

Women doing it forever: The everyday creativity of women craftmakers

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KEY WORDS

Craft, creativity, well-being, women

ABSTRACT

In this article we discuss our narrative research project, *The everyday creativity of women craftmakers*. The research explores what craftmaking means to contemporary Australian women, including perceived links with their well-being. We filmed narrative interviews with 15 amateur women craftmakers. Each interview began with a guided tour of the woman's craftwork. The interviews explored in detail the complex and varied roles and meanings that craft has in these women's lives. We identified six key themes in the interviews: craft as a form of personal creative expression, craft making and well-being, intergenerational and familial connections through craft, the significance of making objects to give as gifts, social and community connections, the incorporation of craft skills into a sense of self and identity, and the pleasure, joy and love of making as an intrinsic aspect of craftmaking.

Note: Permission has been sought and given by the photographers whose images appear in this article.

INTRODUCTION

Women's crafts and craftmaking can be traced back through history for centuries, with various traditions and styles emerging from different parts of the world. Indigenous Australian women, for example, made 'baskets for collecting food, nets for fishing and skin cloaks for warmth' (Powerhouse Museum 2010). The list of traditional crafts, originating from different cultures would, if we were to attempt it, take up several volumes, these include mirrored embroideries from Rajasthan, intricate Turkish rugs, Japanese silk and dyed fabrics. In Australia, Jennifer Isaacs (1987) has documented the history of non-indigenous women's craft in Australia from the 1800s through to the 1980s. The works she collects in this volume include the decorative and the functional, the traditional and the more experimental, intricate lace and embroidery

in various styles and traditions, clothes for children and adults – sewn, knitted and crocheted, quilts and patchworks, jewellery, baskets, and decorated cakes. The works she brings tell the story(s) of women's multiple roles in their homes. They provide an insight into economic and class differences. The works range from basic garments made from the only materials at hand – recycled flour sacks and sugar bags – to those made by women with access to the finest fabrics and threads and plenty of time to dedicate to intricate and detailed work.

Contemporary women around the world, living complex and demanding lives, continue traditional craft practices and develop new ones. In this article we discuss a narrative research project undertaken in 2008/9 in Melbourne, Australia with amateur