

REVISED ARTICLE MS FAP-17-7200

June 2019

TITLE

Transcending utility? The gendered conflicts of a contemporary creative identification

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LENGTH OF REVISED ARTICLE

Approximately 7800 words including abstract and references

ABSTRACT

The late 20th and early 21st centuries have been described as an age of creativity in affluent Western societies. The psychology of creativity has contributed new conceptualisations of creativity and creative processes, challenging associations that derive from the elite arts. This article investigates the implications of these changes for the gendering of creativity and creative practice. It asks if contemporary reconceptualisations of creativity open new possibilities for women to identify as creative practitioners. The article presents a critical discursive study of interviews with UK women maker-artists. The analysis shows how the women emphasise the practical applications or utility of their creative practice. A claim of utility can function to justify the practice. In addition, a claim of therapeutic utility, for others and for the artist herself, potentially addresses the neoliberal priority that people take responsibility for their personal well-being. However, the justification of utility contrasts with the creative vocation associated with the masculine elite artist who pursues 'art for art's sake'. The justification can therefore be seen to undermine the women's creative identifications, reinstating the conventionally masculine status of creativity and the arts.

Introduction

The positive associations of creativity derive in large part from the arts and especially the elite arts displayed in public sites, like national galleries. However, in recent decades, the reference of creativity has expanded. The global sector of the cultural and creative industries (CCI) now encompasses a wide range of occupations and forms of work (Fuller, Hamilton and Seale, 2013). Psychology has developed new theories and models which emphasise the practical applications of creativity and potentially erode its elite status by suggesting that almost anyone can be creative.

This article investigates the implications of these changes for the gendering of creativity and creative practice. The article addresses concerns relevant to feminist research in psychology and other disciplines, including geography (e.g. Parker, 2016) and gender, cultural and media studies (e.g. Conor et al., 2015; Gill and Scharff, 2013). Research in psychology has noted the exclusion of women from many creative domains and from 'real world creative accomplishment' (Baer and Kaufman, 2008: 77) Researchers in various disciplines have explored the conflicts that women experience around a lived creative practice (Bain, 2004; Conor et al., 2015). This article presents UK research that analyses the talk of women 'maker artists' to investigate how they construct and claim identities as creative practitioners. The research follows a critical discursive psychological approach which analyses how discursive conflicts are negotiated in talk as part of the ongoing constitution of an emergent subject (Wetherell, 1998; Taylor, 2015). The article investigates how the multiple meanings of contemporary creativity are taken up in the talk of the women maker-artists. It asks

whether contemporary reconceptualisations of creativity open new possibilities for women to claim a creative identity.

Reconceptualising creativity

In 1950 the President of the American Psychological Association called for more research on creativity (Guilford, 1950). Sarah Brouillette (2013) suggests that the underlying prompt for the call was economic because at this time, in the post-war period of the mid-twentieth century, America's future industries were expected to require innovators. Brouillette argues that the ideal for a creative future worker, subsequently taken up in management theory, was informed by a classic image of the artist. The image is of a lone practitioner, living in poverty ('a garret'), probably in a European city, pursuing art to the exclusion of all other priorities. Recognition and reward may come eventually, but perhaps not in the artist's own lifetime, and meanwhile the art is pursued for its own sake, as a vocation and an end in itself. The image of the artist has been called a 'romantic myth' (Becker, 1982: 14). It can also be understood as part of what Alison Gerber (2017) calls a 'historical imaginary' (p.30): 'contemporary ideas about traditional practice that hold sway, regardless of the true landscape of historical practice' (p. 80). The myth and the imaginary gave rise to the ideal of a new worker as a creative non-conformist who will defy social norms in search of fulfilment or self-actualisation, and be able to live with uncertainty.

The valorisation of creativity in the post war period may also have had a political aspect. In the Cold War, US politics were dominated by the political threats of authoritarianism and Communism. Jamie Cohen-Cole (2009) argues that, despite their differences, both threats

were associated with conformity, rigidity, a lack of autonomy and people's failure to think for themselves. In contrast, an American style and way of life were assumed to be characterised by freedom of thought and diversity. Cohen-Cole suggests that creativity was seen as an aspect of 'the open, autonomous mind' that contrasted with 'the closed, conformist mind' associated with 'the authoritarian personality' described by Theodor Adorno (Cohen-Cole, 2009: 230). Creativity was 'taken to be interchangeable with autonomy, rationality, tolerance and open-mindedness' (Cohen-Cole, 2009: 219) and also 'democratic character' (p.237). The myth and imaginary of the artist therefore shaped a further image, of the creative individual as the protector of American values.

The image of the creative artist to some extent persists in psychology. Researchers name elite artists and other revered special individuals as examples of creative people. For instance, widely cited publications in social and sociocultural psychology refer to van Gogh and Martin Luther King (Adarves-Yorno et al., 2006), eminent artists, scientists and writers (John-Steiner, 2000), music and theatre (Sawyer, 2003) and a celebrated novel (Tanggaard, 2012). However, psychology has also challenged the myth of the special creative individual, first by proposing that creativity is a (potential) capacity that almost everyone possesses, second, by questioning the individual nature of creative practices, and third, by emphasising the practical applications or utility of creativity.

The first challenge appears, for example, in the work of Abraham Maslow (1962) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2014). Both discuss creativity as a near-universal capacity rather than a special or elite quality that is possessed by only a few people. Maslow links creativity to the 'self-actualisation' at the top of the human 'hierarchy of needs'. Csikszentmihalyi connects creativity to the 'optimal' or 'flow' experience which, he suggests, everyone aspires to as

their 'foremost goal' (2002). The image of the special creative individual is further challenged by the assumption that creativity can be taught or cultivated through interactions with other people. Csikszentmihalyi proposes that creativity is the outcome of a process involving not only an individual but also a cultural context or 'domain' of knowledge and a social 'field' (Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer, 2014). Teresa Amabile (1983) links creativity to 'social/environmental factors' as well as 'personality characteristics' and 'cognitive abilities' (p.357). She suggests that creativity can be developed and improved through education and the acquisition of skills. Vera John-Steiner (2000) argues that creativity arises through collaborative relationships (see also Miell and Karen Littleton, 2004). Similarly, Keith Sawyer (2003) proposes that the creative unit is not an individual but a group (although other psychological research has suggested that creativity is diminished in the work of groups: see Glaveanu, 2011: 477).

Psychology has also emphasised the practical applications or utility of creativity. Brouillette suggests that the self-actualisation discussed by Maslow is 'potentially as important to business innovation as ...to individual self-development' (Brouillette, 2013: 31).

Psychologists have researched creativity in multiple domains, including engineering, business and advertising (see Kaufman et al, 2017). They have developed tests to measure creativity and models of its functioning (see Lubart, 2018). Similar assumptions about applications and utility have contributed to the identification of a global sector, the cultural and creative industries (CCI), in which economic growth is assumed to be driven directly by creativity. For example, an influential UK government document claims that wealth is generated by the 'individual creativity, skill and talent' of contemporary creative workers (DCMS, 2001).

Definitions of the CCI are broad and varied, encompassing workers in many occupations and domains. A recent account suggests that creative work includes 'virtually all the performative labours producing the information economy, from computer coding to legal research' (Fuller, Hamilton and Seale, 2013: 144). Despite this variety, the 'creative' designation promotes a shared experience and expectation for the workers themselves. Researchers have noted how CCI workers emphasise their personal commitment to following their own creative interests (Taylor and Littleton, 2012). They accept precarious employment, uncertain earnings and postponed rewards as the necessary difficulties of doing work that they 'love' (Taylor and Littleton, 2012). As Angela McRobbie noted in 2002,

'The flamboyant *auteur* relation to creative work that has long been the mark of being a writer, artist, film director or fashion designer is now being extended to (a) much wider section of a highly 'individuated' workforce.' (517)

An alternative explanation for this attraction is offered by Andreas Reckwitz (2017) who has argued that contemporary creativity offers the promise of a 'fascination and satisfaction' (p.30) excluded in previous modernist systems of work.

Whatever its economic efficacy, contemporary creative work carries the positive associations of the arts and the promise of a different working life that is based on the myth and imaginary of the creative artist. The elite associations of creativity therefore persist alongside the conceptualisations developed in influential psychological theories which emphasise its practical applications or utility. The next section discusses the gendered associations of creativity, including those that derive from the myth and imaginary of the masculine creative artist.

The gendered associations of creativity

The elite arts are conventionally associated with a masculine creative figure, exemplified by the majority of named artists in the European tradition (White and White, 1965/1993). The gendering of the artists is given by the historical imaginary which has already been discussed, and the individualism of the artist is itself associated with an idealised masculinity. The masculine image has of course been challenged by many woman artists, including Judy Chicago and Tracey Emin, but it persists. As Alison Bain (2004) states, 'In contemporary Western mythology, the artist is understood to be male. The dominant cultural myth is of the 'artist as male hero' (p.172)'.

However, the gendering of some creative practices is more complex because they originated in traditional work skills. The skills include wood working, the making of pottery and ceramics, metal working and glassblowing, all of which were once seen as men's work, and other skills that retain the associations of domesticity and women's work, such as embroidery, lace making, dress making/fashion and textile work. The practices linked to these skills are sometimes distinguished from art as 'craft' (Luckman, 2015). The distinction rests on a further historical imaginary in which art is an elite practice, pursued for its own sake, whereas craft is valued primarily for its practical applications or utility. Class and gender therefore intersect in a complex hierarchy of creative status. For example, McRobbie (1998), discussing the history of art schools in the UK, suggested in the late 20th century 'the painting boys' retained a higher status than 'the fashion girls' (p.44); the lower status category was the one which is feminised and has utility.

As the previous section discussed, the work of psychologists has challenged the image of the elite artist. A review of psychology research also finds no conclusive evidence of difference between men's and women's creative ability (Abraham, 2016) although psychologists have noted that men have significantly greater levels of 'real world creative accomplishment' (Baer and Kaufman, 2008: 77) than women. This difference is attributed to 'sociocultural factors' (p.77). Similarly, research on the cultural and creative industries has noted continuing gendered inequalities (Conor et al., 2015). For example, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2015) suggest that within particular industries there is occupational segregation linked to gendered stereotypes, with the more 'creative' jobs likely to be held by men. These inequalities have been attributed, at least in part, to expectations based on two converging figures. One is the masculine figure of the elite artist, variously reversioned as 'auteur' (McRobbie, 1998) and creative practitioner. The other is another masculine figure, the entrepreneur. Helene Ahl (2006) suggests that the entrepreneur is understood to be 'an unusual and extraordinary figure with levels of achievement orientation, optimism, self-efficacy, internal locus of control, cognitive skills, and tolerance for ambiguity above the ordinary' (Ahl, 2006: 599).

After comparing the figure's qualities, identified in a study of business and economic texts, to the index of typical masculinity and femininity characteristics compiled by a US psychologist, Sandra Bem (1981), Ahl concludes that the 'entrepreneur is a masculine concept' (Ahl, 2006: 601; see also Ahl and Marlow, 2012).

The contemporary associations of creativity and creative practices are therefore multiple and varied. They include elite and masculine images of the arts but also more complex classed and gendered intersections around art practices linked to craft skills, such as textile

art. In addition, there are the masculine associations of entrepreneurship linked to the work in the CCI. The research presented in this article looks at how these associations appear in the identity work of women creative practitioners. It analyses the talk of women 'maker artists' in the UK to investigate their claims to be creative and their constructions of their practice and its value. The research asks if contemporary reconceptualisations of creativity open new possibilities for women to identify as creative practitioners.

Method

Analytic approach

Previous sections have reviewed influential psychology theories of creativity. This research approaches creativity from the tradition of critical discursive psychology (Wetherell, 1998). Discourse analytic and discursive research approaches reconceptualise conventional psychological topics, such as memory and attitudes, as social, not individual, phenomena. A further premise is that such phenomena can be studied through language. In these terms, creativity is of interest as a social phenomenon. It carries multiple meanings that derive from both its contemporary celebration and its longer history, including those from academic work in psychology. For critical discursive psychologists, there is an additional interest in the exclusionary potential of a creative categorisation.

One premise of the approach is that the analysis of language in use is a means of accessing the often banal (Billig, 1987) and taken-for-granted meanings, and associated values and affects, through which people interpret and experience their worlds. These meanings may have the status of acknowledged 'truth' or they may go largely unrecognised. They are

largely stable but potentially shift as a consequence of direct challenges or the subtler additions and recombinations that take place in ongoing interactions at all levels of society.

A further premise is that the use of language is constitutive, functional and performative.

Language, especially talk, is therefore analysed as a form of action. The analysis investigates what speakers are doing in their talk, such as making claims and constructing identities.

Critical discursive research therefore investigates a social phenomenon, such as creativity, through the analysis of language. It takes patterns in language as evidence of knowledge and practices shared across a wider sociocultural context, such as, in this case, the affluent Western societies in which creativity is currently celebrated.

Participants

The participants in the research presented in this article are 18 women 'maker artists' who pursue a range of creative practices in a UK 'new town', established in the 1960s to provide residential and business accommodation near London. They follow practices in a wide range of materials or media (textile, ceramics/clay, glass, metal, wood, paint). Some have a conventional specialism or occupational category (millinery, photography, lace making) but all of them emphasise the creativity and originality of their making. Most have studied at art colleges or on similar tertiary level courses; the others have taken up their creative practice following workshops or evening classes, and one or two are self-taught.

The term 'maker artist' was adopted by the original project organisers and was not questioned in any of the interviews. The participants referred to themselves as 'artists' in passing (for instance, 'as an artist we never stop changing ourselves'). All of them present a creative identity to others, through websites or membership of studios or practitioner

groups, and as teachers or demonstrators of their specialisms. Most follow their creative practice as their main activity, devoting regular time to it, in a dedicated space. In a further presentation of a creative and artistic identity, they name internationally recognised artists as influences on their personal practice.

The participants were not explicitly asked to identify themselves in terms of age, race, ethnicity or class classifications. In some interviews, the participant identifies herself in one or more of these terms, for example, in a comment about family background, but the categories are not consistently addressed. This lack of demographic detail about participants is consistent with the discursive methodology which analyses the talk as evidence of the 'discursive backcloth' of society (Wetherell, 2001). Speakers are understood to position themselves in talk, for example, by constructing and claiming identities, but the talk is not taken to be a direct expression of an identity category, such as woman or artist, or as evidence of how all members of the category think or speak. Instead, the interest is in how existing meanings facilitate or constrain identity work, such as the construction of a claim to be creative.

Recruitment and data collection

The women were part of a larger group of 25 maker artists who were interviewed for a commemorative project. The project organisers were two former academics with an interest in creative practices. The project organisers adopted the term 'maker artists' for prospective participants with the intention of excluding conceptual artists, partly reflecting the intention to produce a public exhibition at the conclusion of the project. The participants were recruited initially through local art studios subsidised by charities or the

city council, with further participants recruited through links provided by the initial contacts, in a 'snowballing' process.

The interviews were conducted by the project organisers. After obtaining appropriate permissions, they interviewed each participant one-to-one about their creative practice with an invitation to demonstrate it and/or present examples of the finished work. The participant was then asked about places associated with their making, including workspaces and the city; their connections to other people, and possible future challenges to their practice. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the interviewers. The interviews were passed to the authors of this article as data for the current research project. The participants gave consent for this use of the interviews.

Data analysis

Following a critical discursive approach based in critical discursive psychology (Wetherell, 1998) and narrative-discursive psychology (Taylor, 2006; Taylor and Littleton, 2012), the analysis involved a search across, and within, interviews for patterns of wording, association, image and logic (e.g. sequence and consequence). These commonalities evidence the social or shared 'resources' which shape the possibilities for discursive work in talk, including identity work.

Analysis

This section discusses patterns which were found across the interviews. One pattern is of a conflict which follows from a conceptualisation associated with the imaginary and myth of

the elite artist, of creativity as a vocation and priority. The analysis shows how some resolution to the conflict invokes a different logic, of creativity as of value for its application or utility. In particular, there is a strong pattern in which the creative practice is justified through reference to its therapeutic utility, for other people and for the speaker herself.

A gendered conflict

One strong pattern in the interview data refers to a predictable, even clichéd conflict which has been discussed by other researchers (Bain, 2004; Taylor, 2011). The conflict derives from the meanings and expectations attached, on the one hand, to the creative vocation of the elite artist, and on the other, to a feminine identity as a partner and carer. The vocation prioritises the artist's creative practice and project whereas the feminine identity is linked to an expectation that a woman will be 'other directed' and responsive to the claims of other people (Taylor, 2011). An example of the pattern appears in the extract below. The interviewer is asking this practitioner about home as a site of making.

Extract 1

Interviewer: Oh so you don't really sit at home much and do it

P1: Not much no some [practitioners] do And they can get so engrossed they forget the housework they might even forget to prepare meals and the family suffers No I know one or two that er not locally I will say but are the ones who really get so drawn into it and they're usually the ones that are very clever and design things

Interviewer: So has that not happened to you then?

P1: [laughs] No I tend to sort of do things either for a gift or for a project or if I've got an interesting [creative task] I think oh I'll have a go at that

In this extract, the speaker describes the potential conflict for a woman creative practitioner between following a creative practice and meeting her domestic responsibilities. The account indicates the speaker's acceptance of a conventional prioritising of the domestic responsibilities. She constructs the 'other' women in extreme terms: they become so engrossed in their making ('drawn into it') that they 'forget' to do housework or prepare meals; the consequence is that 'the family suffers'. It is interesting that the speaker initially claims to 'know' the women but then adds 'not locally', distancing herself from them. One possible interpretation of the distancing is that the speaker is avoiding any implication that she is referring to other participants in the project. Alternatively, the distancing functions to emphasise the 'I-them' contrast as do also the references to being 'very clever' and 'design(ing) things' which invoke the myth of the elite artist rather than a skilled maker. The speaker's own priorities are clear: making must be secondary to a woman's conventional responsibilities.

In her research with contemporary North American women artists, Alison Bain (2004) noted a similar conflict arising around the possession of a studio. She suggested that the women artists aspired to have a studio to work in, both as an 'identity marker' of being an artist and to facilitate the individual practice of 'artistic production as the primary and dominant activity' (p.175). The ideal was a building type that carries the historical associations of sites of recognised male and elite artistic achievement:

'the Parisian atelier of the nineteenth century' or 'the stripped-down modernist ideal of a New York factory loft of the mid-twentieth century' (p.174).

However, for many of the women, the only space available was an attic or garage connected to their family home and here their possession was challenged by the demands of partners and family to encroach on the space. The conflict between giving attention to the pursuit of a creative practice and responding to the claims of others was played out in the physical space. A similar conflict has been noted in research with creative workers in the UK. Taylor (2011) discussed how even women without children had difficulty reconciling a creative project with the 'other-directedness' which is the expected contribution of women to the 'emotional economy of relationships' and part of a feminine subjectivity. Elsewhere, Taylor and Littleton (2012) noted how aspiring creative workers referred to their prioritisation of the creative as 'selfish'.

In Extract 1, the speaker presents herself as having avoided the conflict by restricting the scope and ambition of her practice: in contrast to the women who neglect their families, she limits her creative practice ('either for a gift or a project') and follows it light-heartedly ('I think oh I'll have a go at that'). However, this resolution is itself potentially problematic. It risks the label of 'hobby' or 'amateur' which Alison Gerber (2017) found that the US artists she interviewed 'explicitly differentiated themselves from, nearly spitting at the words' (p.26). That categorisation was incompatible with being 'serious' or 'professional' (see also Taylor and Littleton, 2012). In the research discussed in this article, other speakers resolve the conflict differently.

Resolutions to the conflict

The following short extract neatly exemplified one resolution to the conflict that appears as a strong pattern in the participants' talk.

Extract 2

P2: Yeh I mean the kids are grown up now they've left home so my time is my time
now

In just a few words, this talk constructs the speaker as free to follow her creative practice because her domestic responsibilities have been completed. There is a strong parallel with the conventional image of a transition from working hours, when time belongs to others (such as an employer), to leisure time, when there is opportunity to follow more pleasurable pursuits.

Extract 2 implies the same conflict that appeared in Extract 1: the creative making is referred to as conflicting with domestic responsibilities, and as having to be given a lesser priority while those lasted. This conflict can be seen as a shared understanding or resource which shapes the different examples of talk. In the terms of critical discursive psychology, this is an interpretative repertoire: a 'relatively coherent way... of talking about objects and events in the world' (Edley, 2001: 198). The conflict repertoire rests on the assumption that creative practice is outside the ordinary or normal. This short extract also illustrates the 'rhetorical' nature of talk (Billig, 1987) in that the speaker neatly answers the criticism of an imagined critic (perhaps someone similar to the speaker in Extract 1): she is not neglecting her children by following her creative practice.

In Extract 2, the phrase 'my time is my time' does interesting discursive work for this speaker. It constructs the creative practice as her preferred use of her time because it is

closer to her personal identification than other activities. There is an implication that her earlier (domestic) activities and role in relation to 'the kids' took her away from the self that engages in the creative practices. This way of talking about her creative making as the activity that is true to herself invokes the personalised relation to making of Becker's 'mythical' artist. Although only briefly invoked here, this is another repertoire, of the true creative self, discussed below in relation to other extracts. This repertoire is congruent with Maslow's concept of self-actualisation, discussed above, and with a more general association of creative work with fulfilment that is supposedly the attraction for entrants to the CCI. As previously noted, Reckwitz (2017) suggests that creativity offers a 'fascination and satisfaction' that has been lacking in all kinds of work. An extension of his argument might suggest that the same exclusion has operated in contemporary life more generally, so that the maker-artists discussed in this article are seeking to remedy it through their creative practice.

A different resolution to the conflict between making and domestic responsibilities can be seen in Extract 3. Here, a woman presents her creative practice as able to be reconciled with her domestic role.

Extract 3

P3: It works well I think you need to do something that works with your life you know and being a mum the children if you can only do it when they're not around it means you more or less can never do it So it's nice that they can come and do it well I think they're quite proud when they come around with their friends and they say what their mum has done and they look at the [products] and they quite like

having a go so they've done some small [products] And I think it's inspiring for them to grow up with something else than just schoolwork

In this account, the speaker first states as a general principle the need for a creative practice to 'work with your life', adding the practical issue that 'if you can only do it when [your children are] not around it means you more or less can never do it'. She therefore, again, acknowledges the priority of child care; the children will usually be with her. She follows her practice while they are present, and sometimes engages them in it as well. This is presented as more than just a solution to the conflict; it has positive consequences for the children themselves. When she says "I think they're quite proud when they come around with their friends and they say what their mum has done" and "I think it's inspiring for them to grow up with something else than just schoolwork", the speaker positions herself as being a better mother because of her creative practice, rather than the two being in conflict.

The utility of creative practice

Although the account of involving the children in the practice was unusual in the interviews, the speaker in Extract 3 can be seen to invoke the broader principle of the application or utility of creative practice, as emphasised by many psychologists and proponents of the CCI. In contrast to both the 'art for art's sake' claim and a creative project of self-actualisation, the creative practice is justified on the grounds that it has a practical function. This also appeared in another pattern in the interviews, that of references to creative practice having therapeutic utility for other people and the practitioner herself. This repertoire of creativity did not always use the word 'therapeutic'. Where it did appear, it was sometimes

introduced by the interviewer and then taken up by the participant, but it was more often offered by the participants themselves. In the following extract, the interviewer and speaker both use more general language ('help(s) people') but the claim made is a strong one, that the practice benefited a woman who was 'very ill with depression'. The speaker was one of a number of participants who referred to creative projects they conducted for 'the community'.

Extract 4

Interviewer: Yes well you can actually help people through art as well

P4: Yes and it's really lovely when it helps people feel better And I did a project with [organisation name] a few years ago and one lady who was very ill with depression said that she couldn't do it and she got very upset And in the end after three weeks she started to make [a piece of work] and when she'd finished it ... the look on her face [laughs] and she was so happy about that piece and it makes it really worthwhile when you can actually share your gifts and let other people do amazing things

This account is made vivid by the emphases: the depressed woman was 'very ill' and initially got 'very upset' but finally was 'so happy'. The evidence of this happiness, 'the look on her face', is apparently beyond description; the speaker does not offer words for it.

A related pattern in the data is the use of this repertoire of creativity as therapeutic in order to present the creative practice as having therapeutic utility for the practitioner herself. As the following three extracts illustrate, this effect is constructed as the consequence of the

separation between making and the other parts of the speaker's life. The creative practice is constructed as outside ordinary or normal life.

Extract 5

P5: ...I suppose for me it can be cathartic. Sometimes when I've had some problems or whatever I can set up my [equipment] and get totally lost in it and it works for me and cheers me up and makes me feel happier. It's something that I've always done so I've never not done it.

In Extract 5, the separation from everyday life is marked in the extreme account of getting 'totally lost'. The speaker's repeated claim ('something I've always done', 'I've never not done it') has an interesting rhetorical quality. Words like 'always' and 'never' imply both truth and importance, countering possible challenges that the therapeutic function is insignificant or illusory. Other research has noted speakers using similar language to emphasise the authenticity of a creative identity, that is, the repertoire of the true creative self that appeared in Extract 2 (Taylor and Littleton, 2006). Here, the truth claim appears to be attached to the therapeutic benefit.

Extract 6 similarly sets up the separation between the creative making and ordinary life.

Extract 6

P6: What I find is that when I'm [making] it doesn't matter what's happening in my life at that particular time - everything is just completely cut off because I'm so absorbed in what I'm doing that you know you have no worries everything just kind of disappears into the wind really so it's very very therapeutic.

Again, the account employs extreme wording: 'just completely cut off', 'I'm so absorbed', 'disappears into the wind', 'very very therapeutic'. The therapeutic efficacy is again attributed to the making practice being outside the rest of the speaker's life. These women do not embrace the tolerated violation of social rules described by Becker (1982). Instead, there is an escape from society into creative practice, and an escape to self. Bain (2004) described women artists attempting to cut themselves off from the claims of others in order to fully occupy the identity of an artist. The women discussed in this paper similarly construct the separation between the artistic/creative and the other aspects of their lives as positive and desirable.

Therapeutic utility and self-repair

The references to the therapeutic utility of creative practice present this function as self-evidently good. For example, in Extract 7, creative practice is compared positively to a recognised therapeutic activity, yoga.

Extract 7

P7: it's really relaxing and really therapeutic and really calming and I always used to think that like if you were [doing this creative practice] it was better than yoga because er you just sort of almost get into like a trance and can just do it for hours
So for me it was a really nice thing to do

The expression 'better than yoga' implies not only that the benefits of yoga are known but also that its practice is familiar and unremarkable. There is an implication that some kind of therapeutic practice is a normal requirement.

Extract 8 takes the therapeutic claim further in that it presents the creative making as necessary to enable the speaker to manage the rest of her life.

Extract 8

P8: ... there are times when I don't do it for a while you know I work full time and I've got other things going on and I do find that I will sometimes get a bit down or a bit angsty and it's not until I come back into the studio and start work that I think oh that was why I was feeling like that So obviously there's something there you know it's

Interviewer: Very therapeutic like you say

P8: Yes very therapeutic and just that I'm not particularly an extrovert person so I'm not really into going out and meeting people all the time so something like this it's just eases the soul I bit I suppose you know em

Again, the talk in this extract suggests that the speaker benefits emotionally or mentally from engaging in the creative practice because it counters the demands or difficulties of other parts of her life ('I work full time and I've got other things going on'). The practice eases stresses and resolves other emotion-related issues because it is qualitatively different to (other) practices or work. When she says it 'eases the soul' and that it helps her realise 'that was why I was feeling like that', she invokes benefits that might otherwise be sought from religious faith or psychotherapy. In her self-description as 'not particularly extrovert' she invokes a repertoire of a true self, as discussed in relation to Extract 2, although this is apparently a self that needs (therapeutic) support rather than a true creative self.

A similar utility is expressed more positive terms in Extract 9. The speaker refers to the relative benefits of different art practices as therapies ('it's the most therapeutic art I've done'). She compares her current creative practice, which involves assembling separate elements, to self-repair.

Extract 9

P9: it's like repairing yourself and I find it really therapeutic I would say it's the most therapeutic art I've done because I've done [other creative practices] And there's something about [this practice] that I just find really healing yeh lovely

These references to the therapeutic utility of creative practices can be taken to indicate that the speakers take responsibility for their own well-being, including their mental health. This acceptance is consistent with an entrepreneurial project applied to the self in what Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (2013) call 'the psychological internalization of individual responsabilization' (p.6). Gill and Scharff see this responsabilization as a feature of contemporary neoliberal societies. The individual must be vigilant in monitoring herself and the way that she lives because health problems, physical or mental, are attributed to bad life practices and insufficient self-care, and therefore a failure to take (enough) responsibility.

Relatedly, the talk normalises the use of therapeutic activities The implication is that such activities are necessary in ordinary life. Gill and Scharff (2013) have suggested that discourses of neoliberalism and postfeminism share a focus on and, particularly, a call to women to 'work on and transform the self' (p.7). In their references to the therapeutic benefits of creative practice, the women accept their own need for such benefits, positioning themselves as requiring correction or self-repair. The repair project of creative

practice can therefore be understood as another version of the gendering noted by de Beauvoir in which 'woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria' (cited in Taylor and Littleton, 2012: 128). Moreover, Taylor and Littleton (2012) have suggested that for some women creative practitioners, a project of repair is equivalent to a reduced or postponed claim to a creative identity. Part of the myth of the masculine artist is that he is the possessor of 'special talents, gifts, or abilities' that 'give works a warrant which they would not otherwise have' (Becker, 1982: 357). His art is an expression of his specialness and his intact and completed individuality. Taylor and Littleton argue that the feminine project of repair lessens the 'warrant', implying that the specialness and individuality is not (yet) complete.

Conclusion

This article has analysed the identity work of women maker artists, following an approach from critical discursive psychology. The article has investigated whether contemporary reconceptualisations of creativity open different possibilities for women to construct and claim a creative identity. Influential work in psychology appears to have challenged the elite, masculine image and imaginary of the creative artist. For example, psychologists have understood creativity as a capacity that can be exercised by anyone, not just a small minority of special individuals. In addition, psychology research on creativity emphasises its practical applications. Creativity is good because it is useful. This understanding also underpins the logic of the cultural and creative industries, that creativity can be monetised. In contrast, the practices and outputs of the elite arts have conventionally been valued for their own sake. Their lack of utility is even a marker of their superiority to mundane

functional practices. The elite arts have conventionally defined themselves by the exclusion of 'ordinary' people and also the practices which conventionally support 'ordinary' life, promising some transcendence of that ordinariness.

The analysis presented in this article has shown how women maker artists take up a claim of utility in order to resolve a conflict noted in previous research, between a commitment to a creative practice, and the expectation that a woman will be 'other directed' and responsive to the claims of other people (Taylor 2011). The claim of utility is presented to justify the creative practice. The women do not claim economic utility for their practices, noting the impossibility of fully monetising the effort and time involved. Some note the possible domestic function of a creative practice, for instance, as a stimulus or model activity for the maker's children. However, the strongest pattern in their talk is around claims to the therapeutic utility of their creative practices, for other people and for the maker herself.

The claim that creative practices have a therapeutic association can be seen to draw on a well-established tradition of utilising creative making as part of psychological therapies. In addition, it can be seen as part of the larger contemporary phenomenon of creativity being harnessed to wellbeing projects as 'a tool for neo-liberalisation, individuation, and capitalist exploitation' (Moreton, 2018, p. 327). Other writers have discussed the specific significance of discourses of neoliberalism for women (Gill and Scharff 2013). The particular interest for this article is that the claim of therapeutic utility, and utility more generally, contrasts with the individualism of traditional masculine elite art practices in which creativity is valued as the expression of a unique self or a project of self-actualisation. The justification of utility is not compatible with the traditional status of the elite arts in which practices and outputs are

valued for their own sake. In the identity work of the woman participants, the apparent resolution to the creativity/womanhood conflict ultimately undermines the creative identification. The promise of transcendence persists as the ultimate attraction of creative practices, but it is subsumed to the emphasis on utility. And because women, more than men, have conventionally been required to justify themselves and their lives in terms of their utility, for them the promise of transcendence through creative practice is potentially even more powerful, and its loss even more significant.

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