

# **Review of *Creativity: A Toolkit for Academic Libraries***

Eileen H. Kramer

Georgia State University Libraries -- Clarkston Campus

**Abstract:** Review of Falciani-White, Nancy. (2021). *Creativity: A toolkit for academic Libraries*.

Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries. 162 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8389-3777-8 \$54.00

**Keywords:** *creativity*



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Even in the twenty-first century, librarians still confront those who ask why any one needs an MLS "to learn how to say shhhh" (Aycock, 2021, p.15), push a book cart (Thompson, 2011), or teach children how to alphabetize (Thompson, 2011). Against a persistent backdrop of negative stereotypes and questioned value, Nancy Falciani-White's work, *Creativity: A Toolkit for Academic Libraries*, assures her audience that librarians are not only professional but also creative! Librarians make new and valuable ideas, processes, and objects. We may know this already, but seeing it in book form, is both a balm to the spirit and justification for our salaries and status.

In graceful prose, Nancy Falciani-White brings teaches readers about creativity: its definition, theoretical underpinnings, and place in the broader field of psychology. This reviewer, who never took a psychology course, found this background extremely helpful. Falciani-White reminds her audience of the relationship between creativity and research. She assures readers that anyone can become more creative, and that they need not be another Mozart or Rembrandt. Citing Kaufman and Beghetto's Four C Model, she describes incremental, universally available levels of creativity. (Fanciani-White, 2021, p.7).

She also details how librarians can increase their creativity through building new habits, time management, and low or no cost self-training. She reminds directors and deans that a collaborative and empathetic management style, sufficient autonomy, along with good lighting, less extraneous noise, and choice of artwork can empower their subordinates to creatively do more with less, barring all but outright, financial catastrophe. There are footnotes for those who wish to research further and lists of readable resources for those ready to enhance their own or others' creativity.

Falciani-White's(2021) survey of a few more than three hundred librarians, though necessarily skewed by self-selection (p.70) and limited to those in academia, feels refreshingly sweet. The quotes

from fellow professionals make this reviewer think of her own: Access databases, LibGuides with native HTML, JavaScript code, and computer graphics. A quote that really shines is about creativity being integral to character and surviving despite obstacles: "I never truly abandon my creativity although it may need to go underground for a period of time." (Falciani-White, 2021, p.79)

Alas, Falciani-White leaves several questions unanswered. This reviewer wonders how librarians who subscribe to ALA email lists might be different from those who don't. Perhaps subscribers are more concerned about their profession as a whole than nonsubscribers, or maybe they are more active on committees. This adds another layer to Falciani-White's self-selection bias.

Then there are public, special, and school librarians. What does librarian creativity look like in these environments? And what of non-MLS library workers? What aspects of their jobs involve creativity? In addition, Falciani-White's survey dates from 2017, and this reviewer is curious what the extra time and different resources enabled by a year of working, at least partially, from home did to librarians' creativity.

*Creativity: A Toolkit for Academic Libraries* certainly belongs in administrators' and trustees' hands as a reminder of why librarians are worth their salaries, and this reviewer wishes she could give the book an unequivocal, thumbs up, but alas this needs to be a mixed recommendation. [The Association of College and Research Libraries and the American Library Association priced this 163 page volume at \\$54.95.](#) A comparable work, Kaufman's *Creativity 101*, sells for twenty dollars less on Amazon ("Creativity 101," 2021), and is probably already in many collections.

Falciani-White's models of the research process, summarized from the literature, also seem to not quite fit reality. With a few exceptions, such as laboratory internships, some capstone projects, or investigative reporting for the student newspaper, high school and undergraduate students are not

researchers (Falciani-White, 2021, p.48). Most student "research" summarizes others' work, uses it in arguments, but does expand existing knowledge.

In several tables in Chapter Four (p.49-50), Falciani-White (2021) displays and compares various theoretical models of research and creativity. She confesses that these tables are not the best way to lay out these models (Falciani-White, 2021, p. 50), yet fails to take advantage of GIMP, Photoshop, or MS Word SmartArt to produce more realistic diagrams. The models Falciani-White mentions, bear little resemblance with this reviewer's memories of touring colleagues and friends' chemistry labs. No model mentions constructing the tools needed to perform investigations: observing in the field, building apparatus, writing computer programs, or designing questionnaires. Ideas flow and grow through the models, but knowledge workers never dirty their hands. Worse yet, nearly thirty percent of college students attend community college (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018), where their faculty primarily teach rather than conduct peer reviewed research.

Moreover, the opposite of creativity is not complacency, rigidity, or routine but often disengagement, which occasionally drifts toward sabotage (Giacalone, 1990, p.6-7). Advice on fixing disengagement, supportive management and employee autonomy, is often remarkably similar to that for enhancing creativity (Patkin, 2014, p.14-17)(Wolff, 2019, p.32 + 29).

Creativity's is also related to destruction. *Power Thesaurus* (2021) lists destruction as the opposite of creation. Kaufman (2016) reminds readers that creativity can coexist with evil intent (pp. 311-328). Giacalone (1990) recounts "rat hunting" equipment fashioned for employee amusement with purloined materials (p. 7). "Post-Industrial Sabotage" (2014) describes lurid scenes staged after hours with Barbie and Ken at a Toys R' Us (p. 24), and Vinzant (2000) regales readers with the tale of a pen thief, whose exploits sent an abusive boss into red-faced anger. Meanwhile, doctors ("A Dilemma",

1965, p.27 +29) and Leuscher et.al. (2016, pp.40-41) remind readers that among physicians and in Korea and China, creativity's definition requires a positive, social benefit rather than simply being innovation for its own sake.

More problematic, most creativity testing is flawed. While tests that measure creativity abound, their results can be tainted by culturally bias (Leuscher et. al., 2016, pp.36-38), and those results do not always agree with other measures such as experts' judgement of a final product (Ibrahim, 2017, pp.214-217).

Baer (2019) even suggests that creativity is largely domain specific (p.165-168), and that improving generalized creativity may be a fool's errand (p.168-169). Falciani-White's (2021) suggestions for improving general creativity are largely big picture and abstract. They include creative writing, jigsaw puzzles, bucket lists, and reading outside one's comfort zone. There are also five and ten year plans, and suggestions for time management (pp.112-115). They notably omit pragmatic pursuits such as making the most of Windows 10, auto repair, and cooking. Falciani-White (2021) also states that analytic thinking and creativity are antagonistic rather than symbiotic (pp.121-123). This reviewer, who measured images for LibGuides, combed through statistics for their own research, and scrambled to fill user needs with minimal book budgets, thinks that one can't do more with less when one leaves analysis at home. Most of Falciani-White's suggestions for creativity improvement, may make one more personally fulfilled and happier, but they may do little for innovation on the job.

Still it is great to have a readable volume that reminds administrators that listening to their staff, giving them autonomy, allowing space for trials that may go awry, and providing a pleasant work environment is good for their libraries. Librarians also need reassurance that creativity is very much a vital part of their profession, and that we are more than worthy of our

pay and status. This reviewer wishes that *Creativity: A Toolkit* had offered a more depth and breadth at a cheaper price, addressed creativity beyond academia, and covered research beyond traditional, peer reviewed scholarship, because they would like to recommend it for purchase without reservation.

## References

Antonyms for creation. (2021). In *Power Thesaurus*, Power Thesaurus, 2021.

<https://www.powerthesaurus.org/creation/antonyms>.

Aycock, A. (2020, March). A librarian reflects on 20 years in the business. *Information Today*, 38(2), 15–17.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=c9h&AN=148900243&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=gsu1>.

Baer, J. (2015, July). The Importance of domain-specific expertise in creativity. *Roeper Review*, 37(3), 165–178. DOI:10.1080/02783193.2015.1047480.

Creativity 101 (Psych 101 Series) (2nd ed.). (2021). <https://www.amazon.com/Creativity-101-Second-Psych/dp/0826129528/>.

"A dilemma of research: The conflict of creativity vs demands of society." (1965). *JAMA*, 194(8), 27, 29. DOI:10.1001/jama.1965.03090210125065.

Falciani-White, N. (2021). *Creativity: A toolkit for academic libraries*. Association of College and Research Libraries. [forthcoming at time of this review]

Giacalone, R.A. (1990). Employee sabotage: The enemy within. *Supervisory Management*, 35(7), 6-7. <https://search.proquest.com/trade-journals/employee-sabotage-enemy-within/docview/214185890/se-2?accountid=11226>.

Ibrahim, B. et. al. (2017). Exploring the relationship between creativity and design outcome score. In *IEEE 9th International Conference on Engineering Education*, 2017, 212-217.  
DOI:10.1109/ICEED.2017.8251195.

Kaufman, J. C. (2016). Is creativity a good thing or a bad thing? In *Creativity 101* (pp.311-328). Springer Publishing.

Luescher, R.; Young-Zie Barthelmess,P.; Kim,S.; Richter,U. H.; & Mittag, M. (2016). Conceptualizing creativity: General and cultural biases in Gough's Creative Personality Scale. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 53(1), 30-43. DOI: 10.1002/jocb.160.

National Center for Educational Statistics. (2018). College enrollment by selected characteristics: 1990 to 2018 [By student's sex, race, and school type, including nonresident aliens, selected years, as of fall]. In *Statistical Abstract of the United States*,  
<https://statabs.proquest.com/sa/docview.html?table-no=300&acc-no=C7095-1.4&year=2021&z=DD83FA429655D891BF7DBDBB5650021E4639858D&accountid=11226>  
Accessed 19 April 2021.

Patkin, T. (2014, March). Eight simple cures for employee disengagement. *Contract Management*, 14-17.  
<https://search.proquest.com/magazines/eight-simple-cures-employee-disengagement/docview/1541972442/se-2?accountid=11226>.

“Post-Industrial Sabotage.” (1992, October). *Harper’s Magazine*, 285(1709), 24.  
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=fth&AN=9301313758&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=gsu1>.

Thompson, D. (2011, August 9). What people don't get about working in a library. *The Atlantic*,  
<http://web.archive.org/web/20110925084558/https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2>

011/08/what-people-dont-get-about-working-in-a-library/243258/, [Archived URL to circumvent paywall].

Vinzant, C. (2000, May 9). Messing with the boss' head. *Fortune*, 141(9), 329–334.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=bth&AN=3008928&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=gsu1>.

Wolff, B. (2019). The truth about employee disengagement. *Foundry Management & Technology*, 147(4), 32. <https://search.proquest.com/trade-journals/truth-about-employee-disengagement/docview/2213045161/se-2?accountid=11226>.