastly it is important to take into deliberation that qualitative data in itself could be limiting. The interview questions could possibly have been too extensive, and this could have influenced the results that were gathered. The results mainly focused on aspects of posttraumatic growth, while the questions could have been constructed to be more sensitive towards creativity. The limited results supporting the notion of creativity as an attribute to PTG may be explained by the unpredictability of qualitative research, as mentioned by Maree & Peterson (2009).

Recommendations for further research would be to include a larger population with a wider variety of ages as well as in different contexts.

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SECTION D

SUMMARY, PERSONAL REFLECTION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

A summary and personal reflection regarding the study will be discussed in this section. A discussion on the limitations and strengths will follow, as well as recommendations for further research.

2. SUMMARY

Interest was sparked in Posttraumatic growth (PTG) after the researcher had seen this idea coming alive in a close friend. The researcher worked through the entire process of witnessing a friend losing someone close to him/her, and then witnessed the five stages of grief (Kübler-Ross, 1969), through which the friend's perceptions and outlook on life changed. The researcher realized that this was more than just resilience – it was PTG. This interested the researcher. Upon spending time in the literature, Forgeard's (2013) article was found, and this then was the starting blocks for this research. The aim of this research therefore was to explore the subjective experience of creativity and posttraumatic growth after the loss of a loved one.

The formulated research question was: What was the subjective experience of creativity and posttraumatic growth after the loss of a loved one? The study aimed at exploring the subjective experience of creativity and posttraumatic growth after the loss of a loved one. The researcher contemplates the findings to partially have fulfilled the research question. The methods used to generate these findings subsequently are discussed.

This research followed a qualitative approach. The nature of this study was exploratory. A purposive sampling method was followed. This enabled the researcher to select participants based on the phenomena they experienced. Eight adults made up the population. The participants lost a loved one longer than one year prior to the interviewing, but not more than two and a half years. All of the loved ones were their primary care takers and a close family member.

The researcher conducted a literature study in which she studied the main theories of the research. This information was gathered from textbooks, as well as academic articles. These articles were collected from the North-West University library search engines such as ProQuest, EBSCO Host and PsychLit. The focus of the literature obtained was on the concepts of creativity and posttraumatic growth. The trauma of losing a loved one was also discussed. This was followed by young and emerging adults as well as middle adulthood persons, and their experiences of creativity and posttraumatic growth after the loss of a loved one.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to collect data. There were two research questions, the first being: *Which, if any, aspects of thinking about life in new ways did you experience as a result of losing a loved one* and the second question: *How did these new ways of thinking possibly relate or contribute to a sense of change in yourself?* The researcher probed further to obtain adequate understanding of the data. The interviews were then transcribed by the researcher, and the transcribed interviews then formed the set of data.

Thematic analysis of the data was consequently done by the researcher and a co-coder. The main themes that emerged were: a gained sense of maturation in which people experienced an added sense of having more responsibilities and a sense of being more resilient. Emotional support that people incorporated and gave to others had increased.

Further, they experienced an increase in self-awareness. They also found that they found meaning for the trauma and experienced a deeper sense of appreciation for others and living in the now. Along with this they also became more goal-orientated. The last theme that emerged was the idea of being more humble.

This study added value and positively impacted the knowledge concerning the way adults incorporated creativity in order to experience posttraumatic growth. This is especially important because little is known of everyday creativity, and how this contributes to posttraumatic growth after adults have lost a loved one. This can add value and depth in psychotherapy when working with an adult who is working through bereavement. This study may also potentially lay the foundation upon which an intervention can be built for clients working through the death of a loved one, in which there may be more focus on everyday creativity. In South Africa this is relevant because bereavement is a pertinent topic in psychotherapy.

3. PERSONAL REFLECTION

This was a very valuable experience to the researcher as a personal growth experience, but especially as a psychologist, whose main focus is psychotherapy. At the beginning of her internship year she truly understood the value of this study when she started psychotherapy with clients who were working through a bereavement process. This process of bereavement will never truly be understood, but this study added value to the empathetic understanding of it. The endeavour of writing a thesis was unnerving at the beginning. But as the whole process of collecting data got started the researcher learned that this would be one of the most valuable experiences as a psychologist. The researcher gained much from the knowledge of the participants on a professional level, but much was also learned on a personal level. The

researcher admired the participants' strengths and how they managed to get through such a tough time in their lives. The participants were extraordinary.

Brilliant guidance was received from a high-quality supervisor, as well as a lot of moral support, and this made the process exceptionally valuable. The confidence the supervisor had in the researcher flowed over to the researcher herself, and this contributed to the richness of the experience.

The most challenging part regarding this thesis was the process of finding applicable literature. Even though there is a large amount of literature available on the topics discussed, finding the relevant literature, however, was at times perplexing and difficult.

The other challenge the researcher faced regarding the gathering of the data was to carefully monitor her role as researcher. The data of the participants were gathered in between psychotherapy sessions; thus the researcher had to switch from therapist to researcher. Then in the interview she had to carefully monitor her stance because of the highly emotional topic being discussed, and had to avoid the therapist role, but remain congruent and empathic.

The researcher also found it challenging not to listen for themes, especially towards the end of the data gathering, because some themes became very evident. Thus the researcher had to concentrate throughout all the interviews, the whole interviewing, not to be more attuned to the themes that had already emerged. After reflecting halfway through the interviews, the researcher realized that this in itself is a very valuable lesson, to be in the moment with every participant, and concentrate on every word they say.

The researcher found it very satisfactory to realize that this process of focusing on the growth aspects after working through a trauma also granted the participants the possibility of

further integrating the trauma. Some of the participants commented on the opportunity so speak about the loved one again, and also how much they liked focusing on the positive aspects. The researcher could not fully envisage the positive experiences that the participants would have. They seemed to enjoy reflecting on the process as a whole, and how they changed and grew. They gained much insight into how this contributed to them as a person, and the new qualities they now attribute to themselves.

In a way it feels as if an opportunity was granted the participants of making peace with the trauma they had suffered, and to examine and dissect the positive aspects regarding the trauma. Every time an interview concluded, the researcher felt as if the participant was leaving the office with a new sense of hope, a new sense of understanding of what they had experienced, and that good had come out of it. Many participants remarked on the fact that they believe there was a reason for them to experience the trauma, but for those participants who did not see it yet, it felt as if the interview initiated the meaning-making process. The researcher regards this as the most valuable of everything throughout this process.

4. CONCLUSION

Literature supports the idea that adults experienced PTG after they lost a loved one. Supplementary to this, literature partially supports the idea that creativity contributes to PTG in these individuals. The aspects of creativity that especially played a part in the growth of the individuals was creative problem solving and spirituality.

The results should be interpreted with caution because of the small sample size, and the small sample size as well as the small variety in the ages of the participants in the study. Qualitative data also pertains the risk that it might be limiting.

5. STRENGTHS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The possible strengths will be mentioned first, followed by the recommendations, then the limitations

5.1 Strengths

- This study aimed at producing data in a trustworthy manner. This was ensured through the suggestions for ensuring trustworthiness as proposed by Krefting (1991). This was done by applying the following methods: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality as discussed in Section A, Part 1.
- The interviews led to data saturation more rapidly than expected. The data gathered were adequate.
- The researcher closely followed the methodology. This then resulted in the findings being transferable.
- The study included a wide variety of races. This is an important consideration in South Africa which is very divergent.

5.2 Recommendations

It is advisable that this study is replicated with a wider variety of ages in the adult developmental group. It is also recommended that this study be replicated in different contexts. The results and findings should be considered by therapists in psychotherapy with clients who are working through a bereavement process.

5.3 Limitations

- The results had been limited in that the sample was not widely scattered in the age group represented.

- The gender was not evenly represented, and the sample was over-represented by women. More women were willing to form part of the study.
- The interview questions could possibly have been too extensive, and this could have influenced the results that were gathered. The results mainly focused on aspects of posttraumatic growth, whilst the questions could possibly have been constructed to be more sensitive to creativity.

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Appendix A: Advertisement

The subjective experience of Posttraumatic growth and creativity after the loss of a loved one.

Your experience can help researchers understand Creativity and Posttraumatic Growth following the Loss of a Loved one better.

Aim: Explore the experiences of creativity and PTG after people suffered the loss of a loved one. The direct benefits of this study may contribute in therapy and add knowledge to the science. Participants will get the opportunity to talk about the positive aspects of their suffering. Fredrickson (2002) developed the broaden-and- build theory that defines how positive emotions open up peoples` new way of thinking and actions to fresh possibilities and how this extension can help build numerous resources that promotes well-being. Participants thus will have the opportunity to experience more growth after research have been conducted. The indirect benefit of this study includes the enhancements of programs, and to broaden people`s subjective understanding of their posttraumatic growth experience.

What will be expected from you? It will be expected from you to provide the researcher with you biographical information. This include name, age and birthdate, sex and home language. One interview (approxamitely 45 minutes to one hour) at the North-West University.

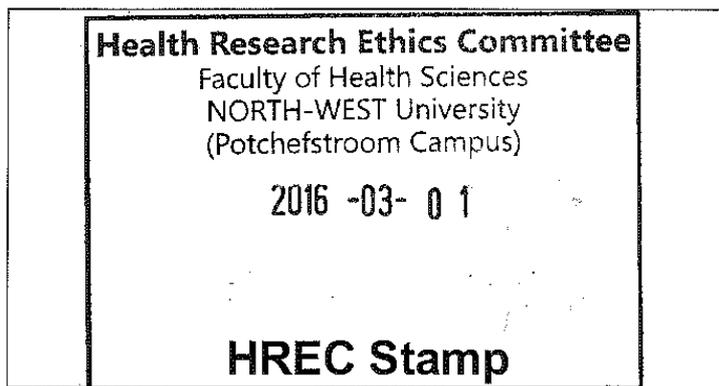
Do you meet the following criteria:

- Older than 20 years or younger than 65 years?
- Experienced the loss of a loved one was between one year ago and not more than two and a half years ago.
- The death of the loved one was sudden in nature, and unexpected. Examples include motor-vehicle accidents, environmental accidents, suicide, death due to operation that went wrong etc.
- The loss of a loved one refers to a family member, or close friend.
- You have the ability to speak English or Afrikaans.
- You completed therapy, or did not have therapy at all.
- You are willing to be recorded

If you are interested, please call **Karen Pretorius** (principle researcher) at

082 257 8259

Appendix B: Consent form: Participants



**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT
FORM ADULT PARTICIPANTS**

**TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: The subjective experience of creativity
and Posttraumatic growth after the loss of a loved one.**

REFERENCE NUMBERS: NWU – 00178 – 15 – S1

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Karen Pretorius

ADDRESS: Grieglaan 5A; Van der Hoffpark; Potchefstroom

CONTACT NUMBER: 082 257 8259

You are being invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my Masters dissertation for the Masters` degree in Psychology. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entails and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part.

This study has been approved by the **Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the North-West University (NWU-00178-15-S1)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records.

What is this research study all about?

- *This study will be conducted at the North-West University, and will involve semi-structured interviews with experienced health researchers trained in Psychology. About 10 participants will be included in this study.*
- *Biographical information will be gathered from the participants. This include name, age and birthdate, sex and home language.*
- *The objectives of this research are to uncover the experiences of the participants.*

Why have you been invited to participate?

- *You have been invited to participate because you have contacted the researcher upon seeing the advertisement.*
- *You have also complied with the following inclusion criteria:*
- *Prospective participants (both male and female) of 20 years to 65 years, as this study is focused on emerging and young adults, as well as middle adulthood.*
- *Prospective participants have to have experienced the loss of a loved one not more than two and a half years ago.*
- *The death of the loved one must be sudden in nature, and unexpected. Examples include motor-vehicle accidents, environmental accidents, suicide, death due to operation that went wrong etc.*
- *The loss of a loved one refers to a family member, or close friend.*
- *For the purpose of this study it is decided to wait one year after the trauma occurred before the participants can participate in this study. This will allow them to have time to experience more growth.*
- *Prospective participants must have the ability to speak English or Afrikaans.*

- *Prospective participants could've had, and completed psychotherapy, or not at all.*

- *You will be excluded if:*
- *Prospective participants younger than 20 years, because this research study focuses on adults.*
- *Prospective participants must not be in psychotherapy currently. In the case where the participant went for psychotherapy, the process must be completed.*
- *The death of the loved one must be sudden and unexpected in nature, thus excluding death due to sickness and natural causes.*
- *When a possibility of complicated bereavement is detected, according to the symptoms displayed by patients who present with complicated bereavement, it will not enrich the data. Furthermore the individual will be referred for psychotherapy.*

What will your responsibilities be?

- *You will be expected to provide your biographical information.*
- *You will be expected to do one semi-structured interview that will take approximately one hour.*

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- *The direct benefits of this study may contribute in therapy and add knowledge to the science. Participants will get the opportunity to talk about the positive aspects of their suffering. Fredrickson (2002) developed the broaden-and- build theory that defines how positive emotions open up peoples` new way of thinking and actions to fresh possibilities and how this extension can help build numerous resources that promotes well-being. Participants thus will have the opportunity to experience more growth after research have been conducted.*
- *The indirect benefit of this study includes the enhancements of programs, and to broaden people's subjective understanding of their posttraumatic growth experience. Emotional support regarding the painful experience that the participants went through will be provided. The findings can be used to assist in therapy of grieving patients. Possible risks include re-traumatisation, in which case a psychologist will be available to assist.*

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research?

- *The risks in this study are: possible risks include re-traumatisation, in which case a psychologist will be available to assist.*
- *Language could be a possible risk*
- *The benefits outweighs the risk*

What will happen in the unlikely event of some form of discomfort occurring as a direct result of your taking part in this research study?

- *Should you have the need for further discussions after the interview an opportunity will be arranged for you to speak to a Psychologist.*

Who will have access to the data?

- *Anonymity will be ensured, and no identifying details about the participants will be made available. Confidentiality will be ensured by the principle researcher and the study leader. Reporting of findings will be anonymous by names and birthdates. Only the researchers and study leader, as well as the co-coder will have access to the tape recordings. Data will be kept safe and secure by locking hard copies in locked cupboards in the researcher's office and for electronic data it will be password protected. (As soon as data has been transcribed it will be deleted from the recorders.) Data will be stored for 7 years.*

What will happen with the data/samples?

- *This is a once off collection and data will be analysed at the North-West University.*

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

There will be no costs involved for you, if you do take part.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can contact Karen Pretorius at 082 257 8259; Karen.pretorius69@gmail.com if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can contact the Health Research Ethics Committee via Mrs Carolien van Zyl at 018 299 2089; carolien.vanzyl@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

How will you know about the findings?

- The findings of the research will be shared with you by email. The article derived from the study will personally be sent to the participants through email, or other means that the participant have access to. If further feedback is requested, the researcher will arrange a meeting in which the participant will have the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study titled:

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*)

20...

.....

Signature of participant

.....

Signature of witness

Declaration by person obtaining consent

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
.....
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use a interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*)

20....

.....
Signature of person obtaining consent

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher

I Karen Pretorius declare that:

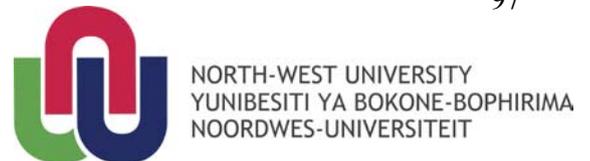
- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use a interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*)
20....

.....
Signature of researcher

.....
Signature of witness

Appendix C: Ethics approval certificate



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: (018) 299-4900
Faks: (018) 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee

Tel +27 18 299 4849
Email Ethics@nwu.ac.za

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE OF PROJECT

Based on approval by **Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC)**, the North-West University Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-IRERC) hereby approves your project as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-IRERC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Project title: The subjective experience of creativity and posttraumatic growth after the loss of a loved one.																															
Project Leader/Supervisor:	Prof AW Nienaber																														
Student:	K Pretorius																														
Ethics number:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>5</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">Institution</td> <td colspan="6">Project Number</td> <td colspan="2">Year</td> <td colspan="4">Status</td> </tr> </table> <p>Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation</p>	N	W	U	-	0	0	1	7	8	-	1	5	-	A	1	Institution			Project Number						Year		Status			
N	W	U	-	0	0	1	7	8	-	1	5	-	A	1																	
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Approval date: 2016-03-01	Expiry date: 2017-02-28																														
Risk	Minimal																														

Special conditions of the approval (if any):

- Translation of the informed consent document to the languages applicable to the study participants should be submitted to the HREC (if applicable).
- Any research at governmental or private institutions, permission must still be obtained from relevant authorities and provided to the HREC. Ethics approval is required BEFORE approval can be obtained from these authorities.
- Any further information and any report templates is obtainable from Carolien van Zyl at Carolien.VanZyl@nwu.ac.za.

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

- The project leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-IRERC and HREC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
 - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the HREC and NWU-IRERC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-IRERC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility the NWU-IRERC and HREC retains the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected,
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the NWU-IRERC or that information has been false or misrepresented,
 - the required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

The IRERC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the IRERC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof LA
Du Plessis

Digitally signed by Prof LA Du Plessis
DN: cn=Prof LA Du Plessis, o=North-West University, ou=Campus Rector, email=Linda.DuPlessis@nwu.ac.za, c=ZA
Date: 2016.03.09 09:54:02 +0200

Prof Linda du Plessis

Chair NWU Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (IRERC)



26 July 2016

I, **Ms Cecilia van der Walt**, hereby confirm that I took care of the editing of the dissertation of **Ms Karen Pretorius** titled *The subjective experience of creativity and posttraumatic growth after the loss of a loved one*.

MS CECILIA VAN DER WALT

BA (Cum Laude)

THED (Cum Laude),

Plus Language editing and translation at Honours level (Cum Laude),

Plus Accreditation with SATI for Afrikaans and translation

Registration number with SATI: 1000228

Email address: ceciliavdw@lantic.net

Mobile: 072 616 4943

Fax: 086 578 1425