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In control but uninspired: Displays of artist self-control undermine perceptions of creativity

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Abstract

Previous research highlighted the interpersonal benefits of self-control in professional contexts: People prefer high self-control individuals as work or study partners and expect them to perform better than low self-control individuals. We show that these benefits of self-control reverse in the artistic domain. Results of one pilot study and five preregistered online experiments (N = 1644) reveal that artists with high (vs. low) self-control are perceived as less creative. This effect replicates across various artistic domains (visual art, music, poetry, screenwriting), holds for both male and female artists and can be explained by perceptions of lower experiential processing, which is considered indispensable for creativity. However, art created by high (vs. low) self-control artists is ascribed higher market value due to stronger attributions of productivity. These findings provide novel insights into the social perception of self-control and contribute to the understudied topic of the downsides of self-control as well as to the literature on lay theories of creativity.

KEYWORDS
arts, creativity, experiential processing, lay theories, rational processing, self-control, social perception

> *When you make music or write or create, it is really your job to have mind-blowing, irresponsible, condomless sex with whatever idea it is you are writing about at the time.*
>
> Lady Gaga

1 | INTRODUCTION

Extensive research in psychology has demonstrated that self-control – defined as 'the capacity to control impulses to resist a temptation […] and protect a valued goal' (Touré-Tillery & Fishbach, 2015, p. 1117) – is a valuable trait in many spheres of life. People with higher self-control have better health, more successful school and work lives, better interpersonal relationships and higher well-being and psychosocial adjustment (de Ridder et al., 2012; Hofmann et al., 2014; Kokkoris & Stavrova, 2021; Stavrova et al., 2020; Tangney et al., 2004). But is self-control always beneficial? More recently, research started revealing potential detrimental consequences of self-control (for a brief overview, see Kokkoris & Stavrova, 2020). For example, self-control can feel alienating for some people (Kokkoris et al., 2019), can lead to regret in the long run (Kivetz & Keinan, 2006) and might help individuals reach not only benevolent but also unethical, antisocial and personally harmful goals (Mathes et al., 2017; Rawn & Vohs, 2011).

Most research on the consequences of self-control has focused on *intra*personal or actor-level effects (i.e., how an individual's self-control affects that individual's life outcomes). Much less is known about the potential *inter*personal or perceiver-level effects of self-control (i.e., how an individual's self-control shapes other people's reactions to them). Advancing our knowledge on perceiver-level effects of self-control is crucial because it can shed more light on positive and

negative consequences of self-control in the social domain. For example, positive reputational consequences of self-control might reinforce self-control behaviours, whereas negative reputational consequences might undermine them.

First studies on the social perception of self-control have painted a predominantly positive picture by showing that high self-control individuals are expected to show better performance at work (Koval et al., 2015), are perceived as more trustworthy (Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011), are considered more likeable (Röseler et al., 2021) and are less likely to be socially excluded (Stavrova et al., 2021). However, more recently, it has been suggested that the social perception benefits of self-control might be context dependent. For example, individuals prefer high self-control others as study or work partners but low self-control others as socializing buddies (Röseler et al., 2021). Moreover, people with higher self-control are perceived as more robotic and dehumanized (Lapka et al., 2023) and as lacking interpersonal warmth (Tang et al., 2022), because people tend to see those who restrain their impulses as not acting upon their genuine preferences and thus lacking authenticity (see also Garrison et al., 2023).

The current research contributes to this nascent literature by extending the scope of potential detrimental interpersonal consequences of self-control to the domain of artistic creation. In contrast to previous studies highlighting the benefits of self-control in the work domain (Koval et al., 2015; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011; Röseler et al., 2021), we propose that when it comes to artistic professions, self-control can be rather disadvantageous and have detrimental perceiver-level (i.e., reputational) consequences. Specifically, we suggest that artists perceived as high (vs. low) in self-control might be seen as less creative. Creative work is defined as work that is novel, original and of value (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). Our proposition that self-control can undermine perceptions of creativity in art is based on two lines of reasoning.

First, research from a dual process perspective (Hofmann et al., 2009) shows that exerting self-control can be ascribed to higher rational processing (i.e., approaching a task systematically based on reason and deliberation), whereas giving in to a temptation can be ascribed to experiential processing (i.e., approaching a task based on intuition and gut feelings). Lay people seem to also share this intuition and associate self-control with more rational than experiential processing (Kokkoris et al., 2019). Therefore, exerting self-control is considered to be an act stemming more from the mind rather than from the heart. Second, lay theories about the creative process suggest that people find experiential processing more important for creativity than rational processing (Ritter & Rietzschel, 2017). For example, as reflected in the opening quote, people believe that creativity requires total freedom, impulsivity, lack of constraints and rejection of social norms (Baas et al., 2015; Feist, 1998).

Combining these insights, we propose that artists with high (vs. low) self-control are perceived as less creative because they are considered to work more rationally and/or less experientially. In other words, if people believe that acts of self-control stem more from the 'mind' (rational processing) rather than from the 'heart' (experiential processing), and if they also believe that in order to be creative one must listen to one's heart, then we can predict that high self-control as a personality trait will be perceived as detrimental for creativity.

Note that our proposition solely concerns creativity perceptions (i.e., whether people perceive the work by artists differing in self-control as more or less creative) and not the actual creativity level of artists with higher and lower self-control. The latter question has been partially addressed in prior empirical investigations with conflicting findings (Baumeister et al., 2008; Chiu, 2014; Radel et al., 2015). More recent research suggests that the relationship between self-control and creativity might not be that straightforward and instead various factors like task instructions might moderate the effect of self-control on creativity (Taylor, 2021).

In contrast, here we focus on whether and how people use the information about artists' self-control in judging artists' creativity. But how do people have access to the information about artists' self-control levels? Research shows that people often actively seek – or are incidentally exposed to – information about artists' private lives, including their relationships, emotions, beliefs and personality and a big industry around tabloid news, celebrity gossip, etc. caters to this need (McCutcheon et al., 2002; Yan & Zhang, 2020). Additionally, museums often feature biographical information about artists that help contextualize artists' creations. Building on these insights, we argue that people have many opportunities to form impressions about artists' self-control, and these self-control inferences influence creativity perceptions of their work.

We further tested whether artist self-control has downstream consequences for perceptions of market value. We hypothesized that artist self-control can affect perceived market value through two opposing pathways. On the one hand, lower perceptions of artist creativity – that we expect to be associated with higher self-control – might lead to lower perceived market value of their art products. On the other hand, self-control is tightly linked to work ethic, productivity and professionalism (Feather, 1984), which can be beneficial for perceptions of market value. Hence, high (vs. low) self-control in artists might decrease market value via decreasing perceptions of creativity and increase market value via increasing perceptions of productivity.

In summary, we hypothesized that artists' displays of high (vs. low) self-control undermine perceptions of creativity of their work and that this effect is mediated by perceptions of lower experiential and/or higher rational processing. We also expected that an artist's high (vs. low) self-control will impact market value negatively via decreased perceptions of creativity but positively via increased perceptions of productivity. We tested these hypotheses in one pilot study and five preregistered experiments in a wide range of artistic domains (visual art in Studies 1 and 5; poetry in Study 2; music in Study 3; screenwriting in Study 4) with respect to both male (Studies 1, 2, 4 and 5) and female (Study 3) artists.

All stimulus materials are publicly available as Online Supplemental Material. Data are publicly available at the project's website on Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/3u5b9/?view_only=201ca72bacb0418a9daea169288b3d16). All five main studies have been preregistered (see respective links in each study's introduction). The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Vrije

Universiteit Amsterdam and complies with all relevant ethical regulations. Participants provided informed consent before participation in each study and were rewarded for their time with either course credit (Studies 1, 2, 4 and 5) or a monetary compensation (Study 3). All measures, manipulations and exclusions in the studies are disclosed as well as the method of determining the final sample size (no data collection was continued after data analysis).

2 | PILOT STUDY

Before examining whether high self-control undermines perceptions of creativity, we present evidence that people hold a lay belief that experiential processing contributes to creativity more than rational processing.

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Participants

Two hundred thirty-six students of a large European university took part in the study online for course credit. After excluding five participants who failed an attention check (to select a predetermined option in a question), the final sample comprised 231 participants (50 women; M_{age} = 19.81, SD = 1.87). This sample size can detect effect sizes of d = 0.16, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.29] with alpha .05 and power .80.

2.1.2 | Procedure

Participants were asked to indicate to what extent each one of two factors, namely 'reason, logic, rules, system' and 'intuition, gut feeling, insight, emotion' contribute to creativity in art broadly defined (painting, music, writing, etc.). With the help of a constant sum question, they could allocate 100 points in total to these two factors. The order of the two factors was counterbalanced.

2.2 | Results and discussion

Participants allocated almost two thirds of the total 100 points to intuition, gut feeling, insight and emotion (M = 76.45, SD = 17.02) and only one third to reason, logic, rules and system (M = 23.55, SD = 17.02). One-sample t-tests indicated that the points allocated to each factor were significantly different from 50, $t(230)$ = 23.61, p < .001, Cohen's d = 17.02. Clearly, participants believe that experiential processing is more important than rational processing for artistic creativity.

3 | STUDY 1

Study 1 examined the effect of artist self-control on perceptions of creativity in the domain of visual art and tested the underlying mechanism via perceptions of higher experiential and lower rational processing. The hypotheses, study design, study materials and analytical plan were preregistered: https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=rg3it3.

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Participants

One hundred sixty-six students of a large European university took part in the study online for course credit. The sample size in this and all subsequent studies was determined by the capacity of the subject pool with a 1-week stopping criterion applied unless stated otherwise. After excluding seven participants who failed an attention check (to select a predetermined option in a question), the final sample comprised 159 participants (71 women; M_{age} = 21.97, SD = 2.04). This sample size can detect effect sizes of d = 0.40, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.71] with alpha .05 and power .80.

3.1.2 | Procedure

As a cover story, we told participants that they would read the description of an artist, Robin, who allegedly took part in one of our previous studies, and they were also shown a painting supposedly painted by Robin. We informed participants that the description of the artist was based on how he described himself in the study as well as on input from his friends. To manipulate artist self-control, we created two personality profiles by adjusting the items of the trait self-control scale (Tangney et al., 2004). For example, in the high (low) self-control condition, it was stated that the artist almost always (never) says 'no' to temptation, rarely says (might say) inappropriate things, that pleasure and fun never (often) interfere with his striving for long-term goals and that his friends say that he has iron (weak) self-discipline (see Online Supplemental Material for complete manipulation text). This methodological approach has been used by other researchers studying the social perception of self-control (e.g., Lapka et al., 2023; Röseler et al., 2021), as it provides a controlled way to study the effects of high (vs. low) self-control from an observer perspective.

Participants were randomly assigned to either a high or a low self-control condition. We then assessed the perceived creativity of the artist's work (α = .85) with six items (e.g., 'How creative do you think Robin is as an artist?', 'How original do you think Robin is as an artist?') on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*) adapted from Moreau and Dahl (2005). We also assessed rational processing (α = .94) and experiential processing (α = .90) with six items each (e.g., 'In creating his paintings, Robin applies precise rules' and 'In creating his paintings, Robin uses his gut feelings', respectively) on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) adapted from Novak and Hoffman (2009). The order between dependent variable and mediators was randomized (in this and all following studies). Finally, as a manipulation check, we assessed perceived self-control with a single item

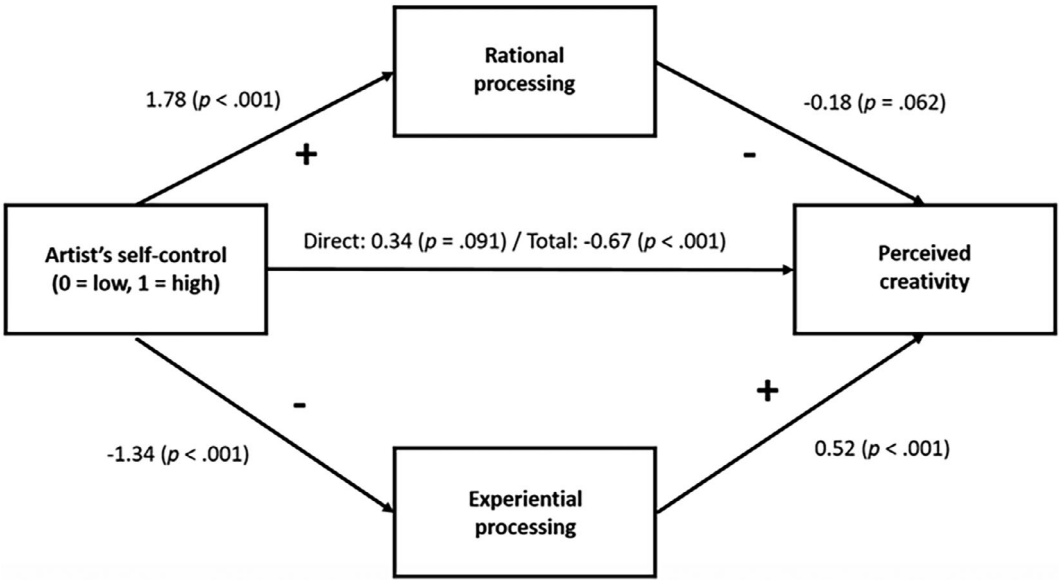

FIGURE 1 Mediation analysis in Study 1. Negative indirect effect via rational processing: $B = -0.32$, *Boot SE* = 0.17, *95% CI* = [−0.67, −0.02]. Negative indirect effect via experiential processing: $B = -0.70$, *Boot SE* = 0.18, 95% CI = [−1.04, −0.35].

(1 = *low*; 7 = *high*). (See Online Supplemental Material for details on all measures.)

3.2 | Results and discussion

The manipulation was successful: The artist was perceived as having higher self-control in the high self-control condition ($M = 6.52$, $SD = 0.71$) than in the low self-control condition ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.95$), 95% CI for the mean difference = [−4.29, −3.77], $t(157) = -30.40$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 4.85$. This indicates that our manipulation of artist self-control had high validity: the vignettes successfully created an image of the artist that was perceived by our participants as either low or high in self-control (see also Lapka et al., 2023; Röseler et al., 2021). In terms of the core hypothesis, the high self-control artist ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.00$) was perceived as less creative than the low self-control artist ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 0.81$), 95% CI = [0.39, 0.96], $t(157) = 4.65$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.74$. In terms of processing styles, the high self-control artist was considered to work more rationally ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.80$) and less experientially ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.85$) than the low self-control artist ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 0.79$; $M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.47$), 95% CI = [−2.04, −1.54], $t(157) = -14.24$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 2.27$ and 95% CI = [1.13, 1.55], $t(126.71) = 12.37$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.96$, respectively. A mediation analysis with artist self-control (0 = *low*; 1 = *high*) as independent variable, creativity as dependent variable and rational and experiential processing as parallel mediators revealed negative indirect effects via rational, $B = -0.32$, *Boot SE* = 0.17, 95% CI = [−0.67, −0.02] and experiential processing, $B = -0.70$, *Boot SE* = 0.18, 95% CI = [−1.04, −0.35] (Figure 1). Correlations of all variables in this study as well as in all subsequent studies are provided in Table 1. Results of Study 1 provide preliminary support to the idea that self-control undermines perceptions of creativity in the domain of visual art. This effect was mediated by perceived higher rational and lower experiential processing.

4 | STUDY 2

Study 2 sought to conceptually replicate the findings of Study 1 in another artistic domain, poetry. The study was preregistered: https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=4cu98q. [1]

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants

One hundred ninety-two students of a large European university took part in the study online for course credit. After excluding 10 participants who failed an attention check, the final sample comprised 182 participants (160 women; $M_{age} = 19.55$, $SD = 2.52$). This sample size can detect effect sizes of $d = 0.37$, 95% CI = [0.08, 0.66] with alpha .05 and power .80.

4.1.2 | Procedure

The study design and materials were the same as in Study 1. The only difference was that Robin was now described as a poet and a sample of his work (a poem) was presented to participants. We assessed perceived creativity ($\alpha = .86$), rational processing ($\alpha = .92$), experiential

[1] The stopping criterion in this study was 2 weeks' time.

TABLE 1 Correlations between variables in Studies 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

	2	3	4	5
1. Creativity	−.48* / −.26* / −.07 / −.35*	.56* / .32* / .38* / .50*	.05	.42*
2. Rational processing	–	−.77* / −.65* / −.52* / −.55*	–	–
3. Experiential processing	–	–	–	–
4. Productivity	–	–	–	.26*
5. Market value	–	–	–	–

Note: Rational and experiential processing were only measured in Studies 1–4; productivity and market value were only measured in Study 5; Creativity was measured in all studies.
*$p < .01$.

processing ($\alpha = .86$) and perceived self-control (manipulation check) with the same items as in Study 1.

4.2 | Results and discussion

The self-control manipulation was again successful: The poet was perceived as having higher self-control in the high self-control condition ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 1.11$) than in the low self-control condition ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.09$), 95% CI = [−4.18, −3.54], $t(180) = -23.70$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 3.53$. Conceptually replicating the findings of Study 1, the high self-control poet ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.00$) was rated as less creative than the low self-control poet ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.97$), 95% CI = [0.28, 0.85], $t(180) = 3.86$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.58$. Regarding processing styles, the high self-control poet ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.72$) was considered to work more rationally than the low self-control poet ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 0.29$), 95% CI = [−1.82, −1.40], $t(180) = -15.13$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 2.26$. At the same time, the high self-control poet ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.79$) was considered to work less experientially than the low self-control poet ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.51$), 95% CI = [0.86, 1.25], $t(154.87) = 10.72$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.72$. A parallel mediation analysis showed a negative indirect effect via experiential processing, $B = -0.30$, *Boot SE* = 0.13, 95% CI = [−0.57, −0.05], but no indirect effect via rational processing, $B = -0.03$, *Boot SE* = 0.17, 95% CI = [−0.35, 0.31] (Figure 2).

Study 2 documented the detrimental effect of self-control on creativity in the domain of poetry. Less experiential processing (but not more rational processing) accounted for this effect. Interestingly, rational processing was not associated with perceptions of creativity in poetry.

5 | STUDY 3

Study 3 examined whether the negative effect of self-control on creativity applies to both male and female artists. This is important since gender has been shown to have implications for the perceptions of both creativity and self-control (Duckworth et al., 2015; Proudfoot et al., 2015). Moreover, we tested the hypotheses with a different population (US Americans) in a new artistic domain (music). The study employed a 2 (composer's self-control: high vs. low) × 2 (composer's gender: male vs. female) between-subjects design. The study was preregistered: https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=t8ce9b.

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Participants

Four hundred fifty participants from the United States were recruited online on Prolific in exchange for monetary compensation. We aimed at recruiting at least 100 participants per cell. After excluding 13 participants who failed an attention check, the final sample comprised 437 participants (233 women; $M_{age} = 32.77$, $SD = 12.49$). With alpha .05 and power .80, this sample size can detect effect sizes of $d = 0.27$, 95% CI = [0.08, 0.46] for the main effect of self-control as well as effect sizes of $f = .13$, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.66] for the interaction effect.

5.1.2 | Procedure

The study design and materials were the same as in Studies 1 and 2. The target artist was now described as a composer and the composer's gender (male vs. female) was manipulated between participants (in addition to the composer's self-control). Participants were also asked to listen to a 1-min percussion piece (allegedly, a sample of the composer's work). We assessed perceived creativity ($\alpha = .91$), rational processing ($\alpha = .94$), experiential processing ($\alpha = .91$) and perceived self-control (manipulation check) with the same items as in Studies 1 and 2.

5.2 | Results and discussion

The analysis of the manipulation check question showed only a main effect of the self-control manipulation, such that the composer was perceived as having higher self-control in the high self-control condition ($M = 6.58$, $SD = 0.75$) than in the low self-control condition ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.45$), 95% CI = [−4.26, −3.83], $F(1, 433) = 1319.85$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .75$. There was no main effect of composer's gender and no interaction between composer's self-control and composer's gender, $ps > .261$.

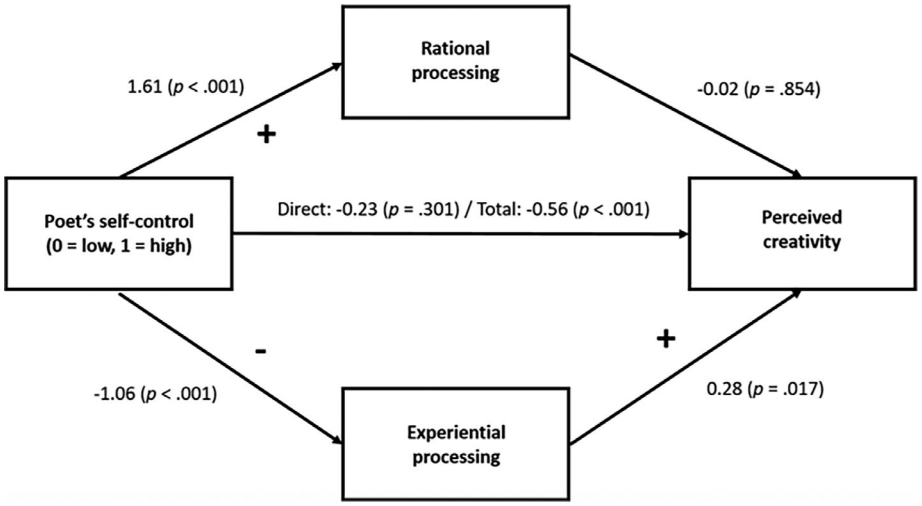

FIGURE 2 Mediation analysis in Study 2. No indirect effect via rational processing: $B = -0.03$, *Boot SE* = 0.17, *95% CI* = [−0.35, 0.31]. Negative indirect effect via experiential processing: $B = -0.30$, *Boot SE* = 0.13, 95% CI = [−0.57, −0.05].

Regarding creativity, only the main effect of the self-control manipulation reached significance, $F(1, 433) = 8.29$, 95% CI = [0.11, 0.56], $p = .004$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. The high self-control composer ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.18$) was perceived as less creative than the low self-control composer ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.35$) (Figure 3a). This effect was not moderated by composer gender nor was the main effect of gender significant, $ps > .260$.

The analyses of processing styles revealed main effects of the self-control manipulation, $F(1, 433) = 529.15$, 95% CI = [−1.52, −1.81], $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .55$ for rational, and $F(1, 433) = 192.21$, 95% CI = [0.89, 1.18], $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .31$ for experiential, and no main effects of composer's gender or interactions, $ps > .191$. Participants perceived the high self-control composer to rely more on rational processing style and less on experiential processing style, compared to the low self-control composer (see Figure 3b,c). A parallel mediation analysis revealed a positive indirect effect via rational processing, $B = 0.38$, *Boot SE* = 0.13, 95% CI = [0.13, 0.65], and a negative indirect effect via experiential processing, $B = -0.65$, *Boot SE* = 0.08, 95% CI = [−0.82, −0.49] (Figure 4).

Using a different population (United States), Study 3 showed that the negative effect of self-control on perceived creativity generalizes to both male and female artists and holds in the domain of music. Interestingly, in contrast to the domains of visual art and poetry (Studies 1 and 2), perceptions of higher rational processing in music writing were associated with higher perceptions of creativity.

6 | STUDY 4

Study 4 extended the results of Studies 1–3 in two ways. First, to develop a more ecologically valid manipulation of artist self-control, we presented participants with excerpts from an interview with an artist, which is among the most common ways the public can get some insight into artists' personalities. Second, we tested our hypotheses in yet another artistic domain: screenwriting. The study was preregistered: https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=t8dq9f.

6.1 | Method

6.1.1 | Participants

Three hundred ninety-one participants of a large European university took part in the study online for course credit. After excluding 34 participants who failed an attention check, the final sample comprised 357 participants (98 women; $M_{age} = 19.74$, $SD = 1.82$). This sample size can detect effect sizes of $d = 0.27$, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.48] with alpha .05 and power .80.

6.1.2 | Procedure

The study design and materials were the same as in Studies 1 and 2. The main difference was that the target artist was now described as a screenwriter and instead of a personality profile, the self-control manipulation featured an interview in the form of questions and answers that covered similar content as the manipulation of self-control used in the previous studies (see Online Supplemental Material). No stimuli were presented in this study as sample of the screenwriter's work. We assessed anticipated creativity ($\alpha = .88$), rational processing ($\alpha = .93$), experiential processing ($\alpha = .84$) and perceived self-control (manipulation check) with the same items as in Studies 1–3.

6.2 | Results and discussion

The new manipulation was successful: The screenwriter was perceived as having higher self-control in the high self-control condition

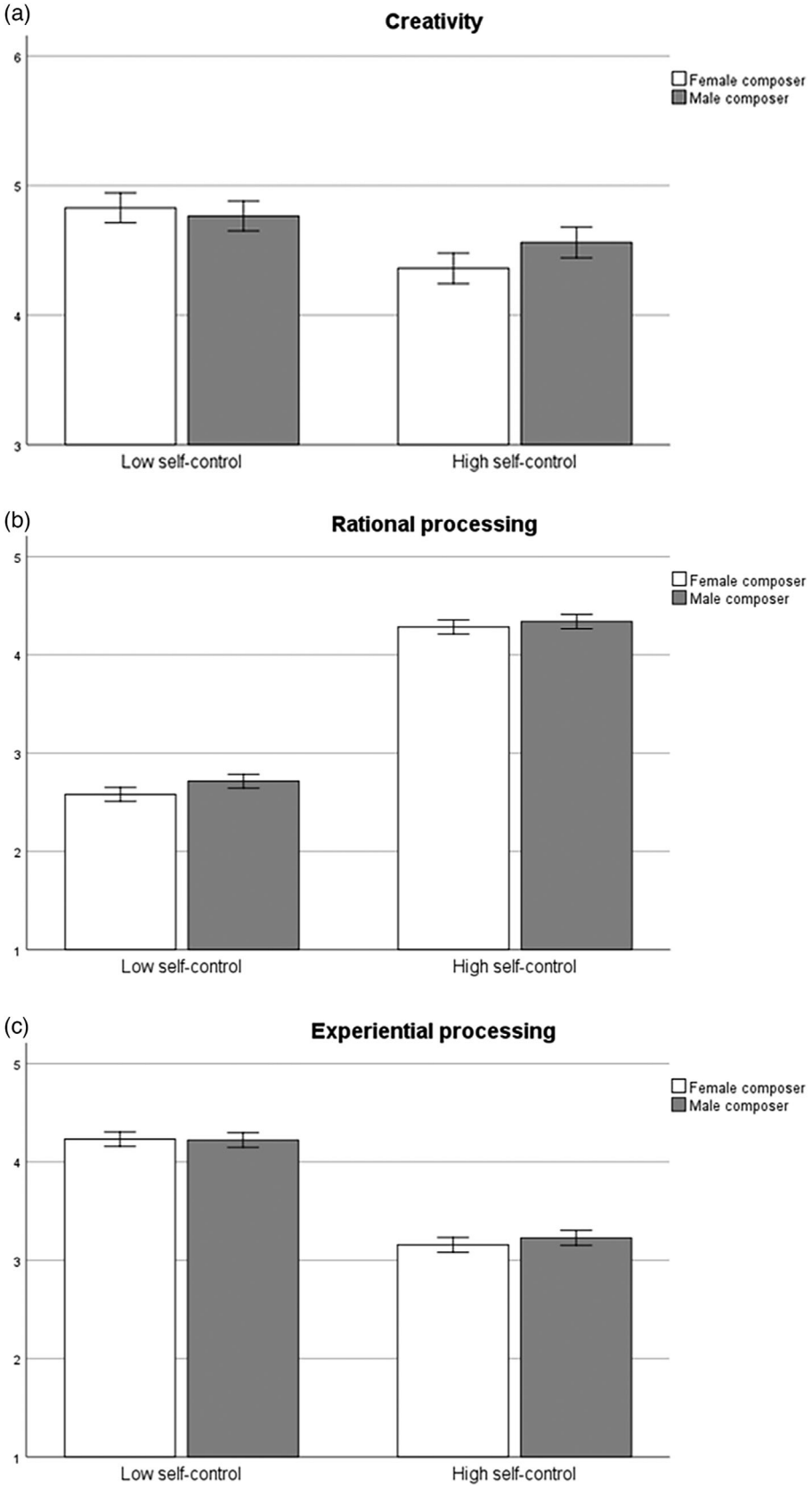

FIGURE 3 Perceived creativity: (a) rational processing, (b) and experiential processing (c) as a function of composer's self-control and composer's gender in Study 3.

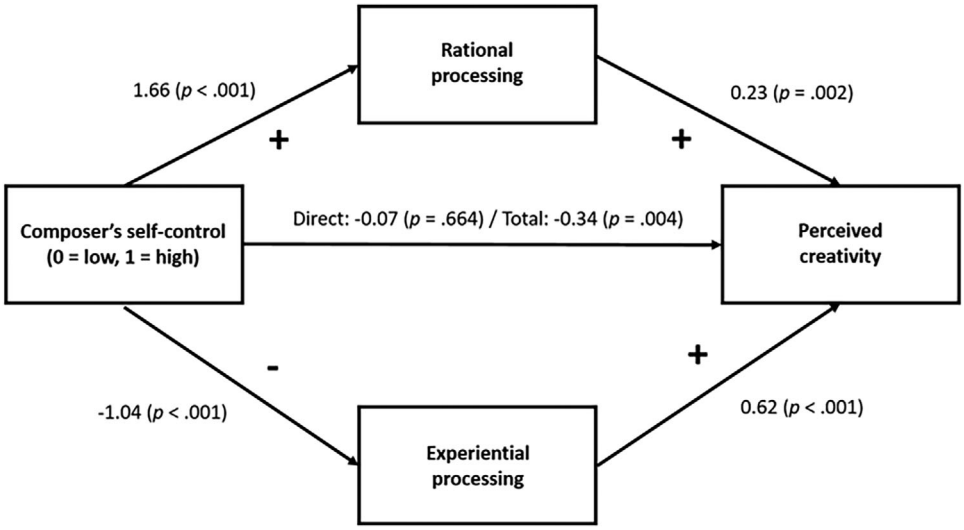

FIGURE 4 Mediation analysis in Study 3. Positive indirect effect via rational processing: $B = 0.38$, *Boot SE* = 0.13, 95% CI = [0.13, 0.65]. Negative indirect effect via experiential processing: $B = -0.65$, *Boot SE* = 0.08, 95% CI = [−0.82, −0.49].

($M = 6.50$, $SD = 0.74$) than in the low self-control condition ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.25$), 95% CI = [−4.05, −3.62], $t(302.10) = -35.61$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 4.10$. Conceptually replicating the findings of all previous studies, the high self-control screenwriter ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.05$) was expected to be less creative than the low self-control screenwriter ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 0.97$), 95% CI = [0.56, 0.98], $t(355) = 7.20$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.76$. Participants also believed that the high self-control screenwriter worked more rationally and less experientially than the low self-control screenwriter, 95% CI = [−2.09, −1.84], $t(355) = -31.73$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 3.37$ and 95% CI = [0.66, 0.93], $t(310.67) = 11.70$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.37$, respectively. A parallel mediation analysis showed a negative indirect effect via experiential processing, $B = -0.51$, *Boot SE* = 0.11, 95% CI = [−0.73, −0.30], but no indirect effect via rational processing, $B = 0.002$, *Boot SE* = 0.21, 95% CI = [−0.42, 0.41] (Figure 5).

Study 4 conceptually replicated the negative effect of self-control on perceived creativity in the domain of screenwriting with a new manipulation of higher ecological validity. Interestingly, like in the domain of poetry (Study 2), higher rational processing was unrelated to perceptions of creativity. Yet, consistent with Studies 1–3, the negative effect of high self-control on perceived creativity was mediated by attributions of lower experiential processing.

7 | STUDY 5

Study 5 examined downstream consequences for the perception of market value. We expected artist self-control to have a negative indirect effect on market value via creativity but a positive indirect effect via productivity. We tested this hypothesis in the domain of visual art. The study was preregistered: https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=3ui84y.

7.1 | Method

7.1.1 | Participants

Two hundred eighty-three participants from a large European university took part in the study online for course credit. After excluding five participants who failed an attention check, the final sample comprised 278 participants (100 women; $M_{age} = 19.59$, $SD = 1.84$). This sample size can detect effect sizes of $d = 0.30$, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.54] with alpha .05 and power .80.

7.1.2 | Procedure

The study design and materials were the same as in Study 1 (visual art) except for the following. Rational and experiential processing were not assessed in this study. In addition to perceived creativity ($\alpha = .90$), we also assessed perceived productivity ($\alpha = .91$) with three items ('How productive/hard-working/professional do you think Robin is as an artist?') and perceived market value ($\alpha = .90$) with another three items ('How much do you think people pay for Robin's paintings in auctions?', 'How high do you think the market value of Robin's paintings is?', 'How much do you think Robin's paintings are worth?'); all items used a 7-point response scale.

7.2 | Results and discussion

The self-control manipulation was successful: The artist was perceived as having higher self-control in the high self-control condition ($M = 6.46$, $SD = 0.88$) than in the low self-control condition ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.19$), 95% CI = [−4.37, −3.88], $t(252.11) = -32.91$, $p < .001$,

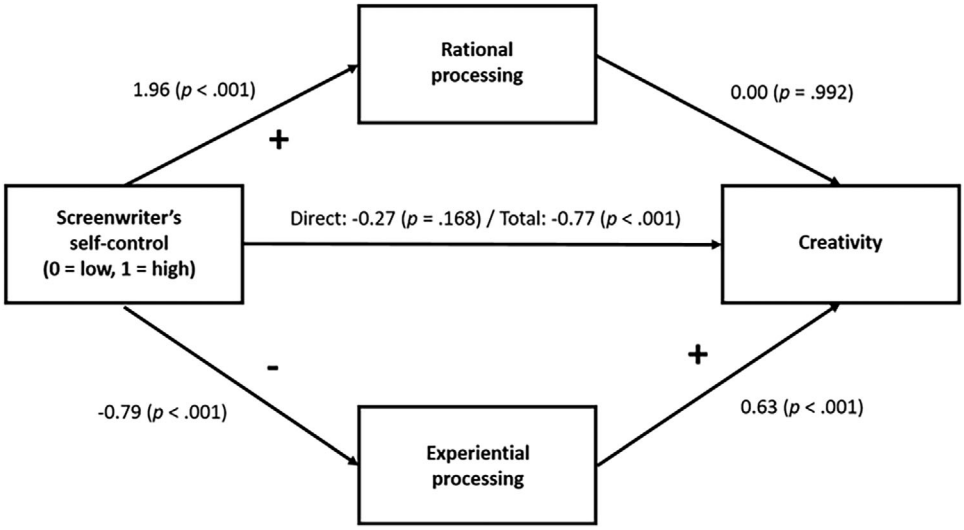

FIGURE 5 Mediation analysis in Study 4. No indirect effect via rational processing: $B = 0.002$, *Boot SE* = 0.21, 95% CI = [−0.42, 0.41]. Negative indirect effect via experiential processing: $B = -0.51$, *Boot SE* = 0.11, 95% CI = [−0.73, −0.30].

Cohen's $d = 4.15$. As in all previous studies, the high self-control artist ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.15$) was rated as less creative than the low self-control artist ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.07$, 95% CI = [0.13, 0.66], $t(276) = 2.97$, $p = .003$, Cohen's $d = 0.36$. On the other hand, the high self-control artist ($M = 6.20$, $SD = 0.79$) was rated as more productive than the low self-control artist ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.17$), 95% CI = [−2.58, −2.11], $t(239.83) = -19.58$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 2.53$. Moreover, the market value of the work of the high self-control artist ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.02$) was perceived to be higher than that of the low self-control artist ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.07$), 95% CI = [−0.55, −0.06], $t(276) = -2.46$, $p = .015$, Cohen's $d = 0.30$. A parallel mediation analysis confirmed our hypothesis: There was a negative indirect effect via creativity, $B = -0.16$, *Boot SE* = 0.05, 95% CI = [−0.27, −0.05], and a positive indirect effect via productivity, $B = 0.27$, *Boot SE* = 0.14, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.56] (Figure 6). The difference between the two indirect effects was significant, $B = -0.43$, *Boot SE* = 0.15, 95% CI = [−0.71, −0.15].

Study 5 showed that artist self-control has downstream consequences on perceived market value through two opposing paths: It decreases market value via lower creativity but increases market value via higher productivity. Interestingly, the latter path was also stronger resulting in the overall higher market value in the case of high (vs. low) self-control artists.

8 | MINI META-ANALYSIS OF STUDIES 1–5

We meta-analysed the five studies following the guidelines by Goh et al. (2016). As our studies varied in sample sizes (from $N = 159$ in Study 1 to $N = 437$ in Study 3) and this variation was not independent from other study characteristics (different artistic fields, artist gender), we opted for a fully random effects test that does not assign different studies different weights based on sample size. Our focal effect size (ES) was the difference between the conditions expressed in Cohen's *d*. We conducted separate analyses for the three different outcomes: perceived creativity, perceived experiential processing and perceived rational processing. For creativity, a one-sample *t*-test of the mean ES against zero was significant, $M_d = .54$, 95% CI [0.26, 0.82], $t(4) = 5.29$, $p = .006$ (two-sided). The average effects for experiential and rational processing were highly significant as well (based on four studies as these variables were not measured in Study 5) – experiential processing: $M_d = 1.60$, 95% CI [1.12, 2.07], $t(3) = 10.64$, $p = .002$ (two-sided) and rational processing: $M_d = 2.52$, 95% CI [1.62, 3.42], $t(3) = 9.91$, $p = .003$ (two-sided). The overview of all effect sizes is shown in Figure 7.

9 | DISCUSSION

In the present research, we showed that the social perception benefits of self-control reverse in the artistic domain. Results of five preregistered experiments indicate that people view artists with high (vs. low) self-control as less creative (see Figure 7 for an overview). This effect seems to primarily occur because people consider artists with high (vs. low) self-control to be working less experientially, which is considered indispensable for creativity (Ritter & Rietzschel, 2017). This effect holds across various artistic domains (visual art, music, poetry, screenwriting) and generalizes to both male and female artists. However, the negative downstream consequences of high self-control on market value are largely offset by perceptions of higher productivity.

Given that people can accurately detect others' self-control at zero acquaintance (Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011), they might form impressions about artists' self-control through their media presence and public exposure. The public has a substantial interest in learning about artists' lives and the media regularly feed this need by providing relevant information (media coverage of artists' lifestyle, tabloid news, etc.). Beyond inferential processes, our research suggests that artists

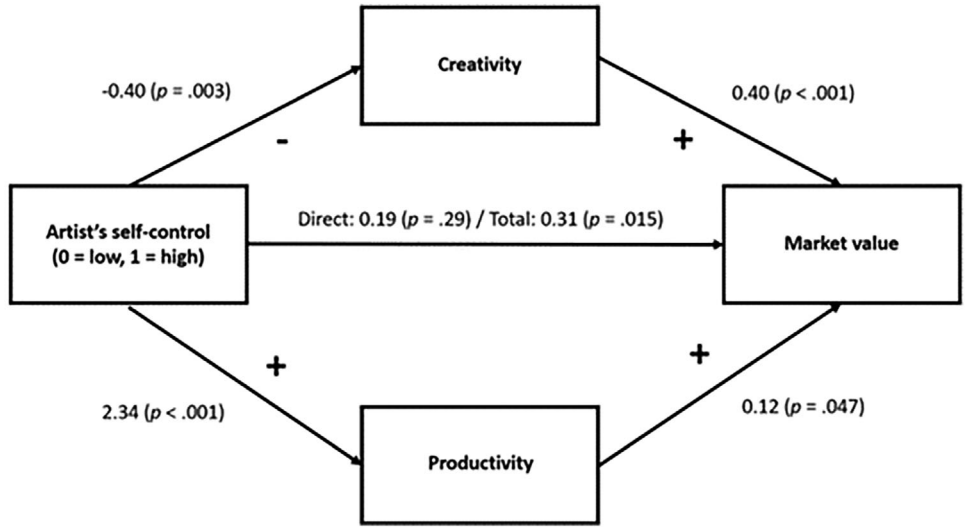

FIGURE 6 Mediation analysis in Study 5. Negative indirect effect via creativity: $B = -0.16$, *Boot SE* = 0.05, 95% CI = [−0.27, −0.05]. Positive indirect effect via productivity: $B = 0.27$, *Boot SE* = 0.14, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.56].

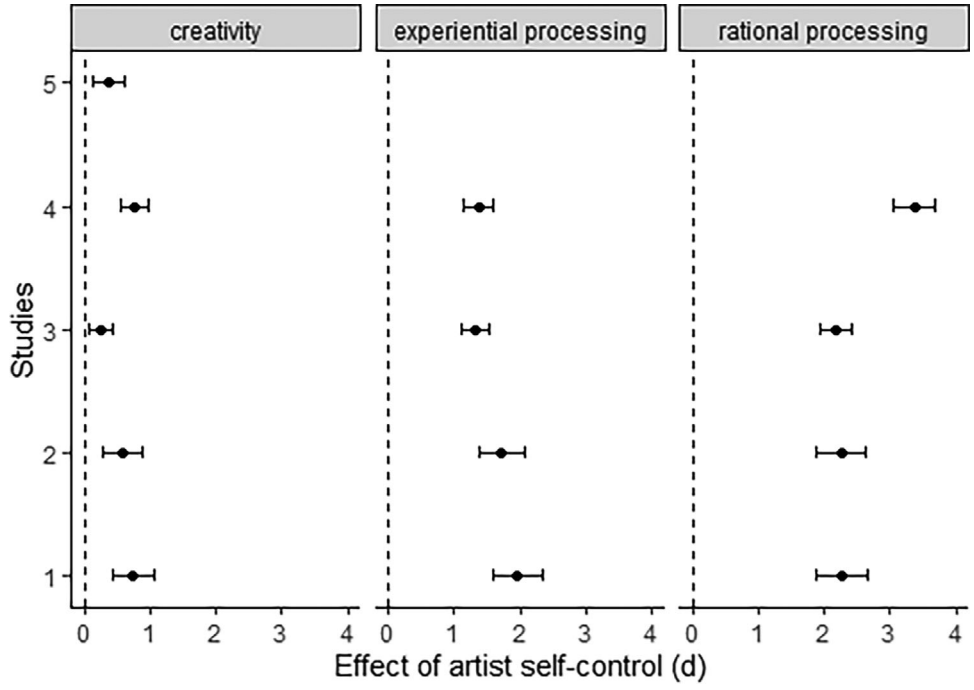

FIGURE 7 Overview of effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) across studies.

can also strategically communicate information concerning their self-control (e.g., via interviews or press releases) in order to manage their creative image.

9.1 | Theoretical contribution

The current research makes six major theoretical contributions. First, it adds to the existing self-control literature in two ways. Whereas prior research has almost exclusively focused on actor-level effects of self-control (i.e., exploring how one's self-control affects one's behaviour), our work suggests that one's self-control can have substantial consequences for how one is perceived by others and thus contributes to an emerging stream of literature on the interpersonal effects of self-control (Koval et al., 2015; Lapka et al., 2023; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011; Röseler et al., 2021; Stavrova et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2022). Moreover, whereas most prior research has focused on exploring the beneficial consequences of self-control, the present work highlighted

that self-control can also have detrimental effects – at least at the social perception level – and thus extends the nascent literature on the dark side of self-control (Kokkoris & Stavrova, 2020; Rawn & Vohs, 2011).

Second, our research contributes to the literature on lay theories of creativity (Ritter & Rietzschel, 2017). Specifically, our findings converge with prior work suggesting that people perceive experiential processing as more important for creativity than rational processing (e.g., Baas et al., 2015). In addition, our work suggests that whereas all creative domains benefit from experiential processing, some creative domains might benefit from rational processing (e.g., music), others might be harmed (e.g., visual art) and yet others might be unaffected (e.g., poetry, screenwriting). Future research can test whether rational processing is perceived as beneficial in artistic domains that are viewed as more analytical (i.e., music) rather than holistic (i.e., visual art). Additionally, the extent to which creativity is perceived as requiring more rational or experiential processing might also vary within each artistic field. For example, composing classical music might be perceived as more analytical than composing punk rock music. In this case, people might perceive rational processing as more beneficial for a classical music composer than a punk rock music composer. Future research could examine this between-genre variation and its consequences for the perception of high and low self-control artists not only across but also within artistic fields.

Third and, building on the previous point, our research suggests some perceptual barriers that might hinder the development of people's creative potential. Research has shown that mindsets and lay beliefs have a substantial impact on people's actual behaviour (Burnette, 2010; Dweck, 2012). Similarly, we assume that people's lay beliefs about creativity might affect the way they approach creative tasks. For example, people might give in to temptations and exercise less self-restraint when attempting to be creative. Ironically, this approach might backfire: there is research arguing that creativity thrives not only through impulsivity (Feist, 1998) but also through constraints, persistence, effort and training (Benedek et al., 2012; Lucas & Nordgren, 2015; Preckel et al., 2020; Simonton, 2014). Future research could examine to what extent people's attempts at creative tasks are guided by their beliefs about the role of self-control in boosting creativity and whether these beliefs subsequently undermine creative performance.

Fourth, even though we set off to explore detrimental effects of self-control in the domain of artistic creativity, we should acknowledge that the net effect of self-control on market value is overall positive. This implies that even though people view artists with high self-control as less creative, they believe that their productivity and work ethic will counteract any negative effect of self-control on creativity and eventually they will be successful and prosperous artists. This finding shows how deeply ingrained the belief is that self-control is a sine qua non virtue that prevails and makes up for other weaknesses. Another possibility, not tested here, is that artists high on self-control are also better at public relations, communicating with others and selling their work, which might also increase their market value. In other words, in addition to higher productivity, self-control might be associated with higher interpersonal skills, which might also be beneficial for promoting one's work. In any case, our results clearly demonstrate that people anticipate individuals with high self-control to be successful in life – even in domains like arts where self-control might be compromising one of the major qualities required in this domain (i.e., creativity).

Fifth, our research converges with and extends the literature on the effort heuristic (Kruger et al., 2004) and the labour valuation effect (Burgmer et al., 2019), which suggests that people value work and effort more than ideas. Specifically, the findings of Study 5 show that even though high self-control artists are perceived as less creative, this is not enough to undermine their overall market value. Apparently, people's higher valuation of labour than ideas spares high self-control artists – who are perceived to be highly productive, professional and hard-working – from the deleterious effects of perceived low creativity.

Finally, our findings could be viewed through the prism of the stereotype content model (Fiske, 2018), which posits that warmth and competence are two fundamental dimensions that people use when they form impressions of others in interpersonal contexts (Russell & Fiske, 2008; Wojciszke et al., 2009). Although the two dimensions are orthogonal and people can be perceived as high or low in both (Fiske, 2018), there are situations where trade-offs take place and being high on one dimension (e.g., warmth) automatically implies being low on the other (e.g., competence). How would self-control of an artist shape the perceptions of the artist warmth and competence? Prior research in marketing has shown that consumers who engage in indulgent consumption (i.e., are potentially low in self-control) are perceived as more warm (Tang et al., 2022). In combination with our finding of low self-control artists being perceived as less productive (Study 5), one could expect artists perceived as high in self-control to be seen as less warm (e.g., lacking passion, expressiveness and impulsivity), but more competent (e.g., championing rationality, deliberation and productivity). As perceptions of warmth have been linked to perceptions of higher creativity in prior research (Bonetto et al., 2021), perceived warmth might represent an additional (to perceive experiential processing tested here) mechanism through which artist self-control affects attributions of creativity. We encourage future research to test this possibility empirically.

9.2 | Limitations and future research

One important limitation of our research is that we used a rather overt manipulation of artist self-control in constructed vignettes. Indeed, the effect of the manipulation on the manipulation check item was very large (Cohen's *d* ranging from 3.53 to 4.85), suggesting that the vignettes had high internal validity and successfully created an image of an artist high versus low in self-control. While this approach maximizes internal validity, it might do so at the expense of external validity. In Study 4 (interview), we sought to increase external validity by integrating artist personality information into a journalistic piece that presented an interview with the artist. It could be worthwhile for future studies to examine other contexts where the public could come

across cues to an artist's personality in a natural way and test whether self-control inferences will affect perceptions of artist creativity in these contexts as well. In addition, future research could also investigate the reverse causal link: Do people consider highly creative artists to have lower self-control? It seems plausible that the relationship between self-control and perceived creativity is bidirectional.

Another avenue for future research would be to distinguish between creation and performance. People might believe that artistic performance (e.g., playing a musical instrument, singing, acting, dancing) requires a high degree of self-discipline, precision and attention to detail in order to faithfully execute a creator's vision. Given that high self-control individuals are better at self-presentation as they can override their own responses and tailor them to external demands (Stavrova & Kokkoris, 2019; Vohs et al., 2005), they might be perceived as better performers who stay true to the essence of an artistic creation. Therefore, the nature of the artistic task, creation versus performance, might be a moderator of the observed effect.

We have found differences across artistic domains with regard to the effect of rational processing on perceptions of creativity. This implies that the role of rational processing in creativity judgements might be more complex than that of experiential processing. One possibility is that rational processing might enhance creativity perceptions in artistic domains that are considered to be more analytical, such as music, which makes use of mathematics, logic and rules, rather than domains that are considered to be more holistic, such as painting. The same might also apply within domains: In subfields of the same artistic domain (e.g., music) that are deemed more analytical (e.g., classical) versus more holistic (e.g., punk rock), rationality might be seen as beneficial for the creative process. Whereas this interpretation is in line with the current findings, these differences across domains were not systematically tested here and therefore need to be addressed in future research. The current data suggest that the perceived nature of the artistic task, analytical versus holistic, may moderate the observed effect.

A question remaining open is whether the detrimental effect of self-control on perceived creativity extends also to other domains that require creativity, such as research and development, technology or marketing. Whereas we assume that the effect generalizes to these domains too, we chose to limit our investigation to the artistic domain because the ecological validity of the proposed effect seems to be higher in this domain (i.e., it is a domain in which people actively seek or have a high chance of being incidentally exposed to information about artists' personalities). It would be nevertheless interesting for future research to examine whether this effect also holds in non-artistic occupations.

Although the goal of this research was to study the link between trait self-control and creativity through a social perception perspective, our findings also pose intriguing questions about the nature of this link (actual, not perceived). As mentioned in the introduction, there are conflicting findings in the literature as to whether trait self-control harms or benefits creativity. Research based on self-reported self-control suggests that artists compared to non-artists indeed score lower on self-control and higher on impulsivity (Feist, 1998). However, studies using behavioural measures of self-control such as the Stroop task show that greater inhibitory control is associated with greater creativity (Beaty et al., 2014; Benedek et al., 2012; Groborz & Necka, 2003).

Perhaps one way to reconcile these conflicting findings could be to assume that even if artists do not possess lower levels of self-control than non-artists, as studies measuring performance indicate, they might nevertheless report lower self-control because this is better aligned with their identity as artists and what is expected by society from them. This resonates with conceptualizations of self-control not just as a capacity but also as identity (Berkman et al., 2017; Kokkoris et al., 2019). Considering that artists themselves must be aware of lay beliefs associating creativity more with experiential processing and less so with rational processing (see the Pilot Study section), they might intuitively ascribe themselves lower self-control when it comes to describing themselves as a way to fit social norms and expectations. Future research could empirically test this proposition.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and complies with all relevant ethical regulations. Participants provided informed consent before participation in each study and were rewarded for their time with either course credit (Studies 1, 2, 4 and 5) or a monetary compensation (Study 3).

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this research are openly available at the project's website on Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/3u5b9/?view_only=201ca72bacb0418a9daea169288b3d16). All stimulus materials are publicly available as Online Supplemental Material.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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