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Article abstract

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Keywords: *Craft, Women, Self-Directed Learning, Leisure, Covid-19*

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Crafting isn't something one casually does, it requires time, effort, dedication, and resilience. So, what motivates young women to creatively engage in craft practices? This is a question I ask myself frequently as a young woman who crafts, but it is also the main question of this inquiry. The difference between art versus craft is heavily debated across many fields; my view is that rigid definitions of craft are often exclusionary of homemakers, hobbyists' and more. The Center for Craft website (n.d.) offers an inclusive definition of craft stating that;

> Craft is a particular approach to making with a strong connection to materials, skill, and process. Artists, makers, scholars, and curators continue to grow the field, embracing new definitions, technologies, and ideas while honoring craft's history and relationship to the handmade. Craft, in all its forms, demonstrates creativity, ingenuity, and practical intelligence. It contributes to the economic and social wellbeing of communities, connects us to our cultural histories, and is integral to building a sustainable future.

My definition of craft is quite expansive, but for the purpose of this inquiry I set out to find twenty-something-year-old women who sew, crochet, or knit, I became interested in the 'why' of it all.

Why do they make? Why do they dedicate time to making things? And why is making worthwhile for them? I ask these questions mainly given my own position as a young woman who crafts, but also because of how craft has gained popularity amongst this population in recent years. Craft practices are widely taken up amongst many different populations, however I find it interesting that younger generations of women continue to engage in craft despite it no longer being something they are expected to learn. These questions also felt important to me given the challenging circumstances of the past couple of years, brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, which led many to either learn or reconnect with their craft practices. A secondary question of interest is the 'how', how did these young women gain the knowledge to perform creative/ craft practices? Crafting is also not something one casually learns - or so it used not to be. Craft knowledge is typically something that is passed down whether formally (through something like a home economics or art curriculums) or informally (like by a relative). Learning to sew or knit or crochet requires patience and understanding, makers are faced with many challenges along the way, many of which take place before even beginning when they ask themselves, do I have the right tools? Do I have the right materials? Am I using the right combination of the two? And so on.

I have always felt that finishing a craft project is often short of a miracle; I am relieved to be finished and somehow surprised I didn't give up from frustration halfway through. Hence through my study, I was keenly interested to learn what keeps young women motivated to persist in making.

Methodology

I elected to work within a grounded theory framework for this inquiry, using Kathy Charmaz's text *Constructing a Grounded Theory* (2006) as a guide through this methodology. I believe the structure of this methodology as a kind of bottom-up process emphasizing flexibility in allowing the lives and lived experience of participants to be interpreted authentically without forcing them to fit into a predetermined theory. And for this reason, in this paper I delay the discussion of my literature reviews since, drawing from Charmaz (2006), it is best to bring the literature after examining the emerging themes "to avoid importing preconceived ideas imposing them onto your work" (p.165).

John W. Creswell (2013) puts forth the idea that in grounded theory answers are found in the data (p.83), therefore this methodology allowed me to spend time searching for patterns and common themes in the responses of participants attempting to pinpoint the 'why' which I was after. This 'why' involved exploring the individual yet often shared reasons that continue to motivate women to craft. Grounded theory challenged my instincts by encouraging me to come into the process free of my own assumptions, ultimately allowing me to do more than just summarize my findings but to make sense of the data as it emerged, teasing out connections and constructing meaning from what my participants offered me rather than what I imposed onto them.

Method

In an attempt to find answers to my questions, I chose to conduct interviews with two women in their early twenties: Adrian (22) and Julia (23), who do not identify themselves as 'artists'. Interviews took place over the online video conference platform Zoom in order to accommodate participants in different locations, as well as to respect Covid precautions. Remote interviews also allowed for the interview transcripts to be automatically generated, and this is what acted as the data for my inquiry. Participants were asked to provide visual examples of their work or past craft projects as well as descriptive captions to support their images (See Figures 1 and 2 for examples of Julia's work, and Figures 3 and 4 for examples of Adrian's). During the interview, participants were asked five questions:

1. What is your chosen mode of creative production?
2. At what opportunities do you find yourself wanting to engage creatively/wanting to pick up your chosen practice?
3. How did you come to learn your chosen mode of production?
4. What initially prompted you to want to engage creatively/learn your specific practice?
5. Do you find that your engagement with this practice has influenced your sense of self, the world, or others in any way?

The structure of these questions was generated in consideration of Charmaz's (2006) suggestion to begin interviews with open-ended questions slowly transitioning into intermediate questions once participants are comfortable and finally ending questions to prompt more holistic reflections. Creswell (2013) suggested the development of an interview protocol which is why I included sub questions for each of the 5 interview questions in case participants required further clarification, rephrasing or more ideas to help prompt their responses. For example, following question four I gave myself space to ask; Is there a specific instance that you credit your interest? Were you encouraged by anyone? These sub-questions allowed me to prompt participants further and see if reframing ideas would help them to better open up while still following my protocol.

Coding

Charmaz (2006) proposes that researchers go through three rounds of coding their data: initial, focused, and theoretical coding. For initial coding, she suggests focusing on assigning words that reflect actions rather than topics (Charmaz, 2006). This is essentially looking between the lines, considering what participants said without saying it, or how the way in which they spoke and the language they chose to use is salient. Rather than beginning with line-by-line coding, I elected to code segment by segment which meant I looked at every phrase, or point made by participants to pinpoint what actions, processes, or thoughts they had in relation to what they were saying. From here emerged a handful of themes recognizable across my initial codes (taking the form of highlighted phrases and keywords). These recurring themes became my focused codes.

For both participants, I identified the following focused codes: leisure, pride, empowerment, family connections, control, hierarchy of making, external pressure, and product-oriented. For Adrian, I also identified process and talent versus skill. And for Julia, accessibility, ethical implications, and validation.
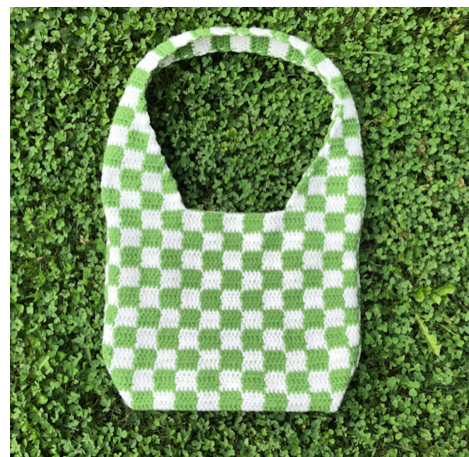

Figure 1. An example of Julia's crochet work, this is one of her favourite pieces that she has made.

Figure 2. An example of Julia's crochet work; winter headbands that she made because she wanted to buy, but she realized she could make them herself instead.

Figure 3. An example of Adrian's sewing; she says that making her own clothing is a fun and challenging way to express herself while also developing a practical skillset.

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Figure 4. An example of Adrian's sewing where she uses second hand fabric to try and keep the environmental impact as low as possible.

Using the categories revealed through the focused round of coding, I went through the interview transcripts once again highlighting where these categories emerged. From this round of coding, I observed that the most prominent category for Adrian was 'leisure.' For example, Adrian noted that "for sewing it's more like when I'm in search of a project and I need something to keep me busy for a couple of days". For Julia, it was 'control' as she noted that "I kind of want to get into sewing, and if I get good at it, the thought of being able to make most of my own clothes is so cool."

As I moved into theoretical coding, I noticed my biggest challenge was naming emerging themes. I had a sense of what they were and I was able to define them broadly by speaking my ideas aloud and making a rough mind map on paper. However, labeling these themes became difficult. I only landed on my themes after working through some of the proposed questions Charmaz suggests for memo writing. She proposes that in early memos researchers may ask themselves "What Process is at issue here? Under which conditions does this process develop? How do(es) the research participant(s) think, feel, and act while involved in this process? When why and how does this process change? What are the consequences of this process?"

(Charmaz, 2006, p.80). After attempting to answer these questions through memo writing, I found myself highlighting compelling ideas and phrases that I was using to describe my participants' thoughts, which led to the naming of my emergent themes: (1) Moving beyond traditional learning trajectories, (2) Art as function, and (3) Implications for sustainability.

Emergent Themes

After eventually choosing the emergent themes 'moving beyond traditional learning trajectories', 'art as function', and a focus on 'sustainability', I organized each one to help further pinpoint motivational and learning processes. This is exemplified in Figure 5, for the purpose of moving forward, I chose to focus more on the first two emergent themes. The emergent theme *Implications for sustainability*, while relevant, was less explicit from the data I had already collected. Within the constraints of this inquiry, it felt best to devote more consideration to the first two themes and not to impose my assumptions onto the third.

Moving beyond traditional learning trajectories

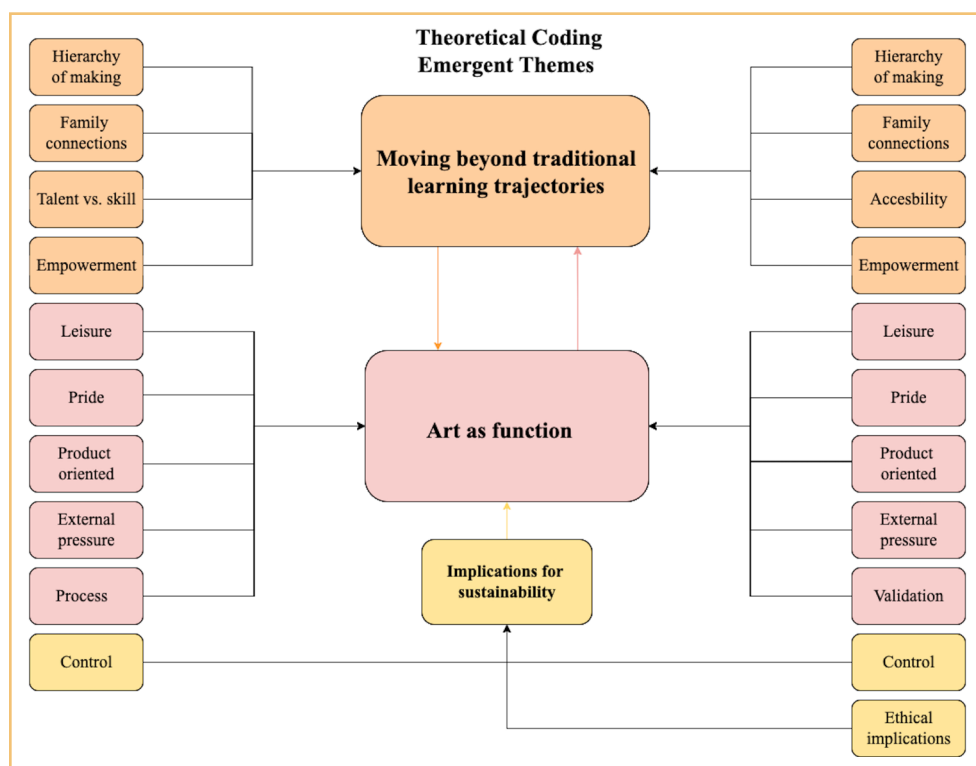Seeking out resources, guidance, and inspiration from the internet was something both participants

Figure 5. Focused coding categories as they feed into emergent themes

referred to as included if not integral to the process of their making. Whether it be by searching for YouTube tutorials, finding inspiration on social media, or following free patterns from Pinterest, the data pointed to self-guided internet learning as being the main facilitator for both women. Adrian spoke of initially learning to sew in a more traditional master-apprentice way with knowledge being passed down by her mother and female relatives. She noted that she only began to truly enjoy sewing once she had autonomy over directing her own process and learning. Adrian said, "I think they [female relatives] saw it as a very valuable skill, so I was really sort of encouraged when I was younger to learn how to sew and I didn't find much joy in it." Julia's relationship to craft began from a place of internet learning, never having been guided by another individual. She completely sought out resources and knowledge on her own, noting "I bought one hook, and a little bit of yarn, and then I just did YouTube videos. And still now, if I ever wanted to do something new, I just use YouTube. [...] I liked that I could just do it at my own pace and pause and watch the same thing over and over." This is where it became clear to me that for both participants having control over their own learning process was a key incentive; being able to move at their own pace, repeat steps as many times as necessary, and engage in the process of making without being under the gaze and perhaps judgment of others is a compelling aspect of this data and inquiry.

Art as function

Significant distinctions between art and craft were made by both participants, emphasizing the confidence they felt in their chosen modes of creative production versus the discouragement, frustration, and even intimidation they felt when performing 'traditional' art forms. Adrian spoke to this noting "What I like about things like journaling, paper-craft, and sewing is that I don't feel as comfortable doing things as drawing and painting where I feel I need to be really skilled [...] When it comes to sewing and paper folding, I feel I don't have to have the same artistic skill - if that makes sense, and I can still create a product that I find satisfaction in and find beautiful." Both interviews revealed that one motivating factor in making was the fact that as a result of crafting these women could create a final product; something that they could make use of on a regular basis. The outcome of their creative engagements would be objects they would reach for every day, integrate into their homes, or adopt into their wardrobes. Julia said, "Making something and having a tangible thing that I made, that I could wear or give to someone, that was kind of the motivation for me, and I just

really liked the end result." Additionally, both participants spoke of how rewarding their final products were and the many personal benefits they offered. Julia said, "Having something I'm good at, that I feel really confident about has just helped with my own feeling of accomplishment and then I find that other people seem to be really interested too."

Exploring Existing Literature

Doing it for yourself

While I had teased out a core category before beginning to compare my data to previous research, I arrived at several possible theoretical frameworks which I felt could encompass my findings. One of these potential frameworks was DIY or 'Do it Yourself.' Paul Atkinson (2006) speaks to the challenge of defining exactly what constitutes as DIY but offers several categories of DIY, with craft fitting into the reactive DIY category "consisting of hobby and handcraft or building activities mediated through the agency of kits, templates or patterns and involving the assembly of predetermined components, where the motivation might range from the occupation of spare time to personal pleasure" (p.3). Atkinson also speaks to DIY as contributing to the creation and maintenance of self-identity which I felt to be compelling, but ultimately this framework did not align with data collected and attitudes towards craft in this context. Another framework considered was Symbolic interactionism which Jill Riley (2008) spoke of in relation to craft. "Symbolic interactionism can be considered in relation to textile-making in that the maker interacts closely with objects in the form of tools, equipment and materials, which are likely to hold symbolic meanings" (p.66). Textile-making is a self-process that Riley expands on craft motivation by stating "an intrinsic need to make textiles is concerned with individuals' inner drive and motivations for making. I use the term 'need' because satisfying it appears to be something that individuals must do at various points in their life to a greater or lesser extent" (p.67). In this case, the craft maker's motivation is that they are quite literally doing it for themselves.

Historical Craft Revivals

Andrea Peach (2013) offered some compelling context to historical craft revivals in the 19th century, in the 1970s, and at the time of her article in 2013. She states that "each period can be characterized as sharing concerns over the loss of creative autonomy and quality of life, as well as a belief that craft might offer a redemptive and restorative role in the face of often bewildering change" (p.2). Additionally, in exploration of social

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and economic factors surrounding the 1970s as well as how they may have contributed to renewed interests in craft Peach says, "the search for creative autonomy and self-expression, as well the desire to live sustainably, had direct links with the resurgence of interest in 'making', and provided ideal circumstances in which craft could flourish" (p.6). I believe these ideas discussed by Peach once again become relevant in consideration of crafting in the Covid-19 pandemic. History perhaps repeats itself, as the pandemic imposed very challenging circumstances which limited individuals' autonomy and placed pressure from both social and economic standpoints.

Leisure

An additional dimension of consideration for this inquiry is leisure. Marybeth Stalp (2015) discusses this through a study conducted about women's leisure, speaking of work and leisure being inherent opposites, work ultimately dominating leisure and contributing to a stigmatization of leisure within workforces. Stalp describes leisure as important for women's rejuvenation and believes it to be a valuable concept worthy of more attention when saying that "seeing what people do when they are not working, but relaxing is an important contribution to the research. Even more important is understanding why and how people enjoy their chosen leisure activities"(p. 265). This is especially relevant when considering leisure today, how it has been taken up through-out the pandemic as well as our attitudes towards leisure activities post-pandemic. Lashua et al. (2021) make this connection when stating that "the pandemic has brought a re-appraisal of many leisure practices that were uncritically accepted, environmentally unsustainable, or systemically oppressive during 'normal times" (p.7). They also make critical points as to how leisure may be something only those of privilege are able to enjoy, and that an absence of leisure exists for those who remain marginalized or oppressed, which can include homeless people, children in less-than-ideal circumstances, and refugees who remained in detention centers throughout the pandemic.

Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

By using grounded theory as a method, I was able to use a process of working backward to first uncover emergent theories, and then ultimately landing on self-directed learning (SDL) as the core category of my inquiry, I felt this best suited the data as well as emergent themes, because it had become clear that the ability to take control over one's own learning and guide one's own process was motivating

in and of itself. Malcolm Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning (SDL) as a "process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18). In an attempt to stay true to this process, I wanted to listen to the data, and I believe exploring what it means to be a self-directed learner, guiding your own learning process within the circumstances of the last couple of years plays an integral role in how young women engage with craft practices. Nasseri and Wilson (2017) have examined craft's ability for personal and social transformation; they describe craft as a solitary practice, which can at times be taught or guided but at other times is self-guided and exploratory, with the boundaries between the self and object becoming blurred. They propose the process of crafting to be a form of dialogue:

> It gathers intentions, meanings, values, and the physical ability of the maker together with the pattern, resistance, texture, strength, and whatever mystery that nature has invested in the material and turns them into a new being with qualities and meanings that did not exist before. The object, however, is not the only outcome of this dialogue. The most significant outcome is the change that has come about in the self through the interplay of the new meanings and understandings with the old ones. (p.202)

I believe this outlook on craft practices helps to support the potential for craft and young women's relationship with craft and its learning processes to become valued for their self-directed nature. Both SDL and craft can be seen as redemptive practices which allow for autonomy to be regained, and this is what perhaps makes them highly motivating for twenty-something women.

What does this mean for Art Educators?

Looking towards self-directed learning (SDL) during and post-pandemic, art educators may be asking themselves what this means for them, and how their role may be evolving. Baldwin and Krishnamurti (2021) seek how to best support online learners, including how to direct the use of technology to help facilitate learning. They discuss a self-directed learning cycle which involves reflective and metacognitive skills, self-regulation, and acknowledgments of social climate as well as learner motivation to function. One of the challenges of SDL is how learners at various

stages of comfort and proficiency manage with technology, especially considering how this can hinder learners' ability to connect with educators. Baldwin and Krishnamurti emphasize that SDL does not mean the complete absence of external learning factors (like educators), it simply points to the strengths of individuals in carrying out independent learning which makes use of available resources, previous knowledge, and experiences. Suggested strategies to facilitate this process can include peer-to-peer feedback, providing learners with resources for consultation, and offering frequent individualized feedback. Knowles (1975) also disagreed with the perspective SDL occurs mostly in isolation, whereas in reality "self-directed learning usually takes place in association with various kinds of helpers, such as teachers, tutors, mentors, resource people, and peers. There is a lot of mutuality among a group of self-directed learners" (p.18). Thomas H. Morris (2020) also investigates self-directed learning within adult learners in contributing to creative learning outcomes, concluding that teachers can support self-directed learning processes in three ways. These three distinct dimensions of teacher support are "(1) helping with sourcing appropriate information (2) assuming a share of control of directing the learning process, and/ or (3) being involved in the process of co-constructing meaning" (p. 172). The role of art educators facilitating SDL remains being a source of knowledge for learners; offering guidance when it comes to decision making; supporting them through the trial and error of materials or methods; fostering discussion amongst learners and encouraging them to be self-reflective. However, learning to respect learner autonomy, embrace technology and other sources of knowledge offers a supported self-directed environment for learners to take some control over their own learning. This can be as simple as compiling resources for learners to reference without having to sift through thousands of search results, or sharing responsibility with learners so they may help define their own learning goals. I believe these strategies would enable learners to feel motivated to engage creatively with craft practices and regain a sense of autonomy over making in order to feel empowered in their process.

Conclusion

This inquiry allowed me to investigate renewed interests in craft practices among women in their early twenties, exploring what motivates them to engage in craft, how they learned to do so, and what this engagement looked like during the Covid-19 pandemic. By pursuing a grounded theory methodology to carry out this inquiry I was able to gain valuable understanding about how and why young women craft without following a predetermined theory or personal presumptions. While I do not believe this inquiry to be a comprehensive review, I do make the statement that craft practices, women's relationship to them, and the learning processes which enable them are incredibly rich subjects and sites of study. And I do think that in allowing this data to reveal itself to me I have broken the surface into a compelling and valuable area of research worthy of additional exploration. As we begin to make sense of society as impacted by Covid-19, some will attempt to pick up the pieces and rebuild what once was, but I believe our relationship to craft, leisure, and learning are forever changed. I look forward to developing more understanding of how these changes may have positive consequences and what this means for how we value autonomy in learning

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