In My Shoes:  
A walk through the creative process

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

Throughout the years I have studied art both prior to and during my career as a student at Ball State University, I have struggled with the idea of creativity. At the beginning of each project I must first make a decision on what to construct, followed by several artistic choices along the way until my work is complete. I have learned to apply the knowledge and skills I have acquired over the years in order to solve the problems that I encounter during the creation of a piece, and oftentimes people marvel at the objects I produce, claiming they could never produce something so creative. I, however, observe a chemist using complex formulas and equations so create what they would consider a simple experiment and feel the same inadequacy in comparison to my own abilities. I have concluded that all humans are creative; we simply use our creativity for different purposes. Through the project, I begin to explore the idea of creativity and attempt to further understand the process through which humans create.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Maura Jasper for advising me through this project. Her knowledge and encouragement was the driving force behind my ideas and my execution of them. I would also like to thank my numerous other art professors for sharing their wisdom and skills with me during my time at Ball State, as well as my Honors professors and advisors who encouraged creative thinking and exploration of abstract ideas through their courses. Many thanks go to my parents for always believing in my ability to succeed, and for being there for me when I do not.
In My Shoes

The experiment, “In My Shoes” was meant to be a social experiment based on the relationship between the photographer and the model. I asked participants to come in and to photograph me so that I could relate to what it was like to be on the other side of the lens, as well as allow others to step into my role as photographer for a change. This project developed, however, into a study of creativity and the process involved with producing original work. While I will never fully understand the creative process or the complexities of the human mind and perception, it is a subject that fascinates me and I will continue to pursue; this experiment was merely the beginning of my exploration. Through it I have learned about not only the creative process, but about other individuals and even myself.

The process of the experiment was simple. I would ask individuals to come in and to photograph me. They were told that the study was on how the female figure is represented in art, and how that representation influences our own use of the female figure in our work. They were not to know that I (the model) was the one conducting the experiment so that my real purpose for studying the interaction of model and photographer was not hindered in any way. As many creative projects often do, however, this experiment transformed into something I never imagined it would, and I’m sure it will continue to grow and develop as time passes.
There was a lot of planning involved in the preparation for this work; I had to have support from my peers and help from other students when the photos were being taken. Since I was being photographed, I could not help with lighting or in the documentation of the process, so I needed an assistant who was personable, and skillful with both lighting equipment and the camera. Finding the right person who was willing to volunteer their time was my first major obstacle. In fact, it took three tries and an entire month to find the perfect personality.

After finding help, I outlined the parameters of the experiment. Each participant was to come to the same room and be given the same instructions. They would be given the opportunity to pick from the same selection of props that they could use at their disposal. Their only instruction was to include the model (me) in each photograph in some way or another. They were told that the experiment was based on how the female figure was represented in art, whether individuals would draw inspiration from the classics or use a more contemporary approach in their work. Because of this idea, I tried to choose props that had historical references to famous works such as bracelets, shoes, and fabric represented in Manet's "Olympia" and a ballet costume like the ones seen in the several studies of ballerinas by Degas. I also had assorted objects and items that didn't have historical connections included such as masks, a puppet, and assorted accessories.
The second problem presented itself directly after the first and also involved other people: Who do I ask to volunteer and how do I get them to come in? This is when the experiment took its first dramatic turn.

I wanted to test my process with a few peers who could give me constructive criticism about how it was set up and carried out. I wanted to get a variety of opinions so I chose to have a friend from the art program (Sara) and a friend from the business college (Anne) come in to photograph me and give me feedback. The results from this initial test astounded me.

Both were very close friends of mine so they were very comfortable around me, and both were very confident, intelligent and accomplished individuals. The difference between the photography sessions of these two young ladies was incredible, however. Sara, considering herself creative, carefully considered the props she chose and how they related to each other and would photograph in the composition. She meticulously composed every frame and took multiple exposures at various angles and perspectives. She exhausted the subject matter and spent well over an hour taking photographs. Not surprisingly, she appeared very confident and comfortable in front of me and behind the camera. She gave me instruction and direction and had an expectation for each photograph she captured.

Anne, however, as soon as the camera was placed in her hands became nervous and unsure of herself. She had used a camera before, and had taken
several humanities courses in which she studied artists and their works, so she was not unfamiliar with art or its elements. She did not give me much of any guidance of any kind and carelessly photographed each composition in the same position and proximity from me. The most surprising part for me was the number of photographs she took compared to the number of photographs that Sara had taken. Sara had taken over a hundred photographs whereas Anne had only taken five.

This dramatic difference in number of exposures caught my attention immediately. I wanted to push Anne to take more photographs, however the nature of the experiment did not allow me to do so. Instead, I explored this idea a little further. I started to compare the progression of each participant's session. The first photographs taken by each individual showed no apparent difference in skill level. Sara's best photograph, however, exceeded Anne's best photograph in terms of composition and creativity by far.

Does this mean that quantity makes quality? No, I don't think that would be an accurate assumption. I do, however, believe that the more people allow themselves to explore the possibilities of their work and the potentials for their medium that the more they will develop and improve.

I decided to continue the experiment in this manner. I chose my participants based on their self-proclaimed level of creativity. I found the results
to be consistent: those who consider themselves creative took a great deal more photos than those who do not see themselves as creative. After just a few participants, this piece soon developed into a study of creative process and how individuals approach the idea of creativity.

This change was something I really struggled with throughout the entire process, but my initial idea forced me to let go of all control over the outcomes of the work and put it into the hands of the participants who photographed me. I did not want my voice to hinder their individuality in any way; I wanted their work to be a reflection of what they had in themselves and not of what I wanted the outcomes to be.

In letting go, I realized the piece was taking on a life and a character of its own, opening the door for other areas of exploration into the idea of creativity, which I have always found fascinating since I am constantly called upon to produce original and well developed ideas in my profession. I am familiar with what my own techniques are for developing ideas; I was curious to study the behaviors of others when placed in my role as an artist. I wanted to point out any similarities between types of participants so that I could better understand a particular method to creativity if there was one.

I noticed a few trends with both types of participants that were also consistent throughout the experiment. The "non-creative" participants would spend between 15 seconds and 1 minute deciding what props to incorporate in
their photos and gave no thought to the environment. I found that the non-creative participants’ first photograph was constantly their most artistic and dramatic. Because of this, I feel that these participants were inspired by the props and were able to form a vision in their head of how to compose the photograph, but after their idea was captured, they no longer knew how to pursue the subject matter.

The “creatives” were the polar opposite of the other participants. They took several minutes to select the props and often changed their mind multiple times before finally settling on their objects. Their first photographs were no better or worse than the non-creatives’ first photographs, and they also appeared to be inspired by the props in the same way, however, their photos consistently improved in artistic quality and creativity while the non-creatives’ photos weakened. The creatives also gave consideration to the environment and utilized equipment from the lighting studio in addition to the provided props. They experimented with several ideas, some successful, some not, and altered the position of the camera multiple times in the capturing of each composition. They explored nearly every potential for the subject matter.

Based on this initial experiment, I have ideas on how to further my understanding of the creative process. I want to continue to study the behaviors of “creative” people and construct a set of new guidelines to pursue this experiment. I want to work with only self-declared non-creative participants and
have them mimic the consistent behaviors of creative individuals and see whether the quality of their photos improves in the same pattern my creative participants’ did.

I would like to have the same group of participants from the first experiment come in and work with the same props they initially chose. I will have them come in several times and work under the new guidelines, forcing them to explore the materials and exhaust the subject matter. I then want to remove all restrictions other than the original requirement to include the female model and see if they revert back to their original method or if they adapt some of the behaviors of the creatives they have been forced to use in the latter part of the experiment.

The topic of creativity is one I have been enthralled with since childhood. The ability to invent and create is what sets humans apart from other animals, which is why I feel that we are all creative in one way or another. Some use their creativity to draw or paint, others to invent new products or solve environmental problems. Our curiosity identifies the problem; our creativity finds a solution.

This project was one of the hardest I’ve ever set out to do because of the lack of control I had over nearly every part of the experiment. I had to rely heavily on the help and support of others and to allow the participants to guide my creativity and ideas. I have realized that it takes a strong person to let go and let a piece be what it needs to be.
I have learned quite a bit about myself throughout the entire process of this experiment. I have realized how much I have grown as both an artist and as an individual since I began my career as an art student. I was no better off than any of my "non-creatives" when I started as a freshman. I had inspiration, but no vision. Skills but no drive or endurance. I have learned to trust my instincts, but to rely on my knowledge and abilities combined with the support of friends and encouragement from my professors. I know that I hardly ever get it right the first time, and that I need to push myself to get my best work. The more I explore my ideas and learn about my work, the more I learn about myself. I can no longer walk away from the compositions of my mind like the participants walked away from the compositions of their photographs, satisfied that they have been accomplished. I am driven to explore my ideas to their fullest, exhaust them until every possibility has been recognized. I become so involved in my work that I become my work, my work becomes me. And I realize that is how it should be. My hands are simply the tools my soul uses to speak to the world.

Creativity is just like any other skill that people develop; it must me learned, practiced, and maintained in order to operate at its full potential. The creative mind is simply the exercised mind. Someone who sees the world in an abstract and inventive way has learned how to do so through his or her individual
experiences. It takes a strong mind and intense understanding of one’s self to be able to listen to the direction of our souls, and practiced hands and heart to translate for the world to see.

The experiment, “In My Shoes” has been a long and difficult process that has transformed and taken unexpected turns, but has been extremely rewarding and the knowledge I have taken from it thus far will carry with me throughout my career. I have been faced with challenges that have increased my understanding of people, the creative process, and even of myself. It is a body of work and an idea that I will continue to pursue, whether through my photography, design, or simply in my daily life and interaction with others. While I am completing my studies as an art student, I will never quit my study of creativity or the intricacies of the human mind and the way we perceive the world.
in my shoes
a walk through the creative process

alana michelle papoy
honors thesis
spring 2011
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The process of the experiment was simple. I would ask individuals to come in and to photograph me. They were told that the study was on how the female figure is represented in art, and how that representation influences our own use of the female figure in our work. They were not to know that I (the model) was the one conducting the experiment so that my real purpose for studying the interaction of model and photographer was not hindered in any way. A copy of the instructions given to each participant is located on the next page. As many creative projects often do, however, this experiment transformed into something I never imagined it would, and I'm sure it will continue to grow and develop as time passes.
In My Shoes: Honors Thesis Experiment
Project Description

Dear Participant,

Welcome and thank you for making the decision to participate in my Senior Thesis Project entitled, "In My Shoes."

The purpose of this experiment is to better understand how society’s exposure to art influences their use of particular subjects when given the opportunity to express themselves creatively in a controlled environment. I chose to use the female figure as my subject of research because it is one of the most widely used themes spanning nearly every style, medium, and movement since the creation of art. I use the female figure very frequently in my own work and often find myself either unconsciously mimicking the classics or intentionally looking to them for inspiration and direction. This realization has sparked an interest in how others, whether knowingly or unknowingly, are also affected by other artists’ ideas.

Procedure:
When you enter the studio, you will find a variety of equipment that you may use at your discretion. Don’t freak out... an assistant will be present to help with any needs you may have and to handle the lighting tools and equipment for you. You will also find the following props displayed for you to incorporate in your compositions if you choose to: assorted costumes, shoes, and clothing / makeup and body pencils / puppet / mask / various fabrics, shrugs / doll / female model
Due to the nature of the experiment, the one requirement is that you use the model in each photograph. Other than that, you may have complete control over the compositions.

While the process is being documented for my own observation and research, your identity will not be revealed at any time during the presentation of this piece. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this piece, or are interested in following the progress of the experiment, you may contact me by email: ampapoy@gmail.com or by phone: 812-276-3232.

Again, thank you for your time, ideas, and interest in this project.

Alana Papoy

*The model reserves the right to refuse any request that might threaten her personal comfort or safety in any way.
**More information regarding confidentiality can be found on the Image Release Form provided to you in this packet.
There was a lot of planning involved in the preparation for this work; I had to have support from my peers and help from other students when the photos were being taken. Since I was being photographed, I could not help with lighting or in the documentation of the process, so I needed an assistant who was personable and skillful with both lighting equipment and the camera. Finding the right person who was willing to volunteer their time was my first major obstacle. In fact, it took three tries and an entire month to find the perfect personality.


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- assorted costumes, shoes, and clothing
- makeup and body paint
- puppet / mask
- various fabrics, shrugs, doll / female model

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The second problem presented itself directly after the first and also involved other people: Who do I ask to volunteer and how do I get them to come in? This is when the experiment took its first dramatic turn.
An n e, however, as soon as the camera was placed in her hands became nervous and unsure of herself. She had used a camera before, and had taken several humanities courses in which she studied artists and their works, so she was not unfamiliar with art or its elements. She did not give me much of any guidance of any kind and carelessly photographed each composition in the same position and proximity from me. The most surprising part for me was the number of photographs she took compared to the number of photographs that Sara had taken. Sara had taken over a hundred photographs whereas Anne had only taken five.
This dramatic difference in number of exposures caught my attention immediately. I wanted to push Anne to take more photographs, however the nature of the experiment did not allow me to do so. Instead, I explored this idea a little further.

I started to compare the progression of each participant's session. The first photographs taken by each individual showed no apparent difference in skill level. Sara's best photograph, however, exceeded Anne's best photograph in terms of composition and creativity by far.

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Sara, 22-year-old student, self-declared "creative" individual.
I decided to continue the experiment in this manner. I chose my participants based on their self-proclaimed level of creativity and stayed within the same demographic age and occupation in order to limit the variables as much as possible. I found the results to be consistent: those who consider themselves creative took a great deal more photos than those who do not see themselves as creative. After just a few participants, this piece soon developed into a study of creative process and how individuals approach the idea of creativity.

This change was something I really struggled with throughout the entire process, but my initial idea forced me to let go of all control over the outcomes of the work and put it into the hands of the participants who photographed me. I did not want my voice to hinder their individuality in any way; I wanted their work to be a reflection of what they had in themselves and not of what I wanted the outcomes to be.
In letting go, I realized the piece was taking on a life and a character of its own, opening the door for other areas of exploration into the idea of creativity, which I have always found fascinating since I am constantly called upon to produce original and well-developed ideas in my profession. I am familiar with what my own techniques are for developing ideas; I was curious to study the behaviors of others when placed in my role as an artist. I wanted to point out any similarities between types of participants so that I could better understand a particular method to creativity if there was one.

Jeremy, 22-year-old student, self-declared “non-creative” individual.

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The “creatives” were the polar opposite of the other participants. They took several minutes to select the props and often changed their mind multiple times before finally settling on their objects. Their first photographs were no better or worse than the non-creatives’ first photographs, and they also appeared to be inspired by the props in the same way, however, their photos consistently improved in artistic quality and creativity while the non-creatives’ photos weakened. The creatives also gave consideration to the environment and utilized equipment from the lighting studio in addition to the provided props. They experimented with several ideas, some successful, some not, and altered the position of the camera multiple times in the capturing of each composition. They explored nearly every potential for the subject matter.

Amy, 21-year-old student, self-declared “creative” individual.
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