

## CREATIVITY IN LATER LIFE: POSSIBILITIES FOR PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

### Abstract

*This article examines the relationship between creative pursuits in later life and personal empowerment. Unfortunately, the relationship between creativity and ageing remains to this very day highly vague and ill-defined. Society tends to have a negative view of ageing, believing that old age brings a decline in adults' intelligence, and hence, less ability to provide an original solution to a problem or challenge at hand. As a result, research on creativity has generally focused on relatively younger cohorts rather than adults who are in the latter stages of the life course. Moreover, the centre of attention has been largely on the relationship of creativity to intelligence, rather upon the possible linkages between creativity and empowerment. To achieve its goal, this article reports upon reminiscence sessions conducted with older adults in Malta in July 2012. Although reminiscence is not typically considered a creative activity, it actually entails cognitive and emotional processes involved in the conception of meaningful solutions to past problems. Research findings demonstrate clearly that creative engagement in later life leads to improved levels of personal empowerment. First, by bringing about changes that enhance more positive attitudes toward life, better problem-solving skills, and greater emotional control (intrapersonal empowerment). And secondly, by stimulating changes in attitudes and skills related to interacting with other people, such as appreciation of other people's merits, willingness to seek help from others, and eagerness to care for others (interpersonal empowerment).*

### Introduction

My lecturing duties in social gerontology take me frequently to caring settings for older persons. One day, entering a residential home for older persons, I was struck by the variety of art paintings on its walls. Thinking that somebody was holding an exhibition for the home's benefits, I was informed that the paintings were the work of some residents who had run painting ses-

sions twice a week during the summer. The next day, my schedule took me to a community day centre for older persons. As a kind of déjà vu, my entrance saw me facing various paintings, arts and crafts, sewing artefacts, and poems displayed on walls and tables. Not wanting to do the same mistake twice, I immediately congratulated the members present for their creative work. The physical, psychological, and social benefits of creativity were unmistakable. The older persons in both the nursing home and day centre were optimistic, extroverted, and this can never be overstated, highly inspiring.

Henceforth, began my fascination of that interface between creativity, later life, and learning. At every opportunity, during lectures, visits to nursing homes and day centres, and in my roles in elder learning programmes, I continuously strive to understand better the capacity of older adults for creative pursuits and the potential benefits that follow. Unfortunately, the relationship between creativity and ageing remains to this very day highly vague and ill-defined. Society tends to have a negative view of ageing, believing that old age brings a decline in adults' intelligence, and hence, less ability to provide an original solution to a problem or challenge at hand. As a result, research on creativity has generally focused on relatively younger cohorts rather than adults who are in the latter stages of the life course. Moreover, the centre of attention has been largely on the relationship of creativity to intelligence, rather upon the possible linkages between creativity and empowerment.

This article studies the potential of creativity to lead older adults towards improved levels of personal empowerment, and reports upon reminiscence sessions conducted with older adults in Malta in July 2012. Although reminiscence is not typically considered a creative activity, it actually entails cognitive and emotional processes involved in the conception of meaningful solutions to past problems. This article includes eight parts. Whilst the first section explores the relations between creativity and later life, the second section focuses on the benefits of creative pursuits for older persons. The third section outlines the concept of personal empowerment, whilst the methodological implications that guided the action research project are the task of the fourth section. The fifth section provides information on the way that the reminiscence sessions developed. The final three sections present data on the potential of creativity to augment personal empowerment in later life.

### Creativity and later life

One dominant stereotype arises when creativity and later life are put next to each other. It is widely assumed, and to an extent even accepted, that creativity is an attribute commonly associated with the young, often perceived as the exclusive product of the high energy, mental acuity, and dexte-

urity of youth. Commentators are quick to point out that Keats and Mozart, reached the heights in their youth, and hence, serve as the archetypes of youthful vigour and artistic drive. On the other hand, Verdi, Picasso, and Monet, who all peaked much later in age, are regarded as exceptions to the rule. In an oft-cited passage, creativity is generally defined by both older adult educators and social gerontologists as

*...the ability to innovate, to change the environment rather than merely adjust to it in a more passive sense. So, we create scientific theories, compose artistic masterpieces, and construct imaginative utopias.*<sup>107</sup>

It is therefore a process requiring the individual to open to new ideas and approaches, to seek an original solution for a problem or challenge at hand.<sup>108</sup> Creativity also incorporates a range of cognitive and emotional processes involved in the conception of meaningful products, a meta-cognitive process that generates novel and useful associations, attributes, images, or sets of operations, to solve problems, produce plans, or fabricate novel products. Ultimately, the creative process challenges us to use accumulated skills to manipulate tools and resources to express a vision or idea.

The limited literature that exists on that interface between creativity and later life demonstrate that whilst creative outputs, and such processes as divergent thinking, actually show a decline from middle age onwards. Yet, there is clear evidence that capacity, interest, and attitudes do not necessarily decline with age. Although Lehman's<sup>109</sup> book *Age and Achievement*, and Dennis's<sup>110</sup> paper *Creative productivity between ages of 20 and 80 years*, found evidence of a decline of creativity with age, their work has received strong criticism.<sup>111</sup> Critics pointed out that these works measured creative output and not creative capacity. This distinction is important because as people grow older they tend to experience a variety of factors – ranging from in-

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<sup>107</sup> D.K. Simonton, "Creativity and wisdom in aging," in *Columbia retirement handbook*, ed. A. Monk (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>108</sup> M. Flood and K. D. Phillips, "Creativity in older adults: A plethora of possibilities," *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 28, no. 4 (2007).

<sup>109</sup> H. C. Lehman, *Age and achievement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953).

<sup>110</sup> W. Dennis, "Creative productivity between ages of 20 and 80 years," *Journal of Gerontology* 21, no. 1 (1966).

<sup>111</sup> J. Hickson and W. Housley, "Creativity in later life," *Educational Gerontology* 23, no. 6 (1997).

creased administrative tasks, illness, loss of sensory acuity, to other changing biopsychosocial factors – that decrease one's creative output while not implying decreased capacity. In fact, life-span studies on creativity do not show a bell curve peaking in the middle years but three diverse patterns – namely, up-down-up, rising creative activity, and consistent creative activity. The reasons for these patterns are not clear. It is possible that an individual's locus of control affects the patterns of creativity over the life span. On one hand, the up-down-up pattern (a creative peak in the early years followed by a decline and then another peak in the later years) may reflect an artist with an external locus of control. The decline in the middle years is generally experienced by those facing family and career responsibilities, and hence, whose life is more controlled by external forces. As Lamdin and Fugate<sup>112</sup> underline, "the inner drive towards creativity, frequently truncated or denied by the demands of 'getting on' in life – earning a living, raising a family, attending to the multiple chores of existence – can have a joyous resurgence in later life". On the other hand, consistent and rising patterns of creativity may be more typical of persons whose life contexts make them more personally responsible for their daily living. These include persons who have no partners or children, and who engage in creative pursuits as their full-time occupation.

### Benefits of creativity for older persons

Research studies about the benefits of creativity work for older adults suggest that there are multiple positive effects. Findings imply that creative activities can improve problem-solving ability, self-esteem, coping skills, anxiety, life satisfaction, and depressive symptoms. Moreover, creative interventions have generally elicited positive anecdotal feedback from older adult participants and stimulated their involvement and responsiveness.<sup>113</sup> In an examination of the relationship between creativity and successful ageing, Fisher and Specht<sup>114</sup> concluded that creative activity contributes to successful aging by encouraging development of problem-solving skills that translate into a practical creativity in older adults' daily living. They also found that creativity fostered a sense of competence, purpose, and emotional growth. Physiological benefits have also been recorded. When the brain engages in creative work, it alerts the parasympathetic nervous system; heart rate and breathing slow down, blood pressure decreases, blood circulation to the intestines in-

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<sup>112</sup> L. Lamdin and M. Fugate, "Elder learning: New frontier in an aging society," (Phoenix, AZ: American Council on Education & the Oryx Press, 1997), 63.

<sup>113</sup> Flood and Phillips, "Creativity in older adults: A plethora of possibilities."

<sup>114</sup> B. Fisher and D. Specht, "Successful aging and creativity later in life," *Journal of Aging Studies* 13, no. 4 (1999).

creases, and the body shifts into relaxation.<sup>115</sup> Creative activities also stimulate the hypothalamus to activate the autonomic nervous system, stabilizing and maintaining blood flow, heart rate, and hormone levels.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, engaging in creative activity can stimulate the release of endorphins from specific areas of the brain, affecting brain cells and the immune system and improving their function. In fact, Kreitzer and Snyder<sup>117</sup> found that the placement of art sessions in intensive care functioned to help patients relax, use less pain medication, and to be discharged earlier than peers who did not have artwork in their rooms.

If one turns the attention towards specific creative pursuits, poetry was found to offer many benefits such as provoking insight, promoting life reviews, and encouraging the resolution of unresolved conflicts.<sup>118</sup> Other forms of writing – especially keeping journals – have also proven useful for older adults. Brady and Sky<sup>119</sup> categorised the benefits of journal writing as the ability to cope, the joy of discovery, the nurturing of voice and spirit, in addition to poetry-writing, as well as building up confidence, since participants tend to grow more confident as they realised that they did have important things to say. Reminiscence is another frequently studied form of creative activity. Westerhof and colleagues<sup>120</sup> conducted a study of reminiscence in 57 older adults, who participated in 12 themed reminiscence sessions, and found that participants tended to have more positive personal meanings after the sessions, and be less negative about the self and social relationships. As regards art, Cohen<sup>121</sup> compared 150 treatment and 150 control participants aged 65 and older, where the former met for 35 weekly meetings and were also given between-session assignments, as well as outings to exhibitions, and concerts. Findings showed that whilst the treatment group reported better health one year after baseline starting point measures, the control group reported their health was not as good one year post-baseline measures.

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<sup>115</sup> M. Samuels and M. Lane, *Creative healing* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998).

<sup>116</sup> M. Lane, "Creativity and spirituality in nursing," *Holistic Nursing Practice* 19, no. 3 (2005).

<sup>117</sup> M. Kreitzer and M. Snyder, "Healing the heart: Integrating complimentary therapies and healing practices into the care of cardiovascular patients," *Progressive Cardiovascular Nursing* 17, no. 1 (2002).

<sup>118</sup> H. Sluder, "The write way: Using poetry for self-disclosure," *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing* 28, no. 7 (1990).

<sup>119</sup> E. Brady and H. Sky, "Journal writing among older learners," *Educational Gerontology* 29, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>120</sup> G. Westerhof, E. Bohlmeijer, and M. Valenkamp, "In search of meaning: A reminiscence program for older persons," *Educational Gerontology* 30, no. 9 (2004).

<sup>121</sup> G. Cohen, *The mature mind: The positive power of the ageing brain* (New York: Basic, 2005).

Mental health was also positively affected by the intervention as the intervention group revealed significantly lower levels of depression. After a year, whilst activity levels amongst the intervention group increased by an average of two activities per person, the opposite was the case for the control group.

### Personal empowerment

There can be no doubt as regards the potential of creative pursuits to lead older adults towards improved levels of active, successful, and productive ageing. However, it is unfortunate that there is a tendency for many authors to refer to the actual benefits derived from participation in creative pursuits as end-in-themselves. My view is that such physiological and psychosocial benefits are to be celebrated primarily for the reason that they function in empowering older adults. Empowerment is not the same as benefits, as the former is only the outcome of the latter. Empowerment generally refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills for coping with problems and stress, the ability to gain greater control over one's life, the ability to comprehend social and political realities, or the cultivation of resources and strategies that help to achieve goals.<sup>122</sup> Empowerment can occur at two levels – namely, at the individual level (personal empowerment) and the social level (collective empowerment). Personal empowerment, to quote Cheung and colleagues<sup>123</sup> refers "to the occurrence of changes of the individual in personal qualities, which include outlook on life, personal ability, emotional control, and knowledge about society, all of which are conducive to more effective decision making and handling of problems". To-date, research in older adult learning has highlighted the difficulties that educators face in their attempts to translate learning initiatives into larger community change.<sup>124</sup> Yet, the opposite is true with respect to personal empowerment, as there are various narratives on elder learning highlighting how study circles lead to improvements in the personal qualities of the learners.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Y.W. Cheung, B-H. Mok, and T-S. Cheung, "Personal empowerment and life satisfaction among self-help group members in Hong Kong," *Small Group Research* 36, no. 3 (2005).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.: 356.

<sup>124</sup> A. Withnall, *Improving learning in later life* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>125</sup> E.F. Nye, "A Freirean approach to working with elders or: *Conscientização* at the Jewish community centre," *Journal of aging studies* 12, no. 2 (1998); Marvin Formosa, "Rethinking empowerment: A postmodern appraisal of critical educational gerontology," in *Elderly, education, intergenerational relationships and social development. Proceedings of the 2nd Conference of Education and Learning of Older Adults (ELOA)*, ed. E. Veloso, et al. (Braga, Portugal: CIED – Centro de Investigação em Educação Instituto de Educação, Universidade do Minho, 2011).

There are strong overlaps between creativity and empowerment. Adaptability, flexibility, and coping are all inherent processes in the creative activity. This is because it is through creativity that individuals seek an original solution to a problem or challenge at hand and, therefore, become open to new ideas and approaches. Of course, there is a risk that what one tries will not work and, hence, this tests the persons' confidence, competence, and ability to learn from failure. However, as Fisher and Specht<sup>126</sup> underline, it is this willingness to take risks, to cope with the unexpected, to welcome challenge and even failure as a part of the process to arrive at a new and deeper understanding of one's activity, which is at the nexus between creativity and successful aging. Hence, through creativity older persons bolster their sense of self as competent and efficacious – or in more academic terms – the 'agentic self'. The close links between creativity and empowerment are also due to the fact that creative persons are open to different paths to the same goal. This openness is a coping mechanism in the sense that when one is blocked from a goal, despite the frustration this may cause, it is also a creative challenge to work with the tools available to find another way to achieve the same goal.<sup>127</sup> In other words, creative individuals have more experience in confronting limitations or barriers, whilst pushing themselves to surmount these limits to find a different path to the same goal.

### Methodology

In my attempt to study creativity in later life, I coordinated a reminiscence programme for older persons titled *Saying it as it is: Unfolding the past*. Reminiscence is the act or process of recollecting past experiences or events, and entails cognitive-emotional processes of providing meaningful solutions to past problems. To cite Flood and Phillips,

*During the process of reminiscing, older adults also may come up with different ways of remembering their past by reframing life events. As a result of reminiscence, past conflicts can be transformed into more stable and creative products. Reminiscing may serve as a stimulus for new ways of thinking and doing things, as older adults rethink past events where they (or others) used different strategies to cope with situations.*<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Fisher and Specht, "Successful aging and creativity later in life."

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Flood and Phillips, "Creativity in older adults: A plethora of possibilities."

Reminiscing sessions took place every week, during five 3-hour sessions during the month of July (2012), at my personal residence in Malta. Malta is a micro-state in the Mediterranean Sea with Sicily 93 km to the north and Africa 288 km to the south. In 2010, the total population of Malta was 365,568.<sup>129</sup> The goal of the sessions was to investigate the potential of reminiscence to improve older persons' levels of personal empowerment. The sessions consisted of structured reminiscence on three key topics – namely, school days, leisure, community life, and major historical events. Participants were recruited through a publicity email. Sessions were free and open to everybody with the only proviso that one had surpassed his/her 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. My target population was eight learners but as many as 19 persons replied to my advert, demonstrating not only the lack of structured activities for older persons in Malta, but also the strong appeal that creativity sessions have for retirees. Faced with such a predicament, participants were enrolled on a first-come first-served basis. All subjects were literate, functionally mobile, and ranging in age from 61 to 79 years. There were 5 women and 3 men. Further information is in table 1.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Marital status	Past occupation	Husband/wife's past occupation
John	61	male	married	clerk	Housewife
Peter	67	male	married	library assistant	Housewife
Natalie	68	female	married	housewife	car mechanic
Rosette	69	female	married	housewife	farmer
Claudette	70	female	widow	housewife	taxi driver
Charles	70	Male	married	engineer	teacher
Matthew	78	male	married	shop assistant	shop assistant
Gloria	79	female	single	Teacher	--

Table 1: Participants in reminiscence programme: *Saying it as it is: Unfolding the past* (July 2012).

The data presented herein was collected through participant observation, recorded conversational probes throughout the learning sessions, and a feedback/evaluation form which was distributed at the end of the session.

<sup>129</sup> National Office of Statistics, *Demographic review 2010* (Malta: National Office of Statistics, 2011).

### The road travelled

Following the advice of Housden<sup>130</sup>, preparations included the presentation of props – such as old educational textbooks, small chalkboards, popular songs of the 1960/1970s, photographs of dances and weddings in the 1960/1970s, old photographs of Malta, reproductions of old newspaper headlines, and old magazine advertisements. As expected, the initial session took off with difficulty since the participants did not know each other. However, after an ice-breaking session, a certain degree of trust was established, and participants were more forthcoming with their personal life stories thereafter. Reminiscence activity was also encouraged through open-ended questions, inviting descriptions, comments, opinions on my behalf, such as “can you describe your childhood?”, “how did you feel about that?”, “what sort of person was she?”, “can you describe the house you lived in?” and “why did you decide to change jobs?” The props were extremely helpful in eliciting a response from the participants. For instance, the old textbooks prompted various reminiscences about their school experience:

*If I close my eyes I can see myself in my stuffy classroom, where I spent some three years of my life. My best mate was [name], her sister was also in our class, despite being two years older than us, her mum wanted them to keep an eye on each other. That shows how much our parents valued girls' education in our times! Our teachers were not much better though. They believed that they were wasting their time with girls who would drop off school as soon they were 14 which was the legal school limit at that time. (Natalie)*

Others talked at length on past leisure pursuits and about community life during the 1960s and 1970s. As to be expected, comparisons with present times were not missing:

*During the 1960s, most of the entertainment was in the form of Saturday dances in local town halls. They started at six and finished at nine, many females had to be at home by nine, and in the winter, even by eight o'clock. It was nothing like today. During the 1960s, most of the entertainment was in the form of Saturday dances in local town halls. (Charles)*

Interestingly, participants' reminiscence about major historical events brought on healthy debates as to the value of such milestones to the Maltese nation:

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<sup>130</sup> S. Housden, *Reminiscence and lifelong learning* (Leicester: NIACE, 2007).

*I do not agree with Charles that Malta's independence was entirely positive. Many worked with the British government and lost their job as Malta achieved independence. Many left for Australia and Canada in search of work and never returned to Malta. I was in favour of Malta's independence but the transition was too abrupt. We were not prepared to be in charge of our own economy overnight. (John)*

Whilst the reminiscent data is surely interesting in its own right, what is more directly remarkable with respect to this study's aim and objectives, is that as the result of such activity participants encountered the following experiences:

identity preservation – discovering and understanding better who they are, problem-solving – drawing on experiences from the past for coping in the present, bonding – rediscovering common attachments between same-aged peers, intimacy maintenance – remembering personally significant persons no longer present, and teaching/informing – enlightening others about values and history.

Such experiences functioned to imbue participants with improved levels of personal empowerment. First, by bringing about changes that enhance more positive attitudes toward life, better problem-solving skills, and greater emotional control (*intrapersonal empowerment*). And secondly, by stimulating changes in attitudes and skills related to interacting with other people, such as appreciation of other people's merits, willingness to seek help from others, and eagerness to care for others (*interpersonal empowerment*).

### Intrapersonal empowerment

The creative processes that made reminiscence possible were central in attributing participants with improved levels of intrapersonal empowerment which relates to self-perceptions concerning “domain-specific perceived control and self-efficacy, motivation to control, perceived competence, and mastery”.<sup>131</sup> This intrapersonal component of empowerment includes perceptions precisely because they are a basic element that provides people with the initiative to engage in behaviours to influence. In fact, most participants recounted how they, as a result of their experience in the group, experienced

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<sup>131</sup> M. A. Zimmerman, “Psychological empowerment: Issues and illustrations,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 23, no. 5 (1995): 588.

changes in their outlook on life. Many stressed how the reminiscence sessions functioned to make them more positive, hopeful, open, and gregarious:

*Seeing my past from a more present standpoint made me aware of my achievements despite of the many obstacles I faced. I now realise how strong I was not to let my car accident stop me from raising a happy family and continue working as long as possible. Previously I was depressed that I had to stop working before retirement age but now I am proud of my efforts to continue working until my late 50s. (Matthew)*

*For many years, I struggled to come to terms with my arthritis. I always focused on what my illness prevented me from doing. I never focused on what I could still do. It is true that my illness prevents me from doing things that many persons in my age-bracket engage in. But looking back at the past ten years or so, I now realise that I still engaged in a lot of activities. The future is not that bad, after all. (Gloria)*

Many also highlighted how listening to members' different experiences of same events made them better placed to make crucial decisions about present dilemmas they are facing:

*My life is tough at the moment. I still miss my husband. I am still angry that he passed away. But these sessions helped me to remember and share the good times we had together. These sessions helped me to realise that I must get my life in order. I must not leave everything in the hands of my children. Widowhood is not the end. I must be strong to face life again. I am not there yet! But I promise to work hard. (Claudette)*

*Becoming old is confusing. You think that you are young, strong, and independent when you are not! My mistake is that I approach life with an unrealistic sense of affairs. I do not ask for help when I need it. I ask help for things which I can do in my own. These sessions helped me to take on a more realistic take on my life situation. I feel better now, more in control of my life. (Peter)*

Most importantly, perhaps, was the fact that all participants spoke of how this creative experience helped them to transform their personal aptitudes for the better. Whilst some participants highlighted how they had learned

to maximise own strengths and accept own weaknesses, others pointed out how learning about the past enabled them to become more confident in solving present problems and control negative emotional feelings.

*I do not like to admit this in public but becoming old depressed me. Ageing, for me, is negative state of affairs. I am always brooding on the limitations that ageing brings on older persons. These sessions made me aware that ageing also brings positive issues in our lives such as fewer responsibilities, more free time, and an opportunity to do things for which you never had time for. (Natalie)*

*These sessions helped me in looking at my life from different ways. I am aware that my disappointments in life are strongly overshadowed by my achievements. If I have to list my achievements, these would be raising a happy family, working two jobs for more than two decades, and also helping my daughter to raise our two grandsons. I now realise that success in life is not measured by one's bank account. (Rosette)*

The above excerpts indicate clearly that reminiscence also arises as a source of life satisfaction for older persons. The process of recollecting memories from the past helps to integrate past experiences (who I was then) with the present (who am I now) and make reasonable projections about the future (who will I be, what will happen to me). As the consequence, of the reminiscence sessions, participants engaged in the re-examining and re-integration of unresolved conflicts vis-à-vis the contemporary social scenario. Indeed, creative pursuits have an unlimited potential for participants to gain a sense of satisfaction, a sense of tranquillity, and a capacity to enjoy to the full their later years.

### **Interpersonal empowerment**

Research findings also acknowledged a second effect on participants following their engagement in reminiscence pursuits – namely, interpersonal empowerment, which refers to changes in attitudes and skills in interacting with other people, such as appreciation of other people's merits, willingness to seek help from others, and eagerness to care for others. Participants highlighted how following end of the reminiscence sessions they started to understand better their community, as well as the norms and values of particular communities which made them conscious of the importance of cooperative decision-making, commitment to collective interests, and mutual

assistance. The following statements on how the sessions helped them to appreciate others' merits lend evidence of the participants' improved levels of interpersonal empowerment:

*In life there is a tendency for people to look at history in black and white. I am no exception, and I must admit that until this experience I have always looked at bird hunters and trappers with very disapproving eyes. Now that I have made friends with Peter, and listened to his arguments, I must admit that I understand better their difficulties and aspirations. (John)*

*There is no history but only histories. If one political decision is beneficial to some it does not mean that it may not hurt some other people. I have always been a proud Socialist in life but, of course, I will be the first to admit that Malta's Socialist period was not always a bed of roses. There is no doubt that some people, such as Gloria, suffered from our heavy handedness. (Matthew)*

Participants also emphasised how the reminiscence sessions aided them in getting along well with others living in the same community:

*We have met only a few times, but it has been enough to make me aware that during our lives we spend too much time fighting and bickering amongst each other rather than building a better future. Wars are the curse of humanity. If I stop and think about all the wars in my life time, the number of people killed, shattered lives, and amount of money spent, I despair. (Charles)*

Hence, creativity also has the potential to aid participants achieve the developmental tasks of generativity and integrity<sup>132</sup>, and hence, achieve what Tornstam's<sup>133</sup> terms of reference "gerotranscendence" – namely, "a shift in meta-perspective, from a material and rational vision to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally followed by an increase in life satisfaction". Activities involving reminiscence have the potential to trigger the process of integrating one's life experience into a more cohesive whole, and thereby, al-

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<sup>132</sup> E. Erikson, *The life cycle completed: A Review* (New York: Norton, 1982); ———, *Childhood and society* (New York: Norton, 1986).

<sup>133</sup> L. Tornstam, "Gerotranscendence: A reformulation of the disengagement theory," *Aging: Clinical and Experimental Research* 1, no. 1 (1989): 60.

lowing older people to grapple with their vulnerability and mortality as they reassess the meanings of their lives.

### Conclusion

The results of this study challenge the inevitable decline of creativity with age as all participants were successful in engaging imaginatively in reminiscence. Data analysis suggests that creativity can help individuals grow through the ageing process as participants succeeded in gaining the experiences of identity preservation, problem-solving, bonding, intimacy maintenance, and teaching/informing. Such experiences also functioned to imbue participants with improved levels of personal empowerment. First, by bringing about changes that enhance more positive attitudes toward life, better problem-solving skills, and greater emotional control (*intrapersonal empowerment*). And secondly, by stimulating changes in attitudes and skills related to interacting with other people, such as appreciation of other people's merits, willingness to seek help from others, and eagerness to care for others (*interpersonal empowerment*). At the same time, it also resulted that creative pursuits in later life instilled participants with improved levels in life satisfaction and in achieving the developmental tasks of gerotranscendence.

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