

Balancing Between Roles and Duties – The Creativity of Mothers*

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ABSTRACT

We raise two issues in the article at hand: how women who are mothers fulfil their creative needs, and what significance they ascribe to creativity in their role as mothers. A thematic analysis of structured interviews with twenty-seven women suggests that for mothers, creative activity mostly concerns fulfilling one's responsibilities as part of the role taken on (be it parental or professional), and the main creative challenge they face is achieving a balance between their private and professional lives. Creativity in their role as mothers relates predominantly to two areas of activity: communication with the child and activities creating a climate conducive to the child's development of creative ability. We discuss the obtained results in relation to those of previous research on the relationship between motherhood and creativity.

It may be assumed that motherhood as a role with numerous responsibilities and challenges is related to how women fulfil their needs and allocate resources and, as a result, how they realize their creative potential. One illustration of this comes from a statement made by Alice Munro, the Nobel Prize Laureate. Asked why she chose writing short fiction, she replied: "I had small children, I didn't have any help. Some of this was before the days of automatic washing machines, if you can actually believe it. There was no way I could get that kind of time. I couldn't look ahead and say, this is going to take me a year because I thought every moment something might happen that would take all time away from me. So, I wrote in bits and pieces with a limited time expectation (<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/10/why-alice-munro-is-a-short-story-writer-not-a-novelist/280463/>, downloaded 22 May 2017).

Based on the biographies of acclaimed female artists, five types of relationships between the role of a mother and creative activity have been indicated (Miller, 2010). The first is resigning from motherhood to pursue creative work (see: Gardner, 1993; Helson, 1999).

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Female creators are four times more likely than their male colleagues to forego having a family. If they marry – they resign having children three times more often than professionally active men (Simonton, 1999, p. 219). This has consequences for their well-being and sense of success; likewise, it may be a source of negative affect – inappropriately strict evaluation of their performance and even the dramatic decision to take their own lives (Gruber & Wallace, 1999/2010). The second type concerns women who are mothers, but concentrate on creative development, limit their investment in the role of a mother to a minimum and do not take on the responsibility of rearing and child care. The third possibility is to focus first and foremost on motherhood and in such cases, the woman withdraws from – or significantly reduces – her creative activity. Another option is striving to reconcile responsibilities in both areas of life (see: Lebuda & Csikszentmihályi, under review; Miller, 2010) or to sequentially engage both roles at different stages of life.

Talented female artists with children suggest that their offspring are often a source of inspiration and that motherhood is conducive to developing their creative potential (Kirschenbaum & Reis, 1997). Little is known about the relationship between creativity and motherhood among women who are not established creators. In this article, we reveal how women who are mothers fulfil their creative need, and how they perceive the significance of creativity in their role as mothers. We focus solely on mothers, as they play the dominant role in forming the creative potential and attitudes towards creativity of their children (Michel & Dudek, 1991). Furthermore, in Poland – especially during the child's earliest years – it is mothers who play the leading role when it comes to child care and rearing (Zgierska, 2012).

Women's creativity and motherhood

In recent decades, psychologists have contemplated ways in which children change and affect women's lives as mothers as well as the subjective experience of motherhood (Vallance, 2010). It has been indicated that motherhood has a positive impact on a wide array of traits and abilities linked to creativity. It has been shown that becoming a mother improves one's memory and learning ability (Kinsley et al., 1999). Breastfeeding mothers, due to the effects of oxytocin and prolactin, are less prone to suffer the negative consequences of stress hormones and experience the benefits of positive social interaction and emotions – even when they cease to breastfeed (Ellison, 2006; Uvnas-Moberg, 1998). Women who have become mothers note that – due to experiencing motherhood as a positive state – they deal with stress much better, are better at multitasking and are

less sensitive when it comes to being judged by others (Lorberbaum et al., 1999). Among women for whom motherhood is a full time occupation and positive experience, improved flexibility of the ego and self-confidence have been noted – alongside a decreased sense of dependence on others and fear, as well as a strengthened sense of identity (Paris & Helson, 2002). Parents state that parenthood changed their thinking, behaviour and feelings (34%), attitudes towards caring for oneself and the environment (25%), that thanks to parenthood they feel smarter and more creative (11%), and that their children are a source of inspiration (29%) (Dillon, 2002).

However, there are indeed reports that becoming a mother may indirectly result in giving up the pursuit of one's own interests and creative abilities. The transition to motherhood relates to a re-evaluation of previous self-concepts and identities and lowered self-esteem (Drew, 2010; Elder, 1999). It is indicated that the causes of negative experiences related to motherhood are numerous conflicting social expectations associated with the role of a mother and the promoted image of femininity. On the one hand, there is a certain prevalent trend – *intensive mothering* (Hays, 1998), or *new momism* (Douglas & Michaels, 2004) – in which immersive motherhood is promoted and requires a complete and utter focus on care and the multifaceted development of the child. On the other hand, much attention is paid to the significance of intense professional activity and striving for success, while realizing one's passions (Brown, 2010). As a result, women trying to reconcile professional work with the responsibilities of family life face a "double day" (Glazer, 1980) or "second shift" (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). The number of responsibilities and striving to reconcile often conflicting expectations is linked to increased anxiety, guilt and ambivalence towards the motherhood experience (LeBeau, 2017). This also applies to women in creative jobs, who – especially in the case of self-employment, where they do not have a strict work schedule – continually struggle with time-management issues and balancing activity in both roles (Ciciola-Izzo, 2014).

It may be stipulated that due to numerous requirements inscribed in being a mother and the consequent lack of time, women cut down on activities which are not crucial for the development and well-being of the family. They do so by abandoning their hobbies and interests, and seek creative fulfilment in dealing with responsibilities inherent to each role.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study seeks answers to the following questions: how do women who are mothers fulfil their need for creativity and what meaning do they ascribe to creativity in the role of a mother? Women invited to participate in the study were women for whom

creativity was important, as noted in self-descriptions, who also happened to be engaged in stimulating their children's development (see: Method). Pursuing these questions is important because cognitive schemas, scripts and mindsets associated with creative self-expression in life are also linked to the mother's conduct with her children (Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 2014). Moreover, one's self-image as a mother translates into parental styles and how a woman develops the familial climate (Sigel, Dreyer, & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 1984). For the child, on the other hand, early childhood experiences – including the climate of the family home – are associated with types of possibilities for realizing their creative potential later on in life (e.g. Amabile, 1996; Block, Block, & Harrington, 1987; Dacey, 1989; Foster, 2004; Getzels & Jackson, 1961; Gute, Gute, Nakamura, & Csikszentmihályi, 2008; Miller & Gerard, 1979; Miller, Lambert, & Neumeister, 2012; Simonton, 1984; Taylor, 1999; Walberg et al., 1996; Wallach & Kogan, 1965).

METHOD

Participants

The sample was composed of mothers ($N = 27$) representing various professions and age cohorts (see: Table 1). All mothers, except for one, had full higher education, only three of them had not finished their final exams. The mothers' ages ranged from 26 to 53 ($M = 37.52$, $SD = 6.93$ for 23 participants who have given information about their age). The participants had from 1 to 5 children ($M = 2.07$, $Me = 2$, $SD = .96$).

Table 1
Characteristics of Participants

| ID | Mother's age | Profession | Number of children | Sex and age of the children |
|----|--------------|---|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | 36 | psychologist, photographer, foundation president | 2 | F8, M5 |
| 2 | 29 | secretary | 1 | F1 |
| 3 | 28 | teacher | 1 | M1 |
| 4 | 33 | teacher | 2 | F6, F2 |
| 5 | 40 | psychologist, journalist, academic teacher | 3 | M13, M9, F7 |
| 6 | 53 | illustrator | 1 | F15 |
| 7 | 36 | spokesperson | 3 | F15, M14, M7 |
| 8 | 36 | office worker | 2 | F4, F1 |
| 9 | 40 | various professions | 2 | M15, M11 |
| 10 | 29 | sociologist | 2 | F3, M1 |
| 11 | No info | business woman | 1 | M2 |
| 12 | 46 | economist | 2 | F20, F16 |
| 13 | 36 | business analytic | 2 | M2, M2 months |
| 14 | No info | project manager | 2 | M8, F5 |
| 15 | No info | makeup artist | 1 | M5 |
| 16 | 35 | scholar of the Russian language | 4 | M14, M12, F9, F3 |
| 17 | 40 | teacher | 3 | M12, M10, F1 |
| 18 | 39 | sociologist, academic teacher | 2 | M7, M5 |
| 19 | 56 | teacher | 5 | M24, M22, F20, M17, M11 |
| 20 | 47 | business woman, economist | 2 | F11, M8 |
| 21 | 41 | logistics expert in foreign affairs, economist | 2 | M5, M3 months |
| 22 | 32 | visual artist, exhibitor | 2 | F7, F4 |
| 23 | 36 | business woman, farmer | 2 | F5, M2 |
| 24 | 36 | psychologist, logistics expert in foreign affairs | 1 | M2 |
| 25 | 26 | economist | 1 | F2 |
| 26 | No info | teacher, office manager | 2 | F5, M1 |
| 27 | 38 | interior and garden designer | 3 | M8, F6, F4 |

The selection process used the competent judges method (Amabile, 1982). Competent judges, psychologists who have completed a course on creativity ($N = 4$), selected mothers among their acquaintances who fulfilled the following criteria:

- they were engaged in parenting and spending a lot of quality time with the child,
- creativity was important in their self-description.

Additionally, the second criterion was later verified with the following request: “rate how creative you are in your role as a mother.” It turned out that the mothers’ self-rating was congruent with that of competent judges, and ranged from 5 to 10 on a 10-point scale ($M = 7.3$, $SD = 1.5$).

Procedure and Data Collection

Competent judges invited selected mothers to participate in the study through telephone conversations and later an official e-mail with an invitation was sent. The participants were informed about the aim of the study, its confidentiality and anonymity. They were asked about their preferred method of replying to questions: through google forms or during an interview/a conversation. In the case of the written form ($N = 22$), mothers were invited to fill in the google form at their leisure. In the case of conversations ($N = 6$), the contents were typed up in real time and the participant had the opportunity to verify whether the transcript was in line with the intent of the statements made. All interviews were carried out by the first author.

The initial instructions and questions for the interview were designed to encourage an open narrative focusing on two main research areas connected with creativity:

The first area of interest is how women who are mothers realized their creativity.

The participants were asked the following questions:

- In what areas of life does your creativity express itself?
- What hobby/passion do you have?
- How do you find time during the day for your own activities?
- What action do you take to have time for your own creativity?

The second problem under investigation concerned the meaning women ascribed to creativity in the role of a mother? We asked:

- What do you do to cooperate with your child creatively?
- Do you do something that might suggest that you are creative in your relationship with your child? Please elaborate.
- What do you do to develop your child’s creativity?

- How does your role as a mother relate to your professional activity and pursuit of passions?
- How does motherhood impact your creativity?
- What is the relationship between motherhood and professional work in your case?

Data Analysis Strategy

We used thematic analysis in search of repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data were coded in an inductive or “bottom up” way (e.g., see Frith & Gleeson, 2004), so the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990). We coded the data without trying to fit it into pre-existing theories or our preconceptions. We did the coding manually using Excel. In the first step of the analysis, the second author of the manuscript read the entire data set a few times and assigned as many codes as she found appropriate to each answer. If new codes appeared in the analysis process that did not match previous categories in the analysis, new codes or topics were created. Later, all codes and potential themes were collected, and afterwards, the themes were compared one more time to the raw data by both authors, and the main theme was chosen. All themes were organized in a thematic map. The first author of the article revised all the coding and themes. In cases of doubt or disagreement, the coding of the data were revised again.

RESULTS

The main theme of the narratives is creativity in the roles played, especially with regard to action taken to maintain balance between the private and the professional (see Figure 1.). This is how the participants described such experiences:

Motherhood forces you to become an equilibrist in organizing your daily life – since I became a mother, I've been trying to make better use of any spare moment. (Number 27, interior and garden designer, export-import expert, English translator, 38 years old)

Creativity is also about reacting to everyday changes, plot twists, planning, managing the family (3 children) and job to make it all work. There are new “jigsaw puzzles” coming in every day that need to be fitted and matched to create a mechanism which might work, provide happiness and move in some good direction. (Number 5, psychologist, journalist, academic teacher, 33 years old)

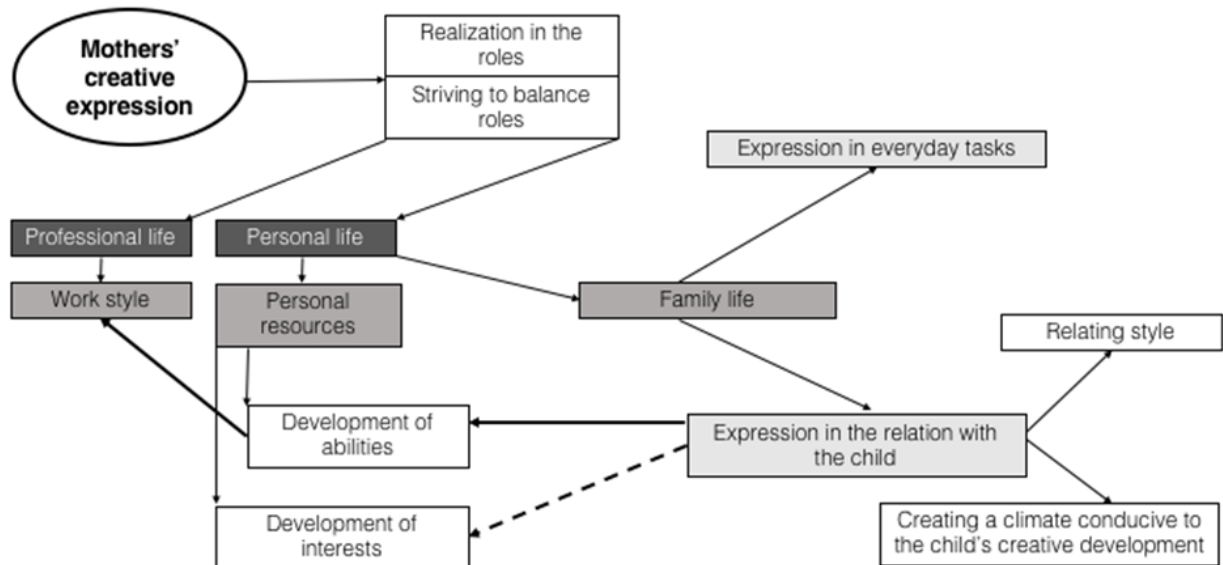


Figure 1. Scheme of dependencies between roles and areas in which women who are mothers realize their need for creativity.

Maintaining some balance between their two roles is the main concern on which the studied mothers focus in their statements. The greatest challenge is, first and foremost, fulfilling one's obligations according to individual standards and notions of what it means to play your role "right." Here is how one of the participants commented on this:

To take care of the kids your way, while defining your role as a mother in a manner which suits you. (Number 5, psychologist, journalist, academic teacher, 33 years old)

Study participants stressed that striving for balance is a permanent state; one which requires flexibility but also perseverance in its pursuit. Making both life roles work is defined as a source of satisfaction, sense of fulfilment and self-realization, but it is also described in terms of an aspiration, ideal state – one which is impossible or very difficult to maintain in the long run.

The participants define creativity as a lifestyle, hence, something not limited to one specific area of activity. Creativity expresses itself in everyday tasks, including those considered repetitive and routine, algorithmic. This is how the participants describe this:

I'm all about doing and seeking solutions to a given situation – I'm not afraid of problems. I look for solutions. I don't like routine and I introduce change into my private and professional lives. You could say that, in my case, creativity expresses itself in how I realize my life. (Number 12, economist, 46 years old)

For me, creativity is about housekeeping, cooking, everyday problem-solving, gift-giving. At work – approaching various issues, seeing the big picture when it comes to things that must be done. (Number 13, business analytic, 36 years old)

As for the professional realm, women realize their creative potential mostly by doing the tasks at hand in a new and unusual way, while seeking out more effective means of operation and innovative solutions.

Professionally, my creativity expresses itself in forming the vision and aims of the Foundation as well as solving problems standing in the way of realizing those aims. Number 1, psychologist, photographer, foundation president, 36 years old Creative work: creating new services, establishing teams, overcoming obstacles. My work is really dynamic and I face new challenges every day. I'm very active professionally, my day must be well planned for me to reach all the self-imposed goals. (Number 20, business woman, economist, 47 years old)

Sometimes women's professional creativity arises from how they perceive the demands of the job. This relates to women in creative jobs, but not only.

Mostly at work – I illustrate children's books. (Number 6, illustrator, 53 years old)

My creativity comes from the job I do – I'm a junior high school teacher. Teacher = enthusiast = activist. There's no other way [to go about it]. (Number 4, teacher, 33 years old)

Not all participants were professionally active. In some cases, (five mothers out of the 27 participants were not employed) no work, or a lost job, resulted in taking on the role of a mother.

After my maternity leave, I lost my job. This motivated me to set up my own sole proprietorship. Even if it yields no financial gains, I have time for the family and I don't have to leave rearing my child to some stranger. I work from home and I can keep an eye on what my child is doing. (Number 25, economist, 26 years old)

I first transitioned from teaching adults to teaching children. Later, I became a mother teaching at home (the children are home-schooled). I'm of mixed opinion about these changes. In a way, I feel demoted. (Number 17, teacher, 40 years old)

Some of the women translated their experiences of motherhood into a job involving organizing meetings for other mothers or monetizing the work they did while at play with the child.

After giving birth, I noticed a need to open a Mothers' Club. I felt it was important for many women – to meet and talk and to let kids play with their peers to start socializing them as soon as possible. (Number 3, teacher, 28 years old)

Thanks to my daughter, I wrote a novel for kids. It hasn't been published yet, but I'm not losing hope. If it weren't for Teresa and the stories and fun we shared, I would never have come up with the idea to write something. (Number 6, illustrator, 53 years old)

While I'm writing stories, children – who are part of my life – are definitely a huge inspiration. (Number 16, scholar of the Russian language, 35 years old)

Mothers primarily suggested a one-way transfer of experience gained in their personal life to their professional life. Motherhood-related experiences were seen as improving creative and organizational abilities, and these were applied at work. It was definitely rarer for women to say that it was their professional background that aids them in their role as mothers. Mothers who worked in artistic jobs were those who indicated that they made use of their skills while at play with their children.

(In motherhood) ...my manual skills come in really handy. As well as all the knowledge I acquired at university. (Number 16, scholar of the Russian language, 35 years old)

...what I do professionally and my hobby (e.g., playing the violin) impact how I raise my children. (Number 27, interior and garden designer, Export-Import Expert, English translator, 38 years old)

My role as a homeschooling teacher has had positive impact on my kids. (Number 17, teacher, 40 years old)

No matter whether the study participants were professionally active or remained unemployed when their children were young, personal life remained the main realm of creative activity for the women. This applies especially to actions taken in their family life and, to a lesser extent, to their personal creativity related to the pursuit of their passions or interests. In the statements made, we noted three main strategies related to personal creative activity. First, a strategy we would call “child's needs first” in which women postpone pursuing their interests to a later period when their children will be more independent, while trying to create sketches, notes, drafts, when their child is busy or asleep.

It's rather difficult for me to paint when the kids are around. I try to do this “after hours”, i.e., when they're asleep. In effect, this often results in not painting at

all. It depends on the period in life (...) It's difficult for me because I first deal with chores and I treat my creativity as "pleasure"; so – much like Cinderella – I rarely make it to the ball. (Number 16, scholar of the Russian language, 35 years old)

I prioritize. That is, I do what is necessary, then I do less important things. If there's any time left, I devote it to my hobbies. (Number 23, business woman, farmer, 36 years old)

I take my camera when I go out on walks. That's how I vent. (Number 21, logistics expert in foreign affairs, economist, 41 years old)

We refer to another strategy used for realizing one's passions as "engaging", as it is about including the children in one's activities. This is how one subject talked about it:

I engage my daughters in everything I do. For example, we've made bracelets recently. We started doing this in spring because I felt like a spring bracelet. (...) More recently, we've made candles, and bath bombs and soaps before that. (Number 22, visual artist, exhibitor, 32 years old)

When you have two children of no more than three years of age at home, it's really difficult to find a moment for realizing your passions. If I can't send the children out for a walk with dad, I try to choose baking recipes I can follow with the kids. (Number 10, sociologist, 29 years old)

The last strategy is "seeking help." In this case, women who want to develop their passions seek support and help from their partners or family.

My partner and I share household chores and childcare responsibilities. We respect our mutual need for pursuing our needs and realizing ourselves. We support each other in this, and the kids know about it and consider this the norm. (Number 20, business woman, economist, 47 years old)

My husband is happy about my creativity and gives me the strength to do at least something. My mum and mother-in-law help out as well if I ask. (Number 16, scholar of the Russian language, 35 years old)

Choosing a given strategy is not always the result of individual preference, but is also the result of how one's immediate family perceive the mother's creativity, as illustrated in the following passage:

The support I get from my nearest and dearest concerns child-related emergencies rather than the "whim" of being creative ;-). (Number 1, psychologist, photographer, foundation president, 36 years old)

The main area in which creative expression takes place is the participants' family life. Two areas of creative activity were noted. The first is that of everyday chores: cooking, house and garden-keeping, or choosing an outfit for one's partner, oneself, or the children. This is how the participants talked about it:

I cook larger batches of soup and freeze it. I have less ironing to do thanks to the tumble dryer. I do the cleaning according to a system: I divided the house into zones and I devote one week to each zone while spending only 15 minutes per day on cleaning it up (timer in hand). (Number 27, interior and garden designer, Export-Import Expert, English translator, 38 years old)

My creativity is expressed in (...) reconciling the numerous responsibilities at work, skilful cleaning – so that the kid has something to do during that time etc. It's important to (...) approach your responsibilities and manage your time in a creative way. (Number 24, psychologist, logistics expert in foreign affairs, 36 years old)

Under certain circumstances, it "forces" you to be flexible, fast, fluent, resourceful about how you can make something out of nothing, how to help with resolving some conflict, what to do when [the child] is sick and you have to go to work, what to cook, how to manage their time, how to make a Christmas tree outfit for the school play etc. (Number 1, psychologist, photographer, foundation president, 36 years old)

However, the most dominant area for creative expression in the realm of family life is activity in relation to the closest of kin. The subjects realize their creative potential in organizing family time, especially in relation to the child/children, in activities supporting creative abilities and attitudes of their child/children. A certain conviction prevails among the subjects – that creativity involving others is of greater value than individual activity in the pursuit of satisfying one's own needs. The statement below is one example:

People can't just be egoistically creative because living life through art may alienate the artist from society. I wanted my children to be able to enjoy life, be good to others and to do something good for them. (Number 19, teacher, 51 years old)

What is crucial for the women studied, is creativity in their relationship with the child. We noted two means of realizing one's creativity in this regard. The first is a relating style which requires great flexibility and elasticity of thought, which involves focusing on the child and their needs, empathic communication, understanding, respect for their inde-

pendence, focusing on emotions and appropriate communication processes, and spending time with the child.

Patience. Listening. Doing what the child suggests and stopping yourself from doing it yourself [instead of letting them do it on their own]. Assisting them and giving the child some space. (Number 5, psychologist, journalist, academic teacher, 40 years old)

I try to follow the kids' interests – I try to respond to their real needs rather than imposing my own ideas upon them. (Number 27, interior and garden designer, Export-Import Expert, English translator, 38 years old)

Another important area for realizing one's creative potential in one's relationship with one's child is creating the right climate for developing the child's creativity. In this regard, mothers indicate four primary categories of activity: encouraging the pursuit of novelty and variety of experience, supporting a nonconformist attitude and independence, strengthening perseverance in realizing creative tasks, and encouraging fantasizing. In terms of providing a variety of experience, women stress the importance of developing openness to new, unknown experiences, stimulating the child's curiosity, but also providing appropriate materials and proposals for everyday play which allow the children to test their abilities in various domains.

I like my children to do cool stuff – travel, meet people of different nationalities, professions, to have friends from various walks of life. For me, it's important for them to be familiar with the world, and – despite living in the country – not to be provincial. (Number 22, visual artist, exhibitor, 32 years old)

I try to provide materials which encourage my child to do arts and crafts – colourful paper, blotting paper, magic markers, crayons etc. We read books, learn nursery rhymes, we make up our own. (Number 10, sociologist, 29 years old)

When our daughters were younger we tried (...) to play together, travel, go to museums, theatres, to art exhibitions, [attend] sports and language classes. We encouraged them to be self-reliant and, later on, we gave them, and still give them, freedom under certain supervision. What I added is that I tried to show them new, different solutions to various things and ways of thinking about all kinds of matters. (Number 12, economist, 46 years old)

Another type of activity in which women make use of their creative potential in creating a climate conducive to the child's development of creativity is supporting the child in effort and persistence. Most of all, by explaining the principles behind

executing specific tasks, supporting them in their pursuit of interests, modelling, providing help with undertakings beyond the child's competence, sharing constructive feedback, but also leaving them room and time for their own activities, despite the potential costs and parental discomfort.

Sometimes I don't like what the kids come up with, but when I see that they're on a nice roll – when there are good vibrations between the kids, when their faces are aglow, I don't intrude. I don't disturb them because these moments are worth their weight in gold. It does come at a cost; stronger emotions, a greater mess. However, I keep reminding myself that these moments are of greater value. (Number 1, psychologist, photographer, foundation president, 36 years old)

When I see they've acquired an interest in some specific matter, I try to come up with experiments or artistic work which would help them deepen their understanding. (Number 27, interior and garden designer, Export-Import Expert, English translator, 38 years old)

[When they look at me,] the kids can see that having a passion is worth it because a passion is [a form of] energy – a source of life. I always point out to the kids that I'm not perfect. When the kids experience failure, I point out that succeeding at something may take a lot of time. I explain that not everything we do has to be perfect at our first attempt. We have our whole lives to perfect certain things if we choose to. It's important not to give up. "I can't draw, so I won't." No! This will not fly! (Number 19, teacher, 51 years old)

The third realm of creative activity among the mothers which contributes to a climate right for developing their child's creativity is supporting their nonconformist attitudes, unusual thinking styles, self-steering, pursuing needs and, hence, leaving the children space to make their own decisions and choices.

I encourage going crazy and abandoning [old] patterns even when we're doing homework together. (Number 9, various professions, 40 years old)

I don't want my kids to go through life in some standard and clichéd way. Most of all, I want them to be happy and confident once they're done with school. (Number 22, visual artist, exhibitor, 32 years old)

I care about my child's development, so I influence his developing personality, I give him choices, I teach him to self-steer. Self-steering is more important to me than insistence in encouraging a child to be well-behaved. (Number 3, teacher, 28 years old)

In my motherhood, this means that I create an environment for the children to be creative, not to push kids into strict rules or limits set by people (...) Expressing yourself, being yourself, not copying the ideas of the group. I remember one event when I was playing a board game with two of my own and two other kids and their mum. We read the rules, and after one round my child came up with a different rule, one that actually seemed more interesting to me. Unfortunately, the other family couldn't understand why and how you could change rules and refused to play with us. (Number 20, business woman, economist, 47 years old)

The last type of initiative taken by the mothers in their attempts to establish a climate which would be conducive to their children's creativity is encouraging them to make use of their imagination, getting disconnected from reality, looking for alternative solutions. In this case, mothers, first and foremost, fantasize along with the children, inspire them to take such action by providing options and asking questions.

I support my child's creativity by fantasizing together, coming up with stories, changing story plots. (Number 8, office worker, 36 years old)

When my daughter was younger, we loved to draw "freaks" – she would say what different body parts should be like (e.g., the head of a cock, the neck of a giraffe, the body of an armadillo, the tail of a fish, etc.), and I would draw them. She would only be allowed to have a look once the drawing was done. Then, we would change places: I would describe it, and Teresa would draw. We made use of a book of animals so that the freaks could be as freakish as possible. Very strange hybrids would come out of it, often, surprisingly beautiful – I've held on to them to this day.

We also liked to tell each other stories – I'd say one sentence, my daughter the next, and on it went. This way, the stories were rich in incredible plot twists; you also had to remember all the details, so that the story "held water." (Number 6, illustrator, 53 years old)

I ask dumb questions, I give strange answers, I encourage seeking out other solutions, I talk about alternative endings to books and movies, I encourage reflecting on ordinary things, I allow for boredom, so that they'd discover the need to act, I talk about imaginary and crazy situations we could experience together. (Number 9, various professions, 40 years old)

Women declare that motherhood has developed their creative abilities, mostly by means of the role they play: flexibility in activities, unpredictability of events and expectations, collecting new experiences while being with the child, developing resilience to stress, setting priorities, but also through developing the ability to intentionally regress in the service of the ego (Kris, 1952).

Motherhood is definitely stimulating. My other son has recently told me that I'm the coolest person he knows :). We mess around constantly – having children gives you a license to be spontaneous, unconventional and to follow the creative child within. It's refreshing, it reminds me of that child-like element within me, it frees me from fears of judgment or lameness :). (Number 9, various professions, 40 years old)

Being a mother let me rediscover my childhood passions. That is: hand-crafting, including machine sewing. I sew toys for the kids. (Number 23, business woman, farmer, 36 years old)

Being a mother enriches creativity, allowing me to meet people I wouldn't normally get to meet, allowing me to see the world through the eyes of a child, helping them develop their sensitivity, providing inspiration, topics, thoughts. My passions enrich me as a mother – the children like it when I come up with stories with them; when I draw for, and with, them, when I come up with planners, camps and parties for them. (Number 5, psychologist, journalist, academic teacher, 40 years old)

They also underscore the role of motherhood in defining / strengthening their system of values:

Motherhood is so engaging – especially if the child requires more attention and work – that it is completely absorbing. But it also changes how you think, sometimes it helps you get some distance between yourself and the values and life goals you've had so far. Sometimes, it can also remove all that distance. But in some 10 years or so I'll have more time for myself. (Number 7, spokesperson, 36 years old)

Motherhood is seen as a source of energy and perseverance. As one of the subjects remarked:

My family (...) doesn't get in the way. my family gives me the strength not to give up in trying times. (Number 20, business woman, economist, 47 years old)

DISCUSSION

The article focuses on how women who are mothers realize their creative needs and the significance they ascribe to creativity in their role as mothers. The analysis of statements made by women who are engaged in stimulating their children's creative abilities suggests that the key area for their realization of creative needs is their activity in the role. This includes, first and foremost, action taken to balance family life, work and personal development. Fulfilling their creative potential in professional work is mostly about an unusual, original approach to the tasks at hand or executing creative tasks inherent to the given position. As a result of embarking on motherhood, some of the participants – not always willingly – limited or abandoned their professional activities. The main realm for realizing their creative potential is their personal life. To a lesser degree, it is pursuing their own interests and passions; however, creative activity is mostly related to family life. Women do everyday tasks in a creative way, seek out innovative solutions they could apply to cooking, house and garden keeping, organizing family life, especially when it comes to free time. The key area for realizing a mother's creative potential is in relationships with her child/children. Women suggest that their creative expression mostly concerns two activities: communicating with the child – where they pay particular attention to being sensitive to the child's needs and flexible in reactions to these needs – and suggesting activities which would stimulate the child/children's creativity. The participants of the study attached particular weight to creating a climate which would be conducive to the child/children's creative development. They primarily ensured that a variety of experience and openness to novelty was provided (Csikszentmihályi, 1999; Foster, 2004; Gute, Gute, Nakamura, & Csikszentmihályi, 2008), whilst stimulating their child's persistence and encouraging effort (Amabile, 1996; Bloom & Sosniak, 1981) as well as developing non-conformist attitudes and independence in forming judgments (Getzels & Jackson, 1961; Miller & Gerard, 1979; Miller, Lambert, & Neumeister, 2012) and making choices. Finally, they did so by stimulating fantasizing and by appreciating the use of imagination (Dacey, 1989; Wallach & Kogan, 1965; Taylor, 1999). Creativity at this stage of life is mostly a lifestyle, a means of framing and solving problems.

Based on our analyses, it may be stipulated that the relationship between motherhood and creativity is reciprocal in nature: on the one hand, creativity is crucial for fulfilling one's role, and helps to deal with various responsibilities; on the other hand, taking on a given role boosts creativity (Dillon, 2002; Lorberbaum et al., 1999; Paris & Helson,

2002) due to the necessity of seeking out new solutions, developing flexibility and openness, but also through collecting new experiences. Interestingly, despite numerous remarks about the need to limit one's own creative activity – and sometimes even one's professional job – the study did not reveal indicators of frustration, discouragement or a sense of guilt, which has been noted in reports covering the topic of links between creativity and motherhood (Ciciola-Izzo, 2014; LeBeau, 2017). This may however, be explained by the makeup of the sample, since inclusion criteria to the study stipulated that mothers should ascribe significance to creativity, as well as recognising the need to focus on spending quality time with the child. Perhaps limiting the research to the first criterion would have resulted in a greater variety of reports. The abundance of positive threads in the narrations may also result from the form and contents of the questions asked. Specifically, the positive overtone of a statement may also be linked to the will to maintain a positive image, the participants' unwillingness to disclose experiences not in line with the prevalent trend of *intensive mothering* (Hays, 1998), *new momism* (Douglas & Michaels, 2004), in which a woman is not just fully immersed in the child's development, but the task itself is supposed to be a source of satisfaction and happiness.

Future Research and Limitations

The results of the conducted analyses are not free of limitations. First, the research focused on a select group of women. All of them valued creativity and were focused on the child's development. It would be of value to see how women scoring differently on measures of their approach to creativity and creative personal identity might fulfil their creative needs as mothers and how they perceive the importance of creativity in this role. Furthermore, future research in this area should include information on how much support is provided by their milieu, as well as the extent to which the fathers engage in childcare and what support they provide to the mothers. It is also worth considering a more homogeneous sample - mothers who have recently experienced motherhood, so they are going through a new life situation in which they are learning how to raise their children.

Another limitation is that some of the interviews were conducted via email. Due to the lack of direct contact, investigating certain matters in greater detail and obtaining additional information was impossible. Perhaps partially structured interviews in which we would follow the participants' narratives, rather than execute a certain script for the conversation, would allow us to sieve out more threads and build a thicker net of interconnected topics.

In the light of the above-mentioned limitations, it is appropriate to continue research on such links to creativity, including quantifying the patterns noted in the text: structures of climates at home which are conducive to a child's creativity, the associations to the mother's creative role identity, sense of efficacy and satisfaction with the role.

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