# WHERE YOU END AND I BEGIN: UNDERSTANDING INTIMATE CO-CREATION

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Creative work is a social process that requires effective collaboration between individuals. Accordingly, theories account for the ways creativity takes place in teams and groups and the role that social networks play in shaping creativity. However, scholars have largely overlooked the role that dyads play in creative work within organizations. This article builds theory on how intimate co-creation occurs and how it influences the generation of creative ideas over time. I theorize that as people create together, they engage in intimate creative interactions, which under certain circumstances lead to the development of a shared interpersonal boundary (i.e., a sense of "we"). This shared interpersonal boundary influences creativity by circumscribing a closed, safe space in which the dyad can explore divergent ideas and manage the paradoxes of creativity; it also enables shared scripts and schemas that help the dyad move through creative blocks. By integrating theories of intimate interactions, psychological ownership, and interpersonal relationships, this article advances our understanding of how dyads—specifically, intimate co-creation—influence creative work.

Given the increasing prominence of collaboration in today's work (Cross, Rebele, & Grant, 2016), it is difficult to maintain the image of the lone creative genius when we think of creativity in organizations. As a consequence, recent creativity scholarship has taken an explicitly social turn (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003). Theories focus on project groups, teams, social networks, and moments in which collective creativity emerges (e.g., Baer, Leenders, Oldham, & Vadera, 2010; Elsbach & Flynn, 2013; Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Harrison & Rouse, 2014; Harvey & Kou, 2013; Perry-Smith, 2006; Skilton & Dooley, 2010). These studies highlight the critical roles that collective processes and collaboration play in the generation of novel and useful ideas and products—that is, creativity in organizations (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; George, 2007; Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004; Zhou & Hoever, 2014). However, in the shift of attention from the individual to the collective, a crucial level of analysis remains obscured: the dyad. In failing to consider dyads in relation to creativity, we underestimate the impact of relationships, which "are the essence of living systems and the basis for organization" (Sias, 2009: 2).

Scholars have not fully acknowledged or addressed the role that dyads—specifically, longer-term interpersonal relationships—play in enabling collaborative creative work despite their ubiquity within organizational life. In fact, many organizational stories are built around dyads that create together. Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak propelled the personal computer revolution; Sergey Brin and Larry Page provided new ways to find information through Google; Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield shifted our expectations about ice cream with flavors such as Cherry Garcia and Phish Food. The popular press provides many rich examples of the ways that creative dyads work in and change organizations (e.g., Eisner & Cohen, 2010; Shenk, 2014). The engagement and intensity that Shenk found when studying dyads such as The Beatles' John Lennon and Paul McCartney, *Seinfeld*'s Jerry Seinfeld and Larry David, and *Chappelle's Show*'s David Chappelle and Neil Brennan led him to conclude that "the pair is the primary creative unit" (2014: xxii).

Theory suggests that dyads offer an opportunity to understand processes and dynamics that might not be present in groups or, at the very least, might not be as easily observable (Moreland, 2010; Williams, 2010). Dyads are unique in that they

involve only one relationship, as opposed to the multiple relationships that occur in groups. Because of this structure, dyads have a stable membership, but they can form and disband more quickly than groups (Moreland, 2010). Each person interacts directly with the other, and information flows through only one relationship (Moreland, 2010). As a result, emotions can be stronger in dyads. The boundary around the dyad is relatively closed, fostering greater intimacy (McGrath, 2015; Moreland, 2010; Solano & Dunnam, 1985). How might these characteristics of dyads be important for creativity?

Anecdotal evidence and nascent research hint that the intimate interactions that can occur in dyads are crucial for the exploration of diverse ideas in a psychologically safe environment, offering an ideal context for creativity; however, we have little theory that explains how, why, or under what conditions intimate interactions occur. Research suggests that for social processes to enable creativity, people must believe that the environment is psychologically safe for them to engage in idea exchange without fear of judgment (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Mogelof, 2006; Gilson & Shalley, 2004; Kark & Carmeli, 2009; West, 2002). McGrath (2015) argued that dyads foster idea sharing by reducing the fear of negative evaluation from others and increasing opportunities for idea elaboration. In considering collaborative circles throughout history, Farrell suggested that the trust, risk taking, and intimacy that develop in dyads are crucial to creativity:

> Just as the dynamics of love are most likely to occur in couples, these more intimate dynamics of collaboration—escalating exchange, risk, and trust, along with mirroring and idealization—are all most likely to unfold within pairs. Although it may be possible to achieve instrumental intimacy in larger face-to-face groups, it is more likely in pairs, where collaborators are better able to achieve the depth of exchange (2003: 202).

With the focus on groups, though, the role of intimate interactions—interactions in which one person communicates self-relevant feelings and information to another, who responds in a way that validates the first person and makes that individual feel known and valued (Cordova & Scott, 2001; Prager, 1995; Reis & Shaver, 1988)—has been obscured and, consequently, theoretically undeveloped in relation to creativity.

In this article I build theory on how *intimate co-creation* occurs and how it influences the generation of creative ideas over time. By integrating theories of intimate interactions and creativity, I define intimate co-creation as a process in which two people form and maintain a *shared interpersonal boundary* by engaging in a series of *intimate creative interactions*—interactions that involve unfiltered idea disclosure, supportive elaboration, and idea-focused evaluation—as they work together over time to develop novel, useful ideas and products. Specifically, I theorize how, under certain circumstances, the accumulation of short-term intimate creative interactions enables the development of mutual safety, trust, affection, and cohesion, which, in turn, support the development of a shared interpersonal boundary around the pair and their work. This boundary enables creativity by circumscribing a safe space for idea divergence, by providing a closed space in which the pair can manage the paradoxical tensions of creativity, and by aiding the development of shared scripts and schemas that facilitate the pair's movement through creative blocks to generate ideas.

In focusing on intimate co-creation, this article contributes to our understanding of creativity and workplace relationships in at least three ways. First, the article brings a focus on dyads to the fore and puts forth co-creation as a critical idea development process. Specifically, it reveals how, in dyads, intimate interactions can operate alongside perceptions of safety and trust to support the development of creative ideas. Rather than assuming that one stable, focal individual or group is doing the creating, in focusing on co-creation, I begin to theorize how people move ideas between each other as they engage in creative processes. Second, rather than assuming a somewhat neutral relational environment, I theorize how relationships can impact the social interactions that occur around creativity and reveal that strong interpersonal relationships can offer support *and* novelty. Finally, while research indicates that high-quality relationships can enable creativity (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Corley, Masterson, & Schinoff, 2016; Kark & Carmeli, 2009), the theory in this article suggests the converse: co-creation can serve as a mechanism through which high-quality relationships form. Before building theory on intimate co-creation, I describe what we know about how other people and social contexts influence creativity.

## HOW SOCIAL CONTEXTS AND OTHER PEOPLE IMPACT CREATIVITY

Creativity is often conceptualized as the production of novel and useful ideas (Amabile et al., 1996; George, 2007). To understand how best to promote creativity within organizations, scholars have studied how contextual factors and social processes influence when and how people create. Specifically, a variety of studies demonstrate that other people matter to the creative process and outcomes; in some situations people enable creativity through diverse thought and support, whereas in other situations people hinder creativity by triggering pressures that lead to conformity and the withholding of ideas.

Research on groups and social networks suggests that because creativity is a quest for the novel, involving other people in the creative process can be beneficial by bringing diverse ideas and perspectives to bear; however, this information must be nonredundant to enable creativity (Kurtzberg, 2005; Mannix & Neale, 2005). For example, newcomers in groups promote creativity since they offer heterogeneous knowledge and perspectives (Choi & Thompson, 2005; Perretti & Negro, 2007); however, repeat collaboration suppresses diversity since shared mental models developed through experience constrain creativity (Skilton & Dooley, 2010). In considering networks, Perry-Smith (2006) drew a parallel conclusion: weak ties—that is, those with low levels of closeness and interaction—are beneficial for individual creativity since they offer nonredundant, diverse information, whereas strong ties can lead to conformity, which constrains creativity despite the social support and trust that such ties offer. Similarly, Uzzi and Spiro (2005) found that creativity is enabled by the sharing of ideas and resources, but connectivity and cohesion can limit creativity since people tend to share common rather than different information, constraining the ability to break new ground. Taken together, this work suggests that although other people have the potential to offer diverse ideas and perspectives, that potential can be thwarted by the commonalties and pressures for conformity that occur in groups and other social contexts.

In addition to offering divergent perspectives that introduce novelty, other people also shape the environments and processes in which creativity occurs. Williams argued that "the presence of another person triggers a state of readiness . . . , is distracting . . . , and signals evaluation" (2010: 270). In considering creativity specifically, scholars have proposed that evaluation apprehension—the fear of negative evaluation from others—prevents people from presenting their more original ideas (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987, 1991; Mullen, Johnson, & Salas, 1991). As Kelley and Kelley observed, "We self-edit, killing potentially creative ideas because we're afraid our bosses or peers will see us fail . . . But you can't be creative if you are constantly censoring yourself" (2012: 117). The presence of others triggers a sense of evaluation that may prevent people from exploring and sharing ideas. Given the general support for the finding that if people expect their work to be judged they will be less creative (for a review see Shalley et al., 2004), it is not surprising that creativity benefits from establishing a psychologically safe environment in which people believe that others will positively respond when they share new ideas (Edmondson & Mogelof, 2006).

Other people can also support the creative process via social interactions. For example, feedback can help people evaluate whether ideas are good or bad, provide a framework for people to recognize the value in previously discarded ides, and offer pathways to explore new possibilities (Harrison & Rouse, 2015). By introducing new frames for understanding problems, reflective reframing helps people "make new sense of what they already know" (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006: 492) and supports moments of collective creativity; an organizational environment in which collaboration is valued and supported is critical to engendering these moments and interactions (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006: 492). Furthermore, leaders who are supportive, rather than controlling, can boost employees' intrinsic motivation and, consequently, their creativity (for a review see Shalley et al., 2004). Therefore, while others have the potential to inhibit creativity by triggering a fear of judgment and evaluation, they also can provide a support system that enables creativity.

Studies of film director and producer dyads, as well as artistic director and executive director pairs in nonprofit organizations, illustrate how support, trust, and even intimacy benefit creativity; however, these dyads do not necessarily engage in co-creation, since one person is typically the primary creative actor (Alvarez, Mazza,

Pedersen, & Svejenova, 2005; Alvarez, Svejenova, & Vives, 2007; Hunter, Cushenbery, Fairchild, & Boatman, 2012; Mainemelis, Nolas, & Tsirogianni, 2016; Reid & Karambayya, 2009). The acclaimed film director Pedro Almodóvar commented that he "wanted to start his production company 'with somebody who was going to understand him *intimately*, from the essence, from the first idea of a film'" (Alvarez et al., 2005: 876, emphasis added). Mainemelis and colleagues claimed that "trusted relationships also provided emotional support and advice in times of trouble . . . These relationships often functioned as 'interpreters, sources of feedback, and sources of support and permission of change and learning' (Boyatzis, 2007, p. 525)" (2016: 275). This research also shows that dyads can balance the tension of managing the artistic and business sides of creative work (Alvarez et al., 2005; Alvarez et al., 2007; Hunter et al., 2012; Mainemelis et al., 2016; Reid & Karambayya, 2009). Like companies with co-CEOs, pairs can manage complementarities in the context of a trusting relationship (Alvarez et al., 2007).

A clear tension emerges when we review the impact of others on creativity. On the one hand, other people offer diversity of thought and provide feedback and support that facilitate the creative process. On the other hand, the presence of others can lead to evaluation apprehension and pressures to conform, both of which stifle the creative process. One study (McGrath, 2015) suggested that, in dyads, this tension can be balanced such that the upsides of other people (increased idea generation and elaboration) are maximized and the downsides (withholding ideas because of fear of judgment and pressures to conform) are minimized. In other words, dyads might provide a context that benefits creativity in ways that working alone or in a group cannot. Theorizing about dyads, then, may shift the way we typically think about the impact of other people on creativity. Nonetheless, dyads do not always perform well and are somewhat volatile (McGrath, 2015). This raises such questions as what are the unique characteristics and processes of dyads that allow for both idea divergence and experiences of safety, and what conditions reduce volatility in pairs so that they can continue to create? Hints in the examples and research I have discussed suggest that intimate interactions provide a key mechanism through which dyads balance the simultaneous needs for diversity and safety and for individuation and connection.

## A THEORY OF INTIMATE CO-CREATION

In this section I build theory on how intimate co-creation occurs and how it influences the generation of creative ideas over time. In focusing on dyads, I define co-creation as a process in which two people pass ideas back and forth throughout idea generation, elaboration, and evaluation (the phases of the creative process), with the goal of developing novel and useful ideas and products (Amabile, 1988; Amabile et al., 1996; Elsbach & Flynn, 2013; George, 2007). From this perspective, co-creation is mutual, and tasks are not roles associated with a particular person (e.g., you are the idea generator, I am the idea evaluator). As ideas are passed back and forth throughout the process, the duration one person "holds" an idea may vary. For example, some academics write a whole draft of a paper and then send it to a coauthor to take the next step in developing the work, whereas others write side by side to develop ideas. Thus, co-creation can be asynchronous or synchronous, but mutual engagement occurs at all phases of the creative process. This definition of co-creation draws attention to *how* people move ideas between them. It articulates a particular process through which creativity occurs and suggests that people make choices about holding and sharing ideas as they create; this contrasts with many existing models of creativity (Amabile, 1988; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Simonton, 1999) that focus on how ideas change, with relatively little consideration of the agentic role particular people play throughout the process.

In the theorizing that follows, I argue that in intimate co-creation (one form of co-creation) two people form and maintain a shared interpersonal boundary by engaging in a series of intimate creative interactions. Specifically, by engaging in *intimate creative interactions*—interactions in which two people engage in unfiltered idea disclosure, supportive elaboration, and idea-focused evaluation—they develop mutual trust, safety, affection, and cohesion over time. And mutual trust, safety, affection, and cohesion support the development of a *shared interpersonal boundary* (i.e., a sense of "we"). This interpersonal boundary enables creativity over time by fostering toleration and appreciation of dissimilarity, and these increase idea divergence and support the holding and maintaining of the paradoxes associated

with the creative process—paradoxes around novelty and usefulness, flexibility and persistence, and passion and discipline, for example. The relational scripts and schemas associated with a sense of "we" support creative momentum, which increases idea fluency, or the quantity of ideas produced by the pair. Figure 1 depicts an overview of these conceptual building blocks, as well as facilitators and inhibitors of these processes.

While co-creation describes the movement of ideas between people, in intimate co-creation a secondary process occurs in which the interpersonal relationship changes (as characterized by the formation and maintenance of a shared interpersonal boundary)—that is, the two people become psychologically paired as they create. Thus, to understand intimate co-creation, we must acknowledge two ongoing processes: (1) the development of a creative idea or product and (2) the potential development of an interpersonal relationship. These two processes need not occur along the same temporal trajectory, but they are likely mutually influencing. For example, a dyad might quickly develop a creative product through intimate creative interactions but still have a relatively nascent relationship. In the course of developing a product that is "ours," the dyad engages in intimate creative interactions, and, consequently, an interpersonal relationship begins to form. Alternatively, a dyad might have a well-established creative relationship (i.e., the individuals have a shared interpersonal boundary), but the creative product is in the early stages of a long development process. In this case, "we" sets the foundation for developing a product that is "ours."

To simplify and clarify my theorizing, I focus on the relationship as it develops through intimate creative interactions, with the recognition that there might be multiple creative ideas/products starting, stopping, and overlapping. To illustrate how these dynamics unfold, throughout my theorizing I use the example of the relationship between the social psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, as detailed by Lewis (2017). While I choose to focus on Kahneman and Tversky's relationship to provide a sense of narrative consistency, many rich examples of similar dynamics in other creative interactions and relationships exist, such as Matt Stone and Trey Parker (of the television show *South Park*), Charlie Munger and Warren Buffett (Berkshire Hathaway), and Michael Eisner and Frank Wells (Walt Disney Company), among many others (Eisner & Cohen, 2010; Shenk, 2014)
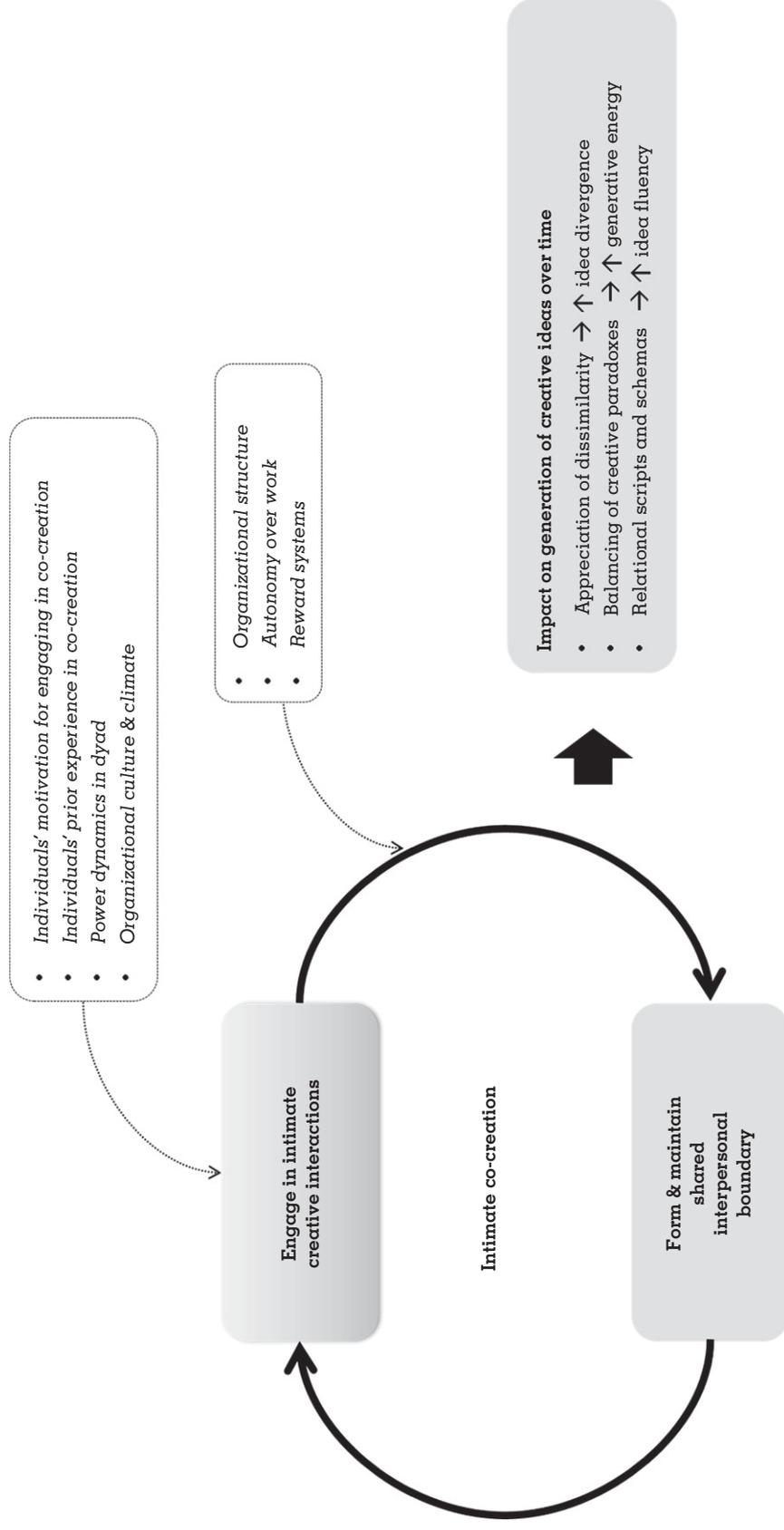
## Engaging in Intimate Creative Interactions

I argue that co-creation takes on a particular tone and quality when intimate creative interactions occur. As Lewis wrote of Kahneman and Tversky, "There was no time at all between the moment either of them had some idea and the moment he shared it with the other. The magic was what happened next: the uncritical acceptance, the joining of their minds" (2017: 306). I build on theories of intimate interactions (e.g., Cordova & Scott, 2001; Prager, 1995) to propose critical behaviors that occur in an intimate creative interaction.

**Intimate interactions: A theoretical foundation.** Intimate interactions are generally defined as a process in which one person communicates self-relevant feelings and information to another, who responds in a way that validates the first person and makes that individual feel known and valued (for a review see Prager, 1995, and Reis & Shaver, 1988). Disclosure is at the heart of intimate interactions (Prager, 1995). This disclosure often includes personal information or vulnerabilities related to the self. Cordova and Scott (2001: 77) suggested that the behavior needs to "have been associated with response-contingent punishment by another person in other social contexts," yet the behavior is not punished in this particular interaction. Responses in intimate interactions are conveyed and understood as understanding, validating, and caring (Reis & Shaver, 1988). In other words, in intimate interactions someone takes a risk to express something, often related to the self, that might be punished in another social interaction; in this interaction, though, the partner responds with acceptance rather than denial, disapproval, or rejection. Such interactions are associated with experiences of "positive involvement in, interest in, or feelings about oneself, the interaction, and the partner"—an affective component—and "each partner's perception that there is an understanding between the partners"—a cognitive/perceptual component (Prager, 1995: 22).

Because intimate interactions involve information disclosure and another person's response to that disclosure, this process assumes an interaction between two people—a dyad. In studying disclosure

**FIGURE 1**

**How Intimate Co-creation Occurs and Its Influence on the Generation of Creative Ideas Over Time**

- *Individuals' motivation for engaging in co-creation*
- *Individuals' prior experience in co-creation*
- *Power dynamics in dyad*
- *Organizational culture & climate*

- *Organizational structure*
- *Autonomy over work*
- *Reward systems*

**Impact on generation of creative ideas over time**
- Appreciation of dissimilarity → ↑ idea divergence
- Balancing of creative paradoxes → ↑ generative energy
- Relational scripts and schemas → ↑ idea fluency

**Engage in intimate creative interactions**

**Intimate co-creation**

**Form & maintain shared interpersonal boundary**

in groups of various sizes, Solano and Dunnam (1985) found that as group size increased, the frequency of disclosure and the self-relevancy of the information decreased. Importantly, the decrease was sharper when the group size increased from two to three people than when the group size increased from three to four people. They concluded that "a dyadic boundary is essential for intimate self-disclosure" (1985: 183); in other words, the boundary around the self can be open because the boundary around the dyad is closed (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977; Solano & Dunnam, 1985). It is not surprising, then, that scholars implicitly or explicitly conceptualize intimate interactions as occurring between two individuals (for a review see Prager, 1995).

The concepts of trust, psychological safety, and positive affect are distinct from but related to intimate interactions. Trust, psychological safety, and positive affect are all characteristics of a single entity—that is, they are cognitions, perceptions, or experiences descriptive of one party (Edmondson, 1999; George, 1990; Kahn, 1990; Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), whereas intimate interactions describe the behaviors between two people. Unlike intimate interactions, trust and psychological safety do not require any vulnerable action to actually occur; the willingness or belief that vulnerable or risky action is possible is enough. For example, one of the *outcomes* of trust is risk taking in a relationship (Mayer et al., 1995). It is possible that intimate interactions occur *within* groups, as interactions

occur between two people within that group (Gillette, 1990), or between an individual and a group, if a person discloses information and the group collectively supports it.

Based on the key components of intimate interactions—vulnerable disclosure and validation—I propose that intimate creative interactions involve three behaviors: (1) person A discloses an idea as soon as they generate it (unfiltered idea disclosure); (2) person B elaborates on that idea by finding value in and building on it, rather than diminishing the other person's idea (supportive elaboration); and (3) person A and/or B evaluates the idea with the intent of developing the highest-quality creative idea the dyad can produce (idea-focused evaluation). I depict these behaviors in Figure 2 and describe them next.

**Unfiltered idea disclosure following idea generation.** Ideas are self-reflective, and, therefore, disclosing the ideas that one person generates to another can be a vulnerable act. In the course of developing creative ideas, people develop a sense of psychological ownership, whereby they view their ideas as extensions of themselves (Baer & Brown, 2012; Belk, 1988; Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001). When ideas become self-representative, evaluation is experienced not just as an assessment of the quality or worth of the idea but also as an assessment of self-worth (Baer & Brown, 2012; James, 1890). Sharing one's ideas (and, consequently, one's self), then, is a risky endeavor that requires vulnerability. Indeed, research on groups suggests that evaluation apprehension and

**FIGURE 2**
**Characteristics of Intimate Creative Interactions**
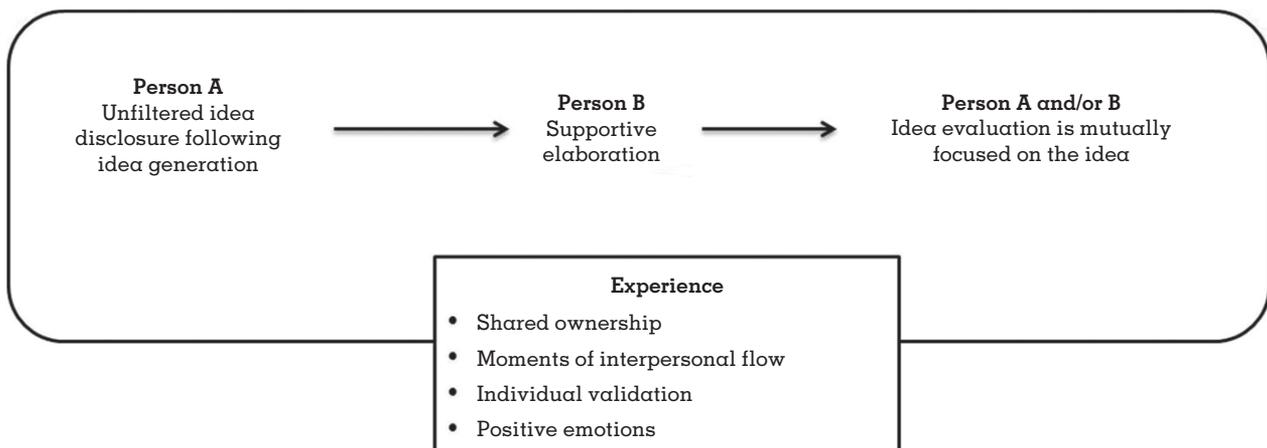
social anxiousness can prevent people from sharing ideas, since people fear being judged and evaluated (Camacho & Paulus, 1995; Diehl & Stroebe, 1987; Mullen et al., 1991). Although people often claim to value creativity, they may judge the expression of creativity harshly in favor of the status quo, because embracing a creative idea involves accepting a degree of ambiguity, failure, and risk; therefore, over the course of a lifetime, people may learn to withhold their creative ideas and view their expression as a vulnerable experience (cf. Kelley & Kelley, 2012; Mueller, Melwani, & Goncalo, 2012; Robinson, 2011). Further, people may be reticent to disclose ideas for fear they will be stolen by others (Hackley & Kover, 2007). It is not surprising, then, that people generally are reticent to share their creative ideas when interacting with others.

In an intimate creative interaction, however, self-monitoring and filtering do not occur, and there appears to be little concern or thought for how the other will evaluate or judge. As the foregoing quote about Kahneman and Tversky illustrates, when one generates ideas, rather than engaging in internal evaluation in which some ideas are rejected prior to disclosure, one discloses the idea as soon as it is generated and lets the evaluation occur in context of the interaction. Consequently, I submit that one of the characteristics defining intimate creative interactions is that the time between idea generation and disclosure can almost be nonexistent.

**Supportive elaboration.** Typically, idea elaboration involves developing, clarifying, transforming, and refining an idea (Mainemelis, 2010; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). In the context of intimate creative interactions, I submit that this elaboration focuses on building on the idea presented rather than minimizing or tearing it apart. Temporarily, then, criticism is held off as the dyad works with the idea. As Kahneman described of his work with Tversky, "When one of us would say something that was off the wall, the other would search for virtue in it" (Lewis, 2017: 180). Vera and Crossan (2005) drew from theater improvisation to suggest that "yes-anding" is critical to establishing a supportive environment for idea development. They summarized these insights from improvisation:

"Agree, Accept, and Add." Halpern et al. (1994, p. 35) state, "Anything can happen in improv. The only rule that can never be broken is the rule of agreement." This rule is captured in the popular technique of "yes-anding." To yes-and means that actors accept the offer made to them and build on it (2005: 207).

In contrast to yes-anding, saying "yes, but" or "no" blocks conversation and stalls idea development. Yes-anding in interactions can be difficult because it requires accepting another's idea as a starting point, whether one thinks the idea is good or not. Research distinguishes between additive and subtractive changes (Baer & Brown, 2012; Dirks, Cummings, & Pierce, 1996). While additive changes refine ideas by building and extending them, subtractive changes refine ideas through elimination and removal. Both types of changes are important for idea development. Here, though, the focus is on finding value and building on that value. Parts of ideas might fall away and be reshaped as a consequence, but the primary action or intent is not cutting, diminishing, or minimizing ideas. Thus, the elaboration is experienced as supportive.

When this type of elaboration occurs, ideas are less likely to be attributed to specific individuals, since they are continually shaped through interaction. When people have control of an idea, they are more likely to develop a sense of psychological ownership and, consequently, feel the need to protect the idea (Baer & Brown, 2012; Brown & Baer, 2015; Pierce et al., 2001). Scholars suggest that an individual not only can experience a target, such as an idea, process, or object, as "mine"—an exclusive form of ownership—but also can experience a target as "ours"—a shared form of ownership (Pierce & Jussila, 2011; Rouse, 2013). In the context of an intimate creative interaction in which ideas are built through value finding and addition, the dyad is likely to experience a sense of shared ownership as each person begins to lose track of who contributed what in the idea development process and no one person has exclusive control over the idea. As Kahneman explained, "We didn't know [who did what] at that time, not clearly. It was beautiful, not knowing" (Lewis, 2017: 293). When this occurs, the idea is no longer tied to and representative of a specific individual; rather, it exists in the space between and represents the work of the dyad. The resulting idea is "ours," rather than "mine" or "yours," and, as a consequence, the idea is shared with rather than protected from one's partner.

**Idea evaluation mutually focused on the idea.** Shared ownership decouples ideas from particular individuals, so when evaluation does occur, it

is not reflective of a person or relationship but the idea. In typical interactions, a comment about an idea conveys information about the idea but also can communicate information about the person or about the relationship with the person who offered the idea (cf. Tsoukas, 2009). In other words, criticizing someone's idea might implicitly be or might be perceived as a criticism of that person or as an outgrowth of a negative relationship with that person. In typical interactions it is difficult to disentangle feedback on ideas from feedback on individuals and relationships. With shared ownership the idea is a reflection of the contribution and the work of the dyad, and the idea is no longer representative of any individual. In intimate creative interactions, then, a critique of an idea is more likely to be perceived as a critique of the idea rather than a communication about the worth or value of an individual. Consequently, the discussion of ideas can be more open and free-flowing and less marred by territorial tendencies that emerge when individuals view ideas as exclusively their own (Baer & Brown, 2012; Brown & Baer, 2015; Brown, Crossley, & Robinson, 2014; Pierce et al., 2001; Rouse, 2013).

Therefore, following supportive elaboration, in which ideas are developed and built up, evaluation in intimate creative interactions does occur, but this evaluation is clearly focused on achieving the best joint idea rather than serving an ego-gratifying or ego-protective function. As Tversky wrote to Kahneman, when their relationship started to face challenges:

> You have become very protective of some ideas and develop an attitude of "love them or leave them" rather than trying to "get it right." One of the things I admired you for most in our joint work was your relentlessness as a critic" (as described in Lewis, 2017: 331).

Being able to challenge and push is essential to developing better ideas.

**Experiences in intimate creative interactions.** I propose that when there is unfiltered idea disclosure, supportive elaboration, and idea-focused evaluation, individuals experience moments of interpersonal flow, a sense of individual validation, and positive emotions, in addition to shared ownership. Similar to the concept of individual flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), in interpersonal flow the self momentarily falls away and there is full engagement in the work being produced. Importantly, in this shared state there is mutual engagement, a feeling of shared identity, total concentration on the shared work, and a lack of self-consciousness with each other (Snow, 2010). There are moments when attention is so fully devoted to the task that distractions, such as concern for the self, fade away and time becomes distorted (Marotto, Roos, & Victor, 2007; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). For example, Lewis claimed that Kahneman and Tversky "didn't even want themselves in the room. They wanted to be the people they became when they were with each other" (2017: 181). Awareness of the self as an entity that is worth monitoring and protecting shifts in intimate creative interactions such that "we" and "our" creative work are all-consuming; when interpersonal flow occurs, the dyad momentarily experiences a sense of being in the work together.

At the same time, in having one's ideas heard and built on, both individuals feel that they are valued by their partner and both develop positive emotions toward their ideas, their partner, and themselves. These positive emotions may be difficult to disentangle. Lewis explained that "there are periods when it is difficult to disentangle their [Kahneman and Tversky's] enthusiasm for their ideas from their enthusiasm for each other" (2017: 250). This quote highlights how co-creation, which focuses on how ideas are mutually developed over time, sits within a relational context. Thus, when people co-create in particular ways (unfiltered idea disclosure, supportive elaboration, and idea-focused evaluation), this generates positive experiences (self-validation, affection for one's partner, shared ownership over the developing product) that remain beyond the more momentary experiences of intimate creative interactions (interpersonal flow). Even though the self momentarily falls away when creating, the quality of the interpersonal relationship builds.

**Facilitators and inhibitors of intimate creative interactions.** As described earlier, when entering a creative interaction, it takes a certain amount of risk and vulnerability to disclose one's idea and accept another's idea as a starting point; I argue that certain individual differences make people more or less likely to take this risk. People are motivated to engage in co-creation for a variety of reasons; I submit that whether people enter into co-creation primarily to attain a positive sense of self or to attain a sense of belonging impacts a willingness to disclose ideas and engage in supportive elaboration. In building on prior literature (e.g., Gecas, 1982; Sedikides & Strube, 1997;

Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006), Ashforth (2001) theorized that self-distinctiveness (the motivation to see oneself as unique or different) and self-enhancement (the desire to see oneself favorably) both bolster a positive sense of self. Some people may view co-creation as a means to improve their ideas and gain individual success and personal recognition for their own work, fulfilling a need for self-enhancement. Co-creation also provides a means for engaging in ongoing social comparisons with a partner. In viewing co-creation as a meeting of complements, a person might view a collaboration as an opportunity to highlight their unique skills, thereby fulfilling a motive to maintain a sense of self-distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991; Smith & Berg, 1987). With these self-focused motives, an individual is more likely to protect their ideas and to preserve a distinction between "me" and "you" in the context of a creative interaction.

People may also enter co-creation with the desire to feel a sense of belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Vignoles and colleagues summarized the belonging motive as "the need to maintain or enhance feelings of closeness to, or acceptance by, other people, whether in dyadic relationships or within in-groups" (2006: 310). In wanting to feel a sense of closeness, people may be more willing to put themselves in a position of vulnerability, taking a risk in disclosing ideas and building on others' ideas. In essence, a sense of belongingness allows people to put their own needs in the background in order to put the work in the foreground by enabling unfiltered idea disclosure and supportive elaboration. While I have presented these motives as dichotomous, it is certainly possible that people might enter co-creation to experience both a positive sense of self and a sense of belongingness; across a series of interactions, each of these motives might be more or less salient, shaping one's willingness to disclose and build on ideas.

Prior experiences in co-creation with other partners also likely shape one's willingness to disclose ideas and build on others' ideas. For example, if in prior co-creation someone experienced a violation of trust in which dependencies were exploited or interpersonal expectations were unfulfilled (Kim, Dirks, & Cooper, 2009), the individual may be more likely to protect the self in all future creative interactions to ensure that they are not taken advantage of again. Therefore, that person would be less likely to disclose ideas.

While people can experience self-expansion in close relationships (Aron & Aron, 1997), a person, in prior co-creation, might have experienced deindividuation to the point that they had no basis for self-definition (Brewer, 1991) or felt as though their contributions were not recognized as unique. Consequently, that person might make increased attempts to maintain their distinctiveness in future creative interactions, keeping track of ownership and preventing supportive elaboration. Alternatively, if in prior co-creation a sense of openness, psychological safety, and vulnerability led to a trusting environment rather than a partner acting opportunistically, a person may more willing to take risks and be vulnerable in new creative interactions.

In the context of organizations, power dynamics also likely influence the ability to be vulnerable and trusting in creative interactions. Holding different positions in an organizational hierarchy may be the most obvious source of power differences. Creative interactions, for example, might take place between supervisors and subordinates or between mentors and protégés. In these situations, differences in hierarchy or experience likely shape processes around disclosure, elaboration, and evaluation; for example, the junior person might be less likely to disclose ideas for fear of coming across as stupid or naive to a senior colleague and may be less willing to critically evaluate the senior's ideas, while the senior person might be less willing to supportively elaborate ideas presented by the junior. Even in creative interactions between employees in similar organizational positions, other power dynamics occur (Sias, 2009). Incorporating various perspectives into her consideration of mentoring relationships, Ragins defined power as "as the influence of one person over others, stemming from an individual characteristic, an interpersonal relationship, a position in an organization, or from membership in a societal group" (1997: 485). These different sources of power likely inhibit the ability to engage in intimate creative interactions. Nonetheless, established mutuality and a desire to establish mutuality within the relationship might mitigate the effect of these power differences (Ragins & Dutton, 2007), enabling intimate creative interactions.

Finally, research and theory suggest that organizational cultures and climates shape how creativity occurs within organizations (for a review see Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014;

see also Hunter, Bedell, & Mumford, 2007, and Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). Generally, scholars argue that environments that promote risk taking and autonomy and provide resources enable creativity. Of particular note for the theory in this article, Hunter and colleagues (2007) found in a meta-analysis that challenge, intellectual stimulation, and positive collegial exchange had a strong relationship with creativity. When considering intimate creative interactions, it is important to consider the characteristics of environments that promote this type of positive collegial exchange, in which challenge and intellectual exchange can freely occur. In recent research scholars have explored how emotional cultures—the shared affective assumptions, values, norms, and artifacts that regulate how people experience and express emotions—influence behavior, in addition to the more cognitive and intellectual aspects of culture (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014, 2016; O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017). Being willing to take risks expressing oneself, as well as experiencing and expressing affection for another coworker, likely requires a culture in which emotions can be freely discussed and the environment is supportive, or at least does not look down on, the development of more affectionate, less instrumental relationships at work. Huy (1999) described a similar concept in emotional capabilities; he argued, for instance, that learning amid radical change is more likely to occur when organizational members are free to express authentic emotions and the organizational context encourages playfulness (experimentation and the toleration of mistakes). Similarly, a culture of authenticity and playfulness might provide a supportive environment in which intimate creative interactions can emerge. In the next section I focus on how, over time, intimate creative interactions enable the development of a shared interpersonal boundary—that is, a sense of "we."

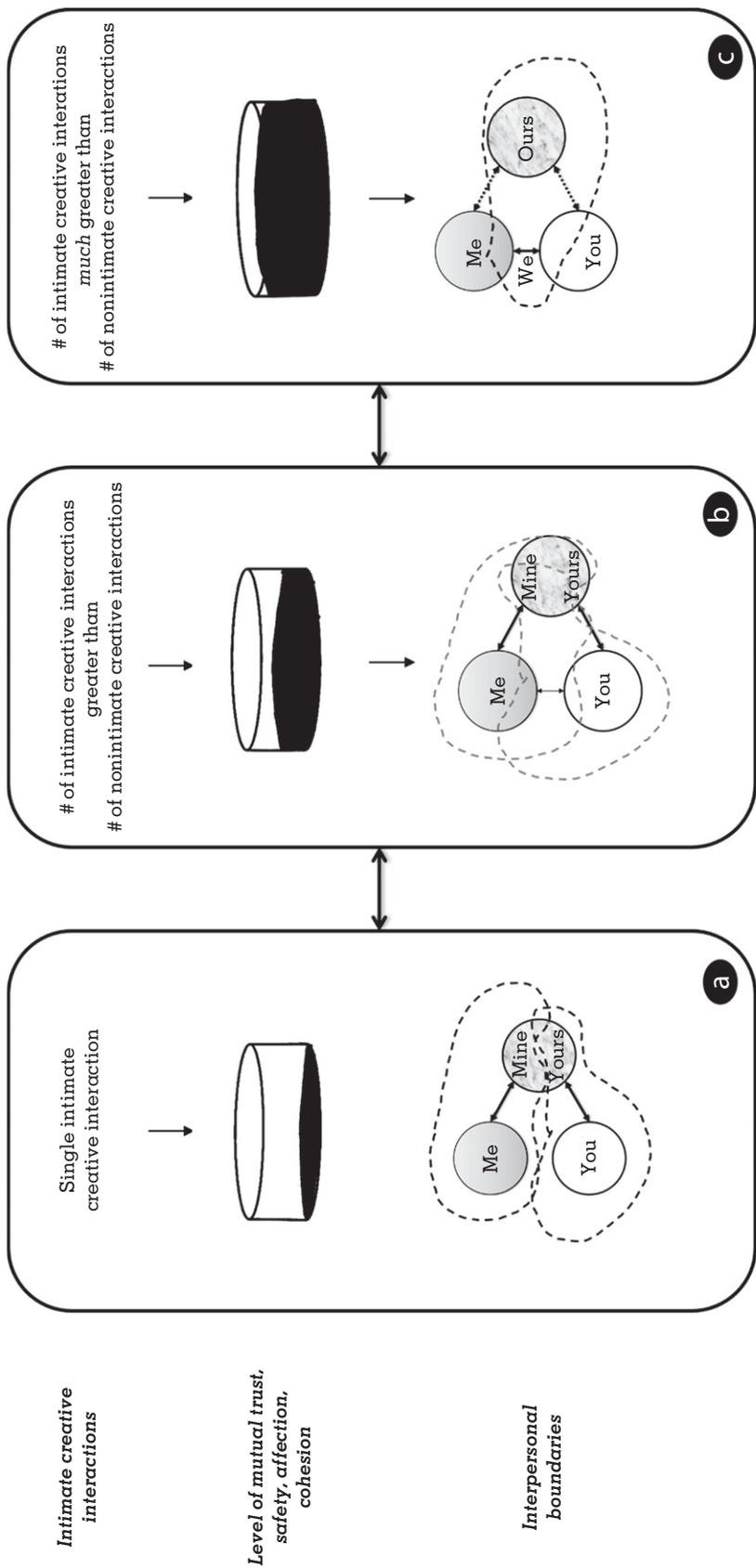## Forming and Maintaining a Shared Interpersonal Boundary

**Intimate interactions and shared interpersonal boundaries.** Scholars suggest that trust, safety, and affection, along with cohesion, are enablers as well as by-products of intimate interactions (Cordova & Scott, 2001; Prager, 1995; Reis & Shaver, 1988). The positive affect from intimate interactions leads to affection for the partner,

authenticity, and sensitive responses, which, in turn, lead to trust and the sharing of time and activities, referred to as *cohesion* (Prager, 1995). This cohesion provides opportunities for further intimate interactions. Also, a sense of safety, or "'comfort in being vulnerable' . . . results from a history rich in intimate events" (Cordova & Scott, 2001: 81). As work on trust and psychological safety hints (Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990; Mayer et al., 1995), it is also likely that if a person feels trusting and safe, they will be more likely to disclose more self-revealing information, thereby setting the stage for intimate interactions. Thus, intimate interactions are propelled by and foster individual experiences of safety, trust, and affection, as well as cohesion.

I build on this theory to propose that, over time, intimate creative interactions lead to the development of a shared interpersonal boundary, as illustrated in Figure 3. Individuals have identity boundaries: "cognitive limits" or "mental fences" that help them define who they are in relation to other entities (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006: 1318–1319). I propose that prior to intimate creative interactions, these boundaries create a sense of separation between each person, and each person forms a more exclusive, territorial form of ownership over their own ideas (Brown & Baer, 2015; Brown & Robinson, 2011). When an intimate creative interaction occurs, each person begins to experience a sense of trust, safety, and affection for the other (Figure 3, frame a). These experiences generate a desire and willingness to engage in more creative interactions. Thus, co-creation has the potential to become more synchronous.

Over the course of continued work, some creative interactions might be intimate (i.e., they are unfiltered, supportive, and focused on the idea), and others might not be (i.e., they are guarded, diminishing, and/or focused on individual contributions). As intimate creative interactions outweigh nonintimate ones, mutual trust, safety, affection, and cohesion continue to build, and the boundaries between each person become more permeable—that is, aspects of the other become more integrated and overlapped (see Figure 3, frame b; Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Hall & Richter, 1988). Frame b in Figure 3 represents a transitional state in which the pair still experiences a separation between "you" and "me," but the overlap is moving toward a sense of "we," and the product is beginning to be more difficult to separate into "yours" and "mine."

**FIGURE 3**

**The Influence of Intimate Creative Interactions on Interpersonal Boundaries**



*Intimate creative interactions*

*Level of mutual trust, safety, affection, cohesion*

*Interpersonal boundaries*

Single intimate creative interaction

# of intimate creative interactions greater than # of nonintimate creative interactions

# of intimate creative interactions much greater than # of nonintimate creative interactions

Me
Mine
Yours
You

Me
Mine
Yours
You

Me
We
You
Ours

a

b

c

= Idea/product

When enough mutual trust, safety, affection, and cohesion occur through increasing intimate creative interactions, I propose that the dyad partners will begin to think of themselves as a "we" who creates ideas and products together (Figure 3, frame c). Theory suggests that sometimes individuals think in terms of "we" rather than "I" (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Brickson, 2000; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In particular, when the relational self is activated or salient, people think of themselves in relation to others (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Similarly, inclusion of the other in the self describes how cognitive representations of self and other can overlap (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Ashforth, Schinoff, & Rogers, 2016; Humberd & Rouse, 2016), and cognitive interdependence can lead people to use plural pronouns—we, us, and our (Agnew & Etcheverry, 2006). While people might be predisposed to certain ways of thinking about themselves, this work establishes that people can shift from thinking of themselves as individuated units to thinking of themselves alongside and in relation to another person. For example, "When [Kahneman and Tversky] sat down to write they nearly merged, physically, into a single form [as they wrote side by side]"; Kahneman explained, "We were sharing a mind" (Lewis, 2017 182). I suggest that as a dyad engages in intimate creative interactions much more frequently than they engage in nonintimate ones, developing ideas that are viewed as "ours," boundaries between self and other become permeable, which allows a new boundary to be crafted. In recrafting boundaries, people move from thinking of the relationship as "you and me" to thinking about it as "us." Research on flourishing—goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience—indicates that because people tend to be more impacted by the negative than the positive, positive events must outweigh negative events in order to enable flourishing (for a review see Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Thus, for the shared interpersonal boundary to form, there likely needs to be significantly more intimate creative interactions as compared to nonintimate ones. As depicted in Figure 3, frame c, a shared interpersonal boundary is formed around parts of the self, other, and the emergent creative work.

This theory also suggests how shared interpersonal boundaries can fail to form or break down through the occurrence of nonintimate creative interactions or other violations. Early in relationships, when there have been relatively few creative interactions, there is little built-up trust, safety, and affection, so people may be more likely to engage in scorekeeping, and nonintimate creative interactions may be more salient than intimate ones. As more trust, safety, affection, and cohesion build through increased intimate creative interactions, people are more likely to tolerate and forgive. Without an established base of trust, safety, affection, and cohesion, the shared interpersonal boundary is somewhat fragile. Building off theories of trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), it is possible that an erosion or more significant violation of trust, safety, affection, and emerging shared interpersonal boundary can occur. For example, one person might begin to protect their ideas because of increased pressures to produce individual work, or a more significant violation might occur where one person takes credit publicly for an idea that was jointly produced. As people engage in co-creation, then, the shared interpersonal boundary is continually mutually renegotiated.

**Facilitators and inhibitors of the development of a shared interpersonal boundary.** Organizations might have structures that enable and promote co-creation and, consequently, vary in the extent to which they offer opportunities for people to work together repeatedly over time. In advertising, for example, art directors and copywriters are often paired to work on creative campaigns (Hackley & Kover, 2007), and there is a rising trend in software development toward pair programming, where "two programmers work collaboratively on the same algorithm, design or programming task, sitting side by side at one computer" (Cockburn & Williams, 2000: 223). In virtual creative work, dyadic interactions are also common (Martins & Shalley, 2011).

While structures and practices that pair people certainly provide more opportunities for intimate creative interactions to emerge, creative workers might not have the autonomy to choose when and with whom they work. It is possible that without autonomy to choose one's work partner, intimate creative interactions might occur between two people, but the dyad partners might not have the opportunity to continue to work together even if they would like to. As research on formal versus informal mentoring suggests, the ability to choose with whom one is paired affects relationship

quality and outcomes (e.g., Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Underhill, 2006). Thus, organizational practices can promote or inhibit the opportunity to engage in co-creation and, consequently, the opportunity to develop shared interpersonal boundaries. Certain professions might also provide autonomy for co-creation *across* organizations. Academics, such as Kahneman and Tversky, as well as entrepreneurs, for instance, have more freedom to choose whom they want to work with since they are not bound as tightly to the structure and processes of their organizations.

Also, reward structures that attribute recognition based on individual contributions threaten the "we-ness" that is critical to developing a shared interpersonal boundary. While some organizations consider the role of teams in their performance appraisals and reward systems (Gupta & Singhal, 1993; Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Johnson et al., 2006), many organizations focus on individual performance. Creative pairs often resist the push to separate credit for individual pieces (Shenk, 2014) since they view the work as "ours." For example, Neal Brennan and Dave Chappelle, cowriters for Comedy Central's *Chappelle's Show*, refused to disclose who wrote which sketches and how their partnership led to the joint work (Shenk, 2014). Nonetheless, outsiders' desire to assign individual credit can cause individuals to keep track of who did what in the context of creative interactions; the boundary between rather than around the partners becomes more salient. For example, early in their relationship, Kahneman and Tversky struggled to assign credit, so they tossed a coin to see who would be lead author on their first paper. On subsequent papers they alternated authorship. Over time, though, outsiders began attributing ideas to one or the other. When Tversky alone received the MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant," he claimed, "How can they give a prize to just one of a winning pair? Do they not realize they are dealing the collaboration a death blow?" (Lewis, 2017: 314). As Lewis (2017) described, the differences in credit created a wedge between the two, as they began to question their value and worth to the other. This example illustrates how associating rewards, promotions, and credit with an individual rather than the pair can introduce or reinforce the fear of judgment and the desire to protect the self in creative interactions such that a shared interpersonal boundary disintegrates or fails to develop.

## Impact on the Generation of Creative Ideas Over Time

I argue that the shared interpersonal boundary developed in intimate co-creation enables the generation of creative ideas over time in at least three important ways.

**Increasing idea divergence.** The shared interpersonal boundary enables creativity by circumscribing a safe space for idea divergence and, consequently, novelty. The boundary provides a container (Smith & Berg, 1987) in which both a sense of belonging and individuation can occur within a defined space. Each individual is validated through intimate creative interactions such that the boundary around "we" provides a space in which each "I" is appreciated and experienced as unthreatening. Within the boundary, the pair can explore, push, and challenge one another, and they can tolerate and even appreciate dissimilarity, rather than experience difference as a threat (Elsbach & Flynn, 2013). As Kahneman said of his work with Tversky, "We would finish each other's sentences and frequently did. But we also kept surprising each other. It still gives me goose bumps" (Lewis, 2017: 180). Within the boundary, the pair can tolerate and appreciate the conflicts and disagreements that arise from divergent perspectives. The strength of the relationship can absorb and withstand this conflict since there is mutual understanding that the dissimilarity is not threatening but is in service of producing creative ideas and there is affection for one another. The pair need not be perfect complements such that they perfectly balance each other out; rather, they can tolerate and appreciate how each is dissimilar to the other.

At the same time, the shared boundary provides a sense of protection and safety from the judgment of external others; the pair can present a unified front to the outside world. As noted earlier, strong creative pairs often resist the push to acknowledge and assign individual credit (Shenk, 2014), since they view the work as "ours." Consequently, with a shared interpersonal boundary, the pair is able to harness divergence in order to continue to produce novel ideas in a safe environment rather than succumb to the conformity that often occurs in the presence of others.

**Increasing generative energy.** Creativity requires an ability to embrace a variety of paradoxical tensions. The shared interpersonal boundary provides a closed area in which tensions can be

held between the pair. Miron-Spektor and Erez (2017) have argued that creativity is "inherently paradoxical" since it requires being flexible and persistent, learning and performance oriented, and passionate and disciplined, and the outcomes need to be both novel and useful. It also requires the balance of divergent and convergent thinking, optimism and realism, and risk taking and risk aversion (Grant, 2016). Rather than trying to eliminate paradoxes, people need to accept and embrace these inconsistencies and complexities in the creative process (Miron-Spektor & Erez, 2017). The pair, with its simple structure of a one-on-one relationship, allows for the fluid balance of tension and change. The pair can view opposing forces as complementary, interdependent, and interconnected, much like the yin and yang from Chinese philosophy (Shenk, 2014). In a group, the complex set of relationships that exists makes holding and maintaining these complementarities and tensions more complicated, which is likely one of the reasons why these complexities are smoothed away in favor of conformity. Moreover, the minority/majority structure that can emerge in groups (Moreland, 2010) likely complicates the balance necessary to hold opposing complementarities throughout creative work.

With a shared interpersonal boundary, the generative energy (e.g., the "goose bumps" Kahneman described above) that emerges likely comes from the fluid nature and ongoing surprise of the need to balance ever-changing tensions. To illustrate, Tversky's wife claimed, "Their relationship was more intense than a marriage . . . I think they were both turned on intellectually more than either had ever been before" (Lewis, 2017: 238). As this quote suggests, striking the right balance between individuation and belongingness can lead to excitement, engagement, and inspiration, rather than feeling stuck or uninspired. The same energy and fluidity are less likely to occur when the pair is organized around fixed functional roles (e.g., you generate ideas, I evaluate them or you do the writing, I do the drawing).

These more domain-specific complementarities might help creative workers establish respect and appreciation for another person's capabilities but simultaneously have the potential to prevent joining as a "we." In scientific research two people might start working together because they are experts in different theories or methods. While these types of differences might provide a foundation for developing and holding on to complementarities, partners drawn together because of skill differences might face more difficulty developing similarities that enable the nimbleness and fluidity in building on each other's ideas; the individuals might stick to and become locked into their roles such that they maintain a clear sense of individual domains even within a collectively developed product—for example, *you* did the art, *I* did the words, rather than *we* made this campaign idea. The pair must begin to share each other's specialties and skills so that they are not the exclusive focus of one person. In other words, there is individuation through expertise, but there is also a connection in learning and sharing the other person's skills. Like the dots in the yin and yang symbol, each person must contain a bit of the other so that a true sense of mutuality develops.

**Increasing idea fluency.** Shared scripts and schemas foster a creative momentum that allows the pair to move quickly through creative blocks and idea stagnation, increasing the quantity of ideas produced. Relational schemas are "cognitive structures representing regularities in patterns of interpersonal relatedness" (Baldwin, 1992: 461); these schemas help navigate social encounters (Baldwin, 1992; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Planalp, 1985). Shared relational scripts and schemas build and are built by this sense of connection and "we-ness" (Reis & Shaver, 1988). These mental models help partners understand, predict, and guide how interactions will occur, enabling routines. Relationship theories similarly describe how, through disclosure and negotiation, a map of a relational partner is formed and rules, rituals, and shared languages develop (Baldwin, 1992; Dixson & Duck, 1993).

During the creative process, people often experience creative blocks or points where it is unclear how to proceed given the ambiguity of creative work (Sawyer, 2013; Tharp, 2009). Shared understandings allow pairs to move through these blocks. Research on individuals suggests that it is important to get space or fresh perspectives to move past creative blocks (Sawyer, 2013; Tharp, 2009). Involving other people helps in this process. When someone moves the idea forward, that allows the other person to recover, recuperate, and see the idea anew. In co-creation, the smaller these back-and-forths, the more the weight of idea development is dispersed, not

resting on one person. The back-and-forth enables a sense of weightlessness, and the idea takes on a life of its own or a feeling of momentum. The difference in dyads, as opposed to groups, is that if one person gets stuck, it is clear whose turn is next. Ambiguity around turns in groups can lead to more stalling out, since attention must be allotted to understanding and decision making around turn-taking (Paulus & Brown, 2007).

The mutual trust and safety providing the foundation for a shared interpersonal boundary enables this momentum. When there is a cache of safety and trust, an individual is more willing to be vulnerable and admit that they are stuck or do not know how to proceed or what is best. The mutual understanding and knowledge of the other allows an individual to be able to read the other to know when help is needed, when to jump in, or when to give the other space, as well as how to best help their partner move the idea forward. Because these individuals are a "we" and the output is shared, there is less likely to be shame associated with this exchange. When there is a clear sense of "we" and a closed boundary where no members are moving in and out, relational scripts can develop around this turn-taking to increase production of ideas over time. Kahneman claimed, for example:

> We were quicker in understanding each other than we were in understanding ourselves. The way the creative process works is that you first say something, and later, sometimes years later, you understand what you said. And in our case it was foreshortened. I would say something and Amos would understand it (Lewis, 2017: 238).

Through a deep understanding of each other, I argue that a shared interpersonal boundary enables the production and development of creative ideas.

## IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

I began this article with the observation that many extraordinary creative efforts, inside and outside organizations, occur through co-creation—when two people work together to develop new creative products, businesses, and processes. Yet we have little theory that explains how creativity occurs as a process of co-creation and what this approach might offer that working alone or in teams does not. The theory in this article provides a foundation to understand creativity at a dyadic level—a level of analysis that

has received insufficient attention in the literature. I draw attention to the role of intimate interactions and theorize about how people who engage in intimate co-creation are able to harness the generative power of working with another person and simultaneously maintain their individuality and a sense of safety to freely engage in elaboration and evaluation. By integrating the literatures on intimate interactions, psychological ownership, and interpersonal relationships with creativity theory, this article puts *relationships* into theory on creativity and *work* into theory on relationships and, in doing so, sets a course for future research. Next I outline three key implications and suggest how future research might elaborate these ideas.

### Co-creation as an Idea Development Process

While a few studies have focused on creativity in dyads (Martins & Shalley, 2011; Tierney, Farmer, & Graen, 1999; Triandis, Hall, & Ewen, 1965), little scholarly work has explicitly considered how the creative process of dyads differs from that of groups or how a focus on dyads might reveal dynamics around creativity that have heretofore remained in the background. The primary contributions of this article are theorizing the critical role that intimate creative interactions in dyads can play in creativity-relevant processes and articulating how intimate interactions work in concert with safety and trust to support the development of creative ideas. Within the creativity literature, psychological safety is often cited as a key construct in understanding how to facilitate creativity (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Mogelof, 2006; Gilson & Shalley, 2004; Kark & Carmeli, 2009; West, 2002). Nevertheless, we have surprisingly little theory on how psychological safety develops in the context of creative work or how to balance this sense of safety with the need to challenge and push new ideas. In other words, as people create together, how do trust and a willingness to take risks develop? How do people balance a sense of safety and belongingness with a sense of individuation to push new thinking? I argue that intimate creative interactions, in their microinteractions around vulnerability and support, provide a route to this experience of safety.

In focusing on how ideas develop, scholars tend to assume that one focal individual or team is responsible for shepherding an idea throughout

the creative process; others are important influences, but they remain somewhat external to the primary idea development process. For example, Perry-Smith and Mannucci made the simplifying assumption that "the idea's origins can often be traced to an individual creator. . . . the individual becomes the primary driver of the idea (e.g., creative director) throughout the remainder of the process" (2017: 57). They theorized about how this focal actor can leverage different social resources at various stages to develop an idea. As another example, in building on Amabile (1988), Amabile and Pratt (2016) illustrated how individuals and teams influence and are influenced by organizational factors as they engage in creativity and innovation. In so doing, their model focused on stages and influences and was relatively agnostic about who does the creating.

In this article, in focusing on co-creation, I relax this simplifying assumption around one primary focal actor. As a consequence, I am able to explore the more micro, ongoing nature of how ideas move across and are held by people during the creative process. For example, intimate creative interactions describe how one person generates and discloses an idea, the other then elaborates the idea, and then one or both evaluate the idea. I discuss how turn-taking can enable idea development by helping the pair move through creative blocks. This theory highlights how people act on ideas and have relationships with each other that impact how ideas move. Without understanding how people manage and move ideas between them, we are left with an incomplete understanding of how ideas move throughout the creative process.

More organizations are explicitly adopting co-creation in virtual and other forms of work; thus, there are opportunities to elaborate theory on co-creation through field studies (Cockburn & Williams, 2000; Martins & Shalley, 2011). In this article I focus on co-creation as a form of the creative process (Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 1999; Shalley et al., 2004). Future research might explore the ways co-creation impacts other creative outcomes; for example, studies could examine whether outcomes are more incremental or radical and under what conditions (Gilson & Madjar, 2011; Madjar, Greenberg, & Chen, 2011). Also, I focus on intimate interactions, but there are likely other unique dynamics that occur when considering co-creation and creativity in dyads more broadly.

Co-creation takes place within, at the top of, or across organizations, and this placement likely shapes the forces that act on the relationship and how the relationship affects others. For example, in their study of hybrid-project systems, Schwab and Miner (2008) studied U.S movie projects and focused on twelve common dyadic relationships, including producer-director and producer-cinematographer pairs. Much as with academics, these types of relationships often extend across organizational boundaries, and individuals generate creative products more as free agents than employees of particular organizations. Other dyads might be placed in leadership positions at the top of organizations, including president-CEO or cofounder relationships (Alvarez et al., 2007; Hunter et al., 2012; Krantz, 1989). Finally, people might form implicit or explicit partnerships within creative departments. Copywriters and art directors in advertising, for instance, often form partnerships that extend across projects (Grimaldos, 2014). These different relationship configurations raise several questions: When intimate co-creation occurs at the top or organizational hierarchy, how does a strong interpersonal boundary around "us" influence the ability to lead others? How does a strong interpersonal boundary around "us" influence the ability for a pair to be led? More generally, how does a strong interpersonal boundary around "us" influence the ability to collaborate and create with others? Answering these questions would help deepen our understanding of co-creation in organizational contexts.

One concern is that a strong interpersonal boundary might cut off the pair from the organization in ways that lead to isolation and rogue behavior (Krantz, 1989). For example, with a closed boundary around them, a junior pair might not be as open to influence from leaders as they work in isolation on the development of new products, while a senior pair might not listen to external constituents or junior colleagues. It is also possible that a pair might be embedded within a project team. In considering the one-on-one interpersonal relationships within a group, we see that each interpersonal relationship likely varies in the strength of its shared interpersonal boundary. Gillette (1990) argued that a pair within a group is disturbing in that the pair can be the object of envy, hope, and longing for a similar experience of intimacy. In creative work this might be compounded by the group's witnessing the pair's joy

and engagement in the process of creating together. Taking this line of reasoning further, future research might investigate when managers should promote co-creation and under what circumstances co-creation—and a shared interpersonal boundary more specifically—might be harmful despite its usefulness for creativity.

## Embedding Creative Interactions in the Context of Longer-Term Relationships

While research on social interactions has begun to capture how ideas are shaped by multiple people, it has not fully addressed whether or how interactions occur as part of longer-term relationships. For example, Hargadon and Bechky (2006) described interactions that lead to moments of collective creativity, Elsbach and Flynn (2013) described collaborative behaviors, and Harrison and Rouse (2015) described feedback interactions in the creative process, yet none of these papers speaks to the implications of longer-term relationships on these interactions, despite their likely occurrence within the study contexts. Consider idea-taking as an example. Idea-taking is particularly problematic in creative work, since people often feel that their identities are being threatened in incorporating others' ideas, and, consequently, people resist collaboration (Elsbach & Flynn, 2013). I suggest that in the process of co-creation, people give and take ideas in ways that might not be possible without the safe container provided by a shared interpersonal boundary. Specifically, the yes-anding behavior that I describe in intimate creative interactions is a form of idea-taking in which one person takes another's idea as a starting point. Without being able to take ideas, the benefit of involving other people in the creative process might be unrealized. Idea-taking is just one example that illustrates how recognizing the importance of relationships can help forge a new understanding of how social processes influence creativity.

This article challenges the prevailing assumption that strong, long-term relationships aid creativity through social support but hinder creativity by leading to idea redundancy and suppression. Through ongoing intimate creative interactions, a shared interpersonal boundary develops that enables a sense of belongingness—a sense of "we" in which the other person is appreciated for their contributions to the pair. The other is valued for what they uniquely offer to the creative work. The relationship is strong, so ideas can be challenged and developed without the experience of threat. I show how a particular boundary configuration can lead to the maintenance of individuation that is perceived as surprising and stimulating rather than threatening; in this situation, strong, long-term relationships can provide social support *and* increase idea generation and elaboration. In so doing, this article draws attention to the importance of interpersonal boundaries in creative work and how they can delimit a safe space for the development of novel and useful ideas.

Incorporating theory of longer-term relationships into creativity offers several areas for future research. For example, while I focus on intimate creative interactions as a mechanism for developing strong interpersonal boundaries and a sense of safety, future research might consider other ways managers could develop bounded safe spaces in which idea-giving and idea-taking occur more freely. Beyond intimate interactions, how do high-quality relationships more generally impact interactions around idea generation, elaboration, and evaluation? How do other types of relationships—positive, negative, ambivalent, indifferent (Methot, Melwani, & Rothman, 2017—influence these interactions? When are one-time interactions among relative strangers desirable opposed to interactions in longer-term interpersonal relationships? I have emphasized the positive aspects of interpersonal relationships, but relationship history can also have negative implications (Skilton & Dooley, 2010). Without taking into consideration the ongoing nature of relationships—their histories, current states, and possible futures—we fail to account for a key component that shapes how social interactions influence creativity in the context of organizations. More broadly, then, the arguments I present here open new avenues for thinking at the intersection of relationships and creativity.

## Co-creation as a Relationship-Building Process

While there is growing interest in relationships at work, researchers tend to focus on the individual and interpersonal factors that enable relationships, rather than the role that actual work plays in fostering relationships (Ferris et al., 2009). Research on workplace relationships demonstrates that positive relationships are consequential for both individuals and organizations

(Ragins & Dutton, 2007; Sias, 2009), yet the work itself often remains in the background. For example, when studying supervisor-subordinate, mentor-protégé, customer-client, and peer-coworker relationships, researchers tend to focus on the functional benefits of the relationships (e.g., employee adjustment, social support, sponsorship, learning) and sometimes performance, but they rarely consider actual products that the dyad works on or makes (e.g., reports, presentations, agreements; cf. Sias, 2009). Subsequently, we have little understanding of how work products shape and are shaped by relationships. Kahn (2007) acknowledged that people can experience meaningful connections in the context of task accomplishment but stopped short of describing how working together serves as a mechanism through which people develop relationships.

I show how co-creation—working with another person to develop novel and useful ideas at work—can bring people together such that they develop strong interpersonal boundaries and come to view themselves as "we." In theorizing around the accumulation of intimate creative interactions, I reveal how co-creation can bring people together in ways that the "we" and the emergent collective work become equal to or more important than the "I" and individual contributions. When a shared interpersonal boundary forms through co-creation, the relationship can be considered high quality or positive, if positive relationships are those that are "experienced as mutually beneficial, where beneficial is defined broadly to include any kind of positive state, process, or outcome in the relationship" (Ragins & Dutton, 2007: 9). While Corley and colleagues (2016) argued that high-quality collaborations open up increased cognitive, affective, and physiological resources by providing cognitive diversity, buffering negative emotions, generating social support, and stimulating physical energy to work, and Carmeli and colleagues (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Kark & Carmeli, 2009) proposed that trust, thriving, connection, and vitality enable innovative and creative work, I show how intimate creative interactions foster high-quality relationships. This article reveals how creation can be an input to, in addition to an output of, high-quality relationships.

Intimate relationships are critical to well-being and provide an important avenue for giving and receiving social support (Prager, 1995; Reis & Shaver, 1988). In today's organizations, space for this type of connection is challenging. As Gillette questioned, "If we spend more and more time in intense work settings that are hostile to intimate relationships, what happens to our internal need and drive for connection?" (1990: 103). Intimate interactions that occur in the creative process are likely beneficial to both individuals and the development of creative products.

I have argued that engaging through the development of work products offers a means of fostering high-quality relationships, but it is important to recognize that work products can also divide people, potentially leading to negative relationships. When people feel exclusive ownership of ideas and products, they may act territorially (Brown & Baer, 2015; Brown et al., 2014; Brown, Lawrence, & Robinson, 2005; Brown & Robinson, 2011). Similarly, creative collaboration can lead to frustration and anger as people seek to protect their ideas and identities (Elsbach & Flynn, 2013). Existing research reveals how territoriality can result in conflict and anger but does not address how territoriality around work ideas and products shapes ongoing relationships. Future research might explore how work products and their creation shape the quality of relationships within organizations.

Finally, many accounts of co-creation in the popular press involve relationships between men (Eisner & Cohen, 2010; Shenk, 2014). This raises the question of what role gender might play in intimate creative interactions and the formation of a shared interpersonal boundary. In considering intimate interactions generally, there are sex differences in self-disclosure patterns (Dindia & Allen, 1992), yet these differences are small, and Prager concluded that "it is important to remember that there are more similarities than differences between women's and men's intimate relationships" (1995: 255). With this in mind, I offer at least three reasons why these accounts might be more likely to involve two men. First, from a heteronormative perspective, men and women might be more likely to struggle to navigate the distinction between psychological and sexual intimacy (Lobel, Quinn, Clair, & Warfield, 1994). If the pair is able to successfully navigate these tensions, they might still face external judgments and criticisms in the workplace that might make sustaining the relationship untenable (Cain Miller, 2017; Lobel et al., 1994). Second, women who co-create might be less likely to get the same credit as their male counterparts (Shenk,

2014), perhaps because women are often viewed as less creative (Proudfoot, Kay, & Koval, 2015). For example, there is evidence that Albert Einstein's wife, Milena Marić, contributed significantly to his work on special relativity, yet he alone was credited (Gagnon, 2016). Thus, mixed-sex co-creation might be more common, but credit is often given to one person. Third, accounts in business contexts tend to focus on co-creation at the top of organizations. Despite some progress in this area, there are still more men than women at the top of organizations (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Ely & Rhode, 2010); thus, we are more likely to hear about co-creation involving men. Exploring the role of gender composition and its influence on co-creation is a rich area for further investigation.

## CONCLUSION

While researchers have acknowledged the role of social processes in creativity, they have given co-creation and longer-term interpersonal relationships relatively little attention. In considering the importance of relationships, Shenk observed:

> I'm used to thinking about relationships according to the common question 'Are you close?' But, I've come to see that the better question is about how two people best animate the space between them—how they maintain the élan of curiosity and surprise alongside familiarity and faith (2014: 119).

This article focuses on the role that intimate interactions play in animating the space between people as they generate, disclose, elaborate, and evaluate ideas. In doing so this theory brings a focus on interpersonal relationships to the fore and provides a springboard for understanding the power of intimate interactions and longer-term interpersonal relationships in today's creative work.

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