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CREATIVITY REQUIRES SLOWNESS AND INNER BALANCE IN A FAST-PACED WORLD

Summary. *On the rise technological, social and cultural changes put pressure on humans to be fast, and always creating. This work considers the tension between the insatiable drive of the rapid and frantic world, and the intrinsic needs for creative processes and argues that creativity involves the need for slowness, psychological space, and internal equilibrium. Referring to interdisciplinary literature, particularly work on tattooing, which represents a form of embodied creative practice, we situate the field of creativity not as an output process oriented toward creating, but as a process of making meaning inextricably connected to identity, embodiment, and emotional regulation. Drawing on cultural anthropology, psychology, and expressive therapies, the analysis helps to demonstrate that artistic processes, such as tattoo art, are reflective processes, symbolic integration, and personal transformation. These are incompatible processes with rapid production cycles and trends. The research indicates that burnout, lack of authenticity and decreased creative depth are all prevalent effects of speed-oriented systems. The*

study develops an interpretive framework underscoring “creative deceleration” as a must-have condition for meaningfully producing art. Not only does the suggestion of prioritizing process over immediate results, and moving creative work closer to internal balance, improve psychological well-being through which artists seek authenticity. The paper intervenes in other aspects of the literature by redefining creativity as a temporally sensitive and psychologically situated construct, rather than a measure of productivity.

Key words: *Creativity, Creative process, Slowness, Inner balance, Burnout, Meaning-making, Identity construction, Embodied creativity, Tattooing, Self-expression, Intrinsic motivation, Creative authenticity, Cultural influence, Psychological well-being, Creative deceleration framework.*

Introduction. The modern age is one of unprecedented rapidity. As a consequence of digital technologies, social media ecosystems and globalized cultural flows the speed of communication, production and consumption accelerated drastically. Within this context, creative people are facing mounting pressures to produce quickly, be perpetually shown in front of anyone and adhere their work to ever-changing trends. This can be interesting work because at the same time making such dynamics potentially more presentable and accessible, they also create conditions for more genuine creative practices.

Creativity (art and artifice as it is conventionally conceived) has never been only imagined in terms of production but of cognition, emotion, identity and culture. Tattoos and other forms of making offer a particularly powerful way of viewing this cross-fertilization. Tattooing is a highly cognitive and embodied brand of creative practice, characterized by artistic choices that are intimately linked to self-realization, self-definition and enduring symbolic importance [5; 8]. Tattoos are not fast-consuming paintings, they require a level of permanence, an intention (as in

feeling) and a feeling of something, in terms of the human psyche (like emotion, memory). Yet, the contemporary creative process frequently values velocity more than substance.

Artists may feel it's important to be trendy, to have one's share a lot of media, to produce a lot of content and to keep their visibility metrics optimized rather than slow down introspectively. So there's this dichotomy between an external drive with everyone else's expectations and an internal one with creative needs. It is suggested as the result that creativity is often tied into meaning making, emotion processing, and identity building [3; 14] in that it takes time and time in its own right and takes up mental space. The ever-growing issue of burnout among artistic professionals serves as a testament to the ramifications of this disparity.

The impetus for expeditious and on-going production may not only be detrimental to intrinsic motivation but can also limit creative authenticity and contribute to psychological burnout (See Figure 1). Discoveries in body modification and creative expression demonstrate the extent to which genuine creative practice is underpinned by internal factors of self-expression, healing and identity-affirming factors [1; 11].



Fig. 1. The Pressure of a Fast World vs the Inner Creative State

Source: photo from internet

This paper sees creativity as a function of slowness and inner balance. Taking tattooing as a case in point, this paper shows that deep and authentic creative practice comes to pass only when you are reflecting and process-oriented. The research goes on to show that a need to reclaim one's temporal space as well as the practice of a preference for internal alignment, rather than external trends, means that both creative quality and psychological well-being need to be maintained.

Literature Review

1. Creativity as Meaning-Making and Identity Construction

A substantial amount of literature conceptualizes creativity as not just production but rather a process of meaning-making. This perspective is strikingly clear in tattooing. Tattoos serve as a symbolic embodiment of personal narrative, identity, and transformation [5; 8]. People tattoo for more than making decorators,

but also for constructing and articulating meaning through visual and bodily expressions.

Carpentier (2023) has highlighted the therapeutic aspect of self-expression as a process, and asserts that art-making provides the means through which the processing of emotional responses, the integration of an individual’s experiences, and the re-creation of identity occur [3]. Per Pankiv-Greene (2023), tattoos are transformative symbols – the visible product of internal psychological changes [14].

These results imply that creativity is naturally reflective and involves some time for internal processing. Tattooing has, at a broader cultural level, been a source of identity or social belonging [7; 9]. This points up how cultural, psychological and structural factors heavily influence creativity, thus going against the belief that creativity may be developed at speed, without it losing meaning.



Fig. 2. Creativity as an Internal Process (Embodied Meaning-Making)

Source: photo from internet

2. The Psychological Functions of Creative Practices

Psychological regulation and well-being are closely linked to creative practices. Research shows that creative expression can help people vent their

emotions, lower stress levels, and promote psychological resilience [11; 17]. Tattooing especially has been linked to processes of healing, body reclamation, and identity affirmation [8; 10].

The psychological function of body modification has been widely explored. Weiler et al. (2025) argue that body alterations serve as mechanisms for self-regulation and identity stabilization [19]. Likewise, DeMeola (2018) conceptualizes tattooing as a transformative process that enables individuals to integrate internal experiences into external forms [6]. Crucially, these processes need time, reflection, and emotional engagement.

Rapid or externally driven creative production may disrupt these mechanisms, resulting in superficial or inauthentic outcomes. This is consistent with self-determination theory, which stresses the significance of intrinsic motivation and autonomy in sustaining meaningful behavior [18].

3. The Impact of Speed and External Pressures on Creativity

Modern life hastens the pace of evolution, and that poses major challenges to creative processes. Fast is more desirable than deep at all levels of performance, but social media exposure, time-varying trends, or economic imperatives often do not let that matter. And this shifts intrinsic to extrinsic motivation, and in so doing, can deteriorate the quality and authenticity of creative work. Such studies imply that people use creative behaviours to be unique, as well as gain social validation [2; 20].

Yet the push to be outside-in is a slippery slope and once the external validation comes in the middle of creativity the creativity becomes performative, or not authentic. Further, evidence suggests that cultural trends largely shape artistic choices. Clemmensen et al. (2025) demonstrate that much of tattooing is culturally-based, implying, of course, that people may adopt designs to match social trends without personal meaning [4]. Not that such practices don't have value, but it's a reflection of the push-pull between authenticity and fitting into the box.

Tattoos have increased among younger populations, revealing the prevalence of cultural desensitization and commodification of artistic expression [13]. The new reality seems more sinister: The symbolic implications of tattooing may be diluted through rapid consumption and trendiness.

4. Burnout and the Loss of Creative Authenticity

The expectations for speedy output and predictability can cause creativity specialists to get burnout. Burnout involves emotional exhaustion, loss of motivation, and less of an individual's feeling that, for whatever reason, they succeed at that task. In terms of creativity, it can result in loss of inspiration and/or a formulaic or redundant output.

In fact, studies have shown that creativity practices work best when it is motivated by people, internal motivation and psychological needs [1]. Then, when these practices come at people from without (external pressurizing forces), they can lead to cognitive overload and decreased emotional engagement (See Figure 3). Moreover, the commodification of creativity can turn individuals from artists to free-market users. Owens et al. (2023) say how historical perceptions of body modification as deviant changed into mainstream acceptance, accompanied by commercialization [12]. Now this change can lead to the loss of personal significance in creative activities.



Fig. 3. Burnout vs Sustainable Creativity

Source: photo from internet

5. Creativity, Slowness, and Internal Balance

The literature support is growing in favor of the concept of time and psychological space being essential to creativity. The slow approach allows an individual to take a thoughtful look at their thoughts, feelings, and sense of self. This is particularly obvious in tattooing, which requires the result to be intentional and considerate due to permanence.

Rees (2021) argues that contemporary tattooing has found authenticity through authenticity and that meaningful artistic creation results from personal engagement, not as an example of trend alignment [15]. Likewise, Roux and Belk (2019) situate the body as a space of meaning production whereby creative actions render the physical space into symbolic narratives [16]. The notion of “creative

deceleration” arises as a critical response to the challenges posed by contemporary existence. Gradually slowing things down helps reconnect people with their inner motivations, control their emotional responses, and produce more meaningful and authentic work (See Table 1).

Table 1

Thematic Categorization of Sources

Theme	Key Sources	Core Contribution
Meaning-making & identity	Dann & Callaghan (2019); Ifrach (2025); Rees (2021)	Creativity as identity construction
Psychological function	Carpentier (2023); McCandlish & Pearson (2023); Solano-Ruiz et al. (2025)	Creativity as emotional regulation
Cultural influence	Clemmensen et al. (2025); Palese & Valent (2025); Ghosh (2020)	Creativity shaped by social trends
Body & transformation	Lefebvre (2024); DeMeola (2018); Weiler et al. (2025)	Embodied creativity and transformation
Motivation & pressure	Atli et al. (2022); Teixeira et al. (2020); Breivik et al. (2022)	Intrinsic vs extrinsic drivers

Source: author's development

Methodology. The study uses qualitative interpretive research design to explore creativity, temporal dynamics, and psychological balance in modernity. Instead of employing an empirical or ‘measureful’ approach, the study blends theoretical and empirical insights from various disciplines, centred on tattooing as an exemplar of embodied creative practice. This methodological focus is based upon conceptual analysis and thematic synthesis. By analyzing these key themes, the authors tried to uncover themes that re-emerged on creativity, identity construction, psychological regulation, and cultural influence. There are three stages to the analysis.

The literature was initially grouped into thematic clusters as follows: (1) creativity as meaning-making; (2) psychological functions of creative practices; (3) external pressures and acceleration; and (4) authenticity and internal balance. The second step was to interrogate and interpret these themes critically to recognize patterns, contradictions, and gaps. Third, an integrative framework was established to help conceptualize the intersection of creative processes and temporal conditions. The author's contribution entails elaborating the "creative deceleration" framework that puts slowness and internal balance within the context of meaningful creativity.

Drawing from and applying to the literature, this framework provides a theoretical lens that can contextualize the influences of speed on creative practice at present in contemporary creative spaces.

Results. The analysis uncovers five key findings on the relation between creativity, speed, and psychological balance.

First, a process rather than an outcome must be understood about creativity all through the years. Creative processes (in particular, tattooing) are linked with meaning-making, identity construction, and emotional integration throughout the literature [5; 8]. Processes like this take time and cannot best be compressed into short, fast production cycles.

Second, psychological well-being is inseparable from how well creative engagement performs. When creative practices are internally motivated and reflective, emotional regulation and emotional resilience develops [11; 17]. Outside creativity - on the basis of trends, or social affirmation - leads to superficial results (and some psychological stress).

Third, the speed of contemporary life imposes drastic disturbances on creative processes. We feel pressure not to produce, and the results we get can often look too shallow, not authentic enough, and burnout is likely to be a result. This becomes all

the more clear when all this is done in environments focused more on being seen and output than quality and purpose.

Fourth, there's a twofold function of the cultural and social. They are, they may put meaning and imagination there and they may also constrain art making as freedom is being stifled. The rise in normalization and commodification of tattooing demonstrate the ways that creativity can move from intimate acts of creativity to commodities [4; 13].

The final message of the current findings is that slowness and internal balance, which the study presents here, are critical to creative processes. Practices that enable reflection, emotion and self-congruence are more authentic and psychologically healthier.

The result of this study reveals a central inconsistency of contemporary creative settings, that the creative process is slow, introspective and ultimately self-driven, yet in contemporary institutions, we can find more and more systems requiring speed, exposure and external recognition. Such contradiction has implications which are grave on the quality of creative output and the psychological health of people with the creative potential. This is the core idea of creativity as progression not result in the discussion of creativity.

This principle is best illustrated by the use of artistic and artistic arts like tattooing. Tattoos are also not simply visual artifacts; they are products of many years of self-reflection, emotional processing and identity negotiation [8; 14]. Tattoos are permanent objects of concern; the fact that they require careful thoughtfulness, they're not fit for quick fix production.

This wisdom touches on creativity more generally, not just tattooing. Creative work that is hastily or imposed from outside, runs the risk of losing its depth, and of losing its authenticity. The transformation of intrinsic to extrinsic motivation is also

a big issue. For self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation is critical for maintaining engagement and well-being [18].

When people produce only to satisfy societal standards, what it creates, their level of enjoyment in the creative process decreases, which brings them into greater difficulty with high level of burnout. Burnout represents a key feature of fast-paced workspaces. The relentless pressure to produce, along with pressure to stay timely in rapidly evolving cultural environments, results in a vicious circle of exhaustion and stifled creativity. This is consistent with externalized creative practices having less emotional involvement and more psychological strain in humans [1]. The influence of culture also complicates this process. Culture can be an impetus towards creativity as well as a bane to it. The normalisation/commercialisation of tattoo shows how creative practices are standardized and commodified [13].

In such cases, people may give preference to adhering, and lose meaning. This proposal focuses on these challenges and has led to the idea of what one may call a “creative deceleration” framework, whereby slowness serves to center our mind and body, encouraging balance within (See Table 2). The theory posits that meaningful creativity demands intentionally disconnecting from dynamic systems, and instead engaging again in reflective, process-oriented activities.

Table 2

Comparison of Fast vs Slow Creative Paradigms

Dimension	Fast Creativity (Acceleration Model)	Slow Creativity (Deceleration Model)
Primary Driver	External pressure (trends, visibility)	Internal motivation (meaning, identity)
Temporal Orientation	Immediate output, short cycles	Long-term process, reflection
Creative Depth	Superficial, repetitive	Deep, symbolic, original
Psychological Impact	Burnout, stress, detachment	Balance, fulfillment, resilience
Relationship to Trends	Conformity, imitation	Selective integration or rejection

Identity Integration	Weak or fragmented	Strong, coherent, embodied
Output Quality	High quantity, variable quality	Lower quantity, high authenticity
Sustainability	Unsustainable long-term	Sustainable creative practice

Source: author's development

This framework also has some implications for creative individuals. At the very least, it promotes a preference for process ahead of results. To improve the quality and authenticity of their work, people need to concentrate on the process rather than the product. Second, it emphasizes the necessity of psychological harmony. Practices like reflection, mindfulness, and purposefully staying away from outside pressures can advance creative health and well-being.

Third, the framework resists typical stories of productivity. In a culture that links speed to success, to slow down seems wasteful. However, the study suggests slowness is not a constraint. It is fundamental to real creativity. Finally, the message of this discussion is for systemic change to happen.

The focus on production and visibility is something that creative industries and platforms need to move past. In this way they will be able to facilitate greater sustainable and authentic creative activities by developing environments of reflection and motivation from inside.

Conclusions. As this paper shows, creativity is dependent on slowness, psychological space, and internal balance. To answer these, in contrast with the pressure of modern society, effective creative processes cannot happen all at once; on a more thoughtful and meaningful basis, they are only possible through slow and thoughtful reflection, emotional involvement, and identity integration. This investigation of tattooing as an embodied creative practice illustrates the richness of the creativity involved. This shows that genuine creative expressions are based on internal motives and can never be boiled down to fast production or trend alignment.

But the rising need to create quickly comes with its own set of risks including burnout, loss of authenticity, and diminished creative quality. The “creative deceleration” model offered in the latter is a theoretical blueprint which will aid in grappling with the challenges presented in turn. It is a way for both creativity and well-being to be sustained by focusing instead on process rather than output and balance instead of the trends. Finally, this paper urges us to rethink our views of creativity in the contemporary world in order to redefine creativity and practice as it is used to describe human creativity. Slowing down isn’t a break from productive activity but a precursor to meaning and longevity in creative output.

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