

10 HARMFUL

# *Creativity Myths*

EXPOSING THE LIES WE WERE  
TOLD ABOUT CREATIVITY... AND  
MOVING FORWARD INTO TRUTH

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*"To practice any art,  
no matter how well  
or badly, is a way  
to make your  
soul grow."*

– Kurt Vonnegut

MYTH # 1:

# *Imagination is for little kids.*

"Let's use our imaginations!"

I feel kind of silly saying that to you, a (presumably) fellow adult.

Why is that?

Imagination is one of the most vital and valuable aspects of what makes us human. It sparks innovation and discovery, launches inspirational and life-changing stories, and propels us forward into a new and better future.

So... why do we feel *silly* talking about it?

We encourage children to use their imaginations... but only to a certain point. Do you remember the point in your life when you were no longer encouraged to be imaginative, playful, or creative?

Do you remember a point in your life when you were told to stop daydreaming?

Because I do.

It's honestly fascinating — as we get older, we're told to grow up, to be more realistic, to stop playing around, to conform to a status quo that values mindless production and unquestioning obedience.

This is, of course, while we (and I'm talking about society here) outwardly claim to value innovation.

But you can't have innovation without imagination.

One of the most pervasive of these myths is that creativity and imagination are "just for children."

They're not.

Our progress as a society depends on that.

*"We have to  
recognize  
imagination  
as a form of  
knowledge."*

— Jerome Stern



## MYTH # 2:

# *You need a degree.*

I talk to a lot of writers, podcasters, and other creators who lament to me that they do not, for one reason or another, have an advanced degree in their creative field – or any degree at all.

"I majored in business," a man sheepishly admitted to me during a consulting call, "so I'm not really qualified to talk about writing."

But he *was* qualified – he was an extremely well-read and strong writer, and I told him so. And honestly, in any creative endeavor, there *is* no "qualified". We don't need to pass a test or get certified or qualify for *anything* to create something we love.

A degree is not a permission slip to create, even though society often treats it like one.

I was privileged enough to attend college and major in English, and in my creative writing classes, we didn't learn the secret formula to creative writing (because it doesn't exist).

We read a lot of literary theory (boring and confusing) and learned why John Cheever is superior to Stephen King (it's completely subjective) and received guidance on how to infuse our writing with deep layers of metaphor (which ultimately just made my writing more pretentious).

I actually had to UN-learn a lot of what I learned in my college writing classes later on in life.

Now, we did read and critique each other's writing in small groups, which was helpful – but it's something you can do in



person or over Zoom with a group of fellow writers.

Whether or not higher education is "worth it" for a creator isn't up for debate here – I simply want to encourage you not to let this hold you back. If you want to create a story or a work of art or some combination of the two, you should do it.

You have everything you need to get started *right now*.

And later on, if you need additional layers of metaphor in there, your editor will (hopefully gently) tell you.

*"Vulnerability  
is the birthplace  
of innovation,  
creativity,  
and change."*

— Brené Brown



MYTH #3:

*You're either  
"naturally creative"  
or you're not.*

One of the most insidious myths surrounding creativity is the notion that, "You're either born creative, or you're not."

I've heard this many times from many different sources, including teachers, college professors, coworkers, and fellow writers. In fact, I've heard it so much that it has begun to feel like it *should* be true, like it's some kind of helpful piece of folk wisdom.

But it's not. It's a dangerous lie.

"I'm not creative," people tell me, almost apologetically, whenever I speak on the topic. They don't feel like they were "born" creative (*whatever that even means*) — because at some point, someone told this to them, and they believed it.

"Oh, I'm not creative," a coworker insisted to me, years ago, "but I'm good at math and numbers."

This echoes another popular version of the same myth: that you're either a "right-brained" person or a "left-brained" person. That you, for some reason, have to choose only one camp to belong to. As if each human being could be only one thing, when we all know that we are *so much more*.

Fun fact: you use both sides of your brain. Because you are a *whole person with a whole brain*. And even though it might feel like it sometimes, you're not carrying around a bunch of cranial dead weight. Your brain is functional and whole and wonderful.



Your brain is a *creative instrument*. It creates things all the time — ideas, dreams, memories, fantasies, hopes, wishes, and solutions.

It might not make the things you *want* it to make, in the way that you want it to make them. You know, the culturally approved "correct" way.

You may get frustrated because when you draw something, it doesn't look "correct," or like something you'd see in a museum.

You may get frustrated because when you write something, it doesn't sound "correct", or like anything a previously published author has written before.

We'll talk about those culturally approved "correct" ways to create another time. But for now, I simply want you to know that you can create. You have permission to create. You were born with that permission, and it is your right as a human being

to use your creativity to bring joy and fulfillment into your life.

We are *all* creative. Because that is the very essence of what it means to be human.

*"It makes you wonder. All the brilliant things we might have done with our lives if only we suspected we knew how."*

— Ann Patchett



## MYTH #4:

# *You need to move to LA or NYC.*

I live in what's called a "flyover state". That means it's one of the big states in the middle of the USA that people literally fly over when they're traveling from coast to coast — the implication of course being that you *fly over* these states because there's *nothing there*. They're not important enough to stop in, and that true life — real life — only exists on the coasts.

We humans love to label things, because a.) it's part of our nature, and b.) it helps us rule things out. We're inundated with a constant flood of data, and it's tempting to rule things out and give us less to deal with — one rule being that "the only

important people live on the coasts". That nothing matters outside of New York City or LA. That you need to live in New York City or LA to create. To matter.

When I tell people I'm a writer, I often get a follow-up question along the lines of, "Why don't you live in New York?" or, "Are you planning on moving to New York?"

And I tell them, "You don't need to live in New York to be a writer. You can write from anywhere."

And with the internet, you can network, build relationships, and market your work from anywhere. Wherever you live, you can be a successful creator.

We have a lot of preconceived notions and cultural rules about who can be creative, and when, and where. But immersing yourself in truly living a creative life means incorporating

creativity into all of yourself, into your whats, whens, wheres, whys, and hows.

You don't need anyone to approve of where you live in order for you to be creative. You don't need anyone else to approve of you, period. You just need to create, and you can do that anywhere.



*"Do what you can,  
with what you have,  
where you are."*

– Theodore Roosevelt

MYTH #5:

*You need to be  
100% original.*

We all love being "that person" – the person who came up with the idea, invented the machine, or solved the problem. But why?

The simple answer is that whoever does something first gets the credit (unless they're a person of color, or a woman, but that's another discussion for another day). And oh, how we love to get credit, in all of its forms! Credit validates us. Credit often secures us fame and fortune. It tells us and everyone around us, "This person is worth something! This person has contributed to society. This person matters."

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And I think that there is nothing wrong with wanting to matter.

However, having an original idea is *not* the only way to matter.

It's not the only way to live a life full of purpose and meaning as a creator.

Plus — did you know? You *already matter*. You are *already important*, and your life is *already priceless*. Even if you never have an original idea, even if you never write your book or launch your podcast (and I still hope that you do), I want you to know that you are an amazing person regardless.

And yet... I think a lot of us feel the pressure not only to be CREATIVE, but to be COMPLETELY ORIGINAL with our ideas.

There are folks who would argue that "there are no new ideas", "it's all been done before", or "there's nothing new under the sun" (which you may recall from Shakespeare and/or the Bible).



People may tell you that only three stories have ever existed (tragedy, comedy, and history), or they may point to Hollywood's recent slew of remakes to prove their point.

And to a point, we're all relying on what we've seen and learned throughout our lives – our brains begin curating information from the very day we're born, and we might not understand where our ideas come from for years, if ever. (For example, I only realized after I'd finished creating Season 1 of *Girl In Space* that it had been heavily influenced by *The Secret Garden*.)

However, I think there *can* be new ideas – or at least unique takes on old ideas, or new combinations of existing ideas. The human brain is amazing and its potential is limitless. I say dream big.

A novel (or any creative project) is more than an idea. It's storytelling, plot, character, art, execution, skill, and talent all

rolled into one. So even if there is someone else out there with the same idea as you... that idea is just one small piece of the whole puzzle. Don't get too hung up on the significance or role of the idea.

And remember: while other folks may have the same idea as you, no one else is *you*. No one else is going to execute that idea in exactly the same way you will, with the same voice, characters, plot twists, etc.

No one can write your novel, launch your podcast, or finish your collection of poetry — except *you*.

*“What has been will  
be again, what has  
been done will be  
done again;  
there is nothing  
new under the sun.”*

– The Bible, Ecclesiastes 1:9, NIV Translation

MYTH #6:

# *You can "run out" of creativity*

I don't know about you, but sometimes I get a little... *anxious* about my creativity.

When I sit down to write, I like to make sure the environment is as idyllic as it can possibly be — a full cup of coffee or tea, freshly filled water carafe, a little dish of M&Ms, socks for my feet and a blanket for my lap if I'm cold, plenty of pencils & paper within reach, office door *shut* — so that not one drop of creativity will be wasted.

But this is false thinking, and it is both harmful and dangerous.



Back when I worked an office job full-time, I was always very careful with how I “spent” my creativity. I would set aside time in the evenings, from about 8-10 p.m., to work on my creative writing, and during work hours I would keep that top-of-mind — “Gotta save my creativity for writing tonight!”

I don’t know if this is something that you’ve ever struggled with, or if it’s a uniquely Sarah-esque neurosis. But I have some really, really good news for you today:

It’s impossible to run out of creativity.

Maya Angelou says it better than I ever could: “You can’t use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.”

Creativity isn’t a scarce dry good, like the last scoop of flour in the flour jar. Creativity is the sourdough starter that doubles in size as you tend it. Creativity is a wellspring. It begets itself.

Now... what we *can* run out of is energy. And I've had firsthand experience with this. You probably have, too. Energy is our tether to the physical. Energy limits what our bodies can do and what our minds can produce.

And if we don't take good care of ourselves – if we don't rest and recharge and eat healthy and hydrate – then we won't have the energy we need to create.

But the creativity will never run out, and it will never go away. Creativity is a paradox like love – the *more* you use, and the *more* you give, the *more* you have.

*"You can't use up  
creativity. The more  
you use, the more  
you have."*

– Maya Angelou

MYTH #7:

# *Society doesn't want you.*

Have you ever thought, perhaps a little bitterly or resentfully, “Society doesn’t want what I create?”

I first had this thought over a decade ago, when I was working in service and clerical jobs that had nothing to do with what I went to college for (which was creative writing and poetry). These jobs did not want to pay me to be creative, innovative, or solution-focused — instead, they just wanted... obedience.

It’s frustrating, and can even feel hurtful when you have something you’re proud of and no one seems to want it. When



you have gifts, and, seemingly, no use for them. This is a form of rejection, and it's one I experienced for years.

You may also experience this by receiving a rejection letter from a publisher or agent, disinterested glances during your thousandth screenplay pitch, or whenever your next great idea is unapologetically shot down.

And when that happens, it's easy to become a little bitter. A little jaded. It's tempting to feel a flare of anger and think, "They don't want my creative work? *Fine!* I'll be quiet and keep my head down and *stop creating!*"

Here's the thing, though – while society will tell you over and over again that it doesn't *want* your creativity, it actually *needs* your creativity to evolve and move forward. It's just too entrenched in its own industrial, factory-like infrastructure to see it. And it's too focused on profits to be willing to pay

employees to take risks and innovate.

Agents, publishers, and film production companies alike will claim that they don't want books/scripts that "won't sell". This is why we get eternally cycling reboots of old properties and storylines "guaranteed" to sell.

But what makes a real difference in society, and to individuals? The creative works that innovate. That reinvent. That push our buttons and coax us out of our comfort zones. That give us something we've never seen before.

Society might not *want* your creativity. But it sure *needs* it.

So don't create for society. Create for *you*. Create your art for the people you love and who will fall in love with your work.

Innovate. Disrupt. Solve problems. Your creativity will set you apart and make you more valuable than society ever imagined.

*"I have never listened to anyone who criticized my taste in space travel, sideshows, or gorillas. When this occurs, I pack up my dinosaurs and leave the room."*

— Ray Bradbury

## MYTH #8:

# *Success comes from hustle.*

In 2017 when I started *Girl In Space*, I was a big believer in HUSTLE. I was working a full-time job at a marketing agency, producing the *Write Now* podcast, ghostwriting nonfiction books, and doing various community volunteer gigs.

Perhaps you can relate — I wanted to do ALL THE THINGS.

Stress fueled me, and I ran on its panicked energy (and, beyond that, on Empty). The days needed more than just 24 hours.

Sleep was for the weak. Hustle was the only way to get anywhere.



I was, of course, telling myself a whole big slew of lies.

We are all more busy and overwhelmed than ever. All of us.

Especially now, when our normal routine is in constant disruption. And (perhaps no surprise here) it's not good for us!

As the American Journal of Public Health states, "Numerous chronic diseases, including heart disease, depression, and Alzheimer's, are associated with high stress levels."

Adding in a massive new creative project — that novel, that podcast, that memoir — sounds like the last thing we should be thinking about.

However, it turns out that creative activities (such as writing, drawing, sculpting, crafting, sewing, woodworking, and more) are actually *good* for us.

"Creating helps make people happier, less anxious, more

resilient, and better equipped to problem-solve in the face of hardship,” says Amanda Enayati of CNN. Creative activities also help delay cognitive decline in old age.

So we’re faced with a paradox. The creative projects we’re longing to do are good for us, mentally, physically, and even spiritually – but how do we fit them into our already crammed schedules? How do we create without it becoming yet another hustle?

I think that the answer to this question will be unique to each individual person (because of course there are no easy answers). For me, it’s realizing that a.) creating is an act of self-care, and b.) I have a choice in how I use my (precious little) free time.

Each time I find myself with some downtime, I have to assess: what do I have the energy to do right now? Would it be fun to

indulge my imagination and scribble some ideas for my latest book/podcast? Or am I completely drained?

Because sometimes we *need* a Netflix marathon, or to get lost in a really good mystery novel and a cup of tea. Just like it's good to shut down our phones and computers every once in a while, our brains need downtime, too. Rest is not for the weak — it's for the weary. And we're ALL weary lately.

Sometimes I have to remind myself that creativity is good for me. Sometimes I have to remind myself, too, that creativity is a paradox — it's hard work, yes, but it's also fun and freeing and invigorating.

So maybe it's less about squeezing “another project” into our already busy schedules, and more about prioritizing what we love — what is meaningful and important and life-giving for us — into our free time.

*"Trying to do it all and expecting that it all can be done exactly right is a recipe for disappointment. Perfection is the enemy."*

— Sheryl Sandberg



MYTH #9:

# *You must create a masterpiece.*

“Done is better than perfect.”

It was a message I absolutely did NOT want to hear when I heard it. If my work was going to succeed — if my work was going to represent me — it had to be *perfect*.

I didn't want to publish something that was merely *done* — it wouldn't be good enough. It wouldn't be up to my standards. Plus, everyone else out there seemed to be easily, breezily publishing perfect things. Look at all the classics, the bestsellers, the award-winners — why settle for simply done

when you could create something great? A masterpiece?

Something... perfect?

I refused to settle for anything less.

But when I ran out of hours for a client project I was working on, my boss very gently told me, “Done is better than perfect.” In doing so, he gave me permission to release my perfectionist’s hold on the work, send it to the client, and move on to something else.

I (perhaps like you) have been a perfectionist my entire life.

Hitting “publish” or “send” or “submit” on something that I know isn’t perfect is one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to teach myself to do. My boss’ advice helped me begin to do this.

Now, it's okay to have high standards for yourself and for your work. However, much of the time, these standards come from

comparison to finished works of art that we see on shelves or in museums or up for an award. Worse, we hold our first attempts — our outlines, our rough drafts — to these standards, which is incredibly unfair (and even cruel) to ourselves.

Your first draft of anything is not going to be good — and that's okay. Encouraged, even. No one's first attempt is a work of sparkling brilliance. It might have some good stuff in it, but... even the masters and the pros have made things the public never gets to see.

And that's a problem. We judge our initial attempts on finished, published works of critical acclaim — works that have seen peer reviews, editors, tons of revisions, rude family comments, etc.

We don't see that famous author's first 190 rough drafts of her eventual classic. We don't see the 450 mangled chunks of stone that that one famous sculptor ruined before he got really good.

This week, I want you to ask yourself:

- What does *perfect* mean to you?
- What does *done* mean for you?
- What are you willing to *sacrifice*?
- What makes you feel *happy and fulfilled* as a creator?

These are questions only *you* can answer, because they hearken back to *why* you create in the first place. If you ever want to see your name on the cover of a book, you have to finish the book first. But if you're writing simply to experience the joy (and frustration) of creating, then "done" might not be a priority, or even a goal.

In this chapter, I was initially going to talk about how "perfect" doesn't exist, and how it's a shining, unattainable trap that keeps us from sharing our work. But... I'm not here to judge. You are creating for your own reasons, and I respect that.

*"Perfectionism is self-abuse of the highest order."*

– Anne Wilson Schaef



MYTH #10:

## *Failure is bad.*

Would you begin (or continue working on) a project you knew was going to fail? Why — or why not?

Failure is such an interesting concept, isn't it? Such a weighty and final-feeling word that, up until very recently in our culture, was all but taboo.

Slowly, I think we're becoming a little more comfortable with failure, and a little less wary of experiencing it. Which, honestly, is a good thing. Taking risks and experiencing failure (essentially, trial-and-error) is how we learn hard but crucial lessons. And while the consequences can sometimes be painful,

humiliating, or just downright irritating, *failure is a necessary part of the creative process.*

We need to get comfortable being uncomfortable. We need room to fail because we need room to grow. *We need to fail* sometimes. And we need to learn how to recover gracefully from those failures, learn from them, deal with the consequences, and move forward.

Failure isn't a death sentence. If you are working with someone (a boss, a project manager, a creative partner) who does not accept failure, then you are working with someone who is close-minded and, despite what they might claim, does not want you to learn and grow.

Failure is a chance taken, and if someone is not allowing you to take that chance, then they are simply projecting their own fears onto you. And that fear is inhibiting *your* growth.

Artists, creators, and other makers are getting better at being transparent with their processes, and vulnerable about the reality of creating. We all fail because we're all human. We need to remove the stigma from failure and realize that it is an essential part of our growth.

What's important — what defines you — isn't the failure itself. It's how you react to the consequences. It's whether or not you stand up, brush yourself off, and try again.

So... I invite you to come fail with me. We're only going to keep getting better as we move forward, and that is a good and beautiful thing.

*"Success is not final,  
failure is not fatal:  
it is the courage to  
continue that  
counts."*

– Winston Churchill

# *Moving past myths.*

Inspired to take action? I dare you to do one (*or all*) of these:

- Open up a blank document and start typing COMPLETE AND UTTER TRASH.
- Grab a pencil and paper and sketch something really awful.
- Use your phone to take a blurry, off-center picture.
- Crank up the music and dance like a fool.
- Look. Listen. Take it all in. Everything. It's inspiration.
- Be willing to fail horribly — freely, gleefully, and often.
- Create with reckless abandon. You don't have to impress anyone — this is purely for you, for the joy of doing it.



*"Creativity requires  
the courage to  
let go of certainties."*

— Erich Fromm

*What is calling  
your heart?*

# *Thank you.*

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Thank you so much for downloading and reading this little ebook. If you like my work, check out my podcasts, *Write Now with Sarah Werner* and *Girl In Space*. Both are free to enjoy. :) I also have a number of free resources for creators out on my website, [sarahwerner.com](http://sarahwerner.com). I made all these things because I needed them to exist, and... they didn't. I hope they help you in your own creative journey.

Words & warmth,

*Sarah*

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# 10 HARMFUL *Creativity Myths*

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We've all been lied to. Perhaps not maliciously, or even intentionally, but... still, the lies persist. And before we can move past them, and begin to undo the harm they've caused us as creators, we need to know what they *are*.

Join Sarah as she exposes the harmful lies we were told about creativity — and helps to guide us forward into truth.

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