

Elements of Crafts that Enhance Well-Being *Textile Craft Makers' Descriptions of Their Leisure Activity*

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Abstract

The main goals of this study are to depict the elements reported to enhance well-being in the descriptions of craft-making participants and to describe the meanings behind crafting. The study is based on written narratives of 59 female textile craft makers aged 19 to 84. The analysis revealed that the elements that participants characterized as enhancing their well-being were the following: the raw materials, the artefacts, the sense of achievement, the possibilities for personal growth, the development of physical and cognitive skills, the control of one's body and feelings, and the social and cultural dimensions of craft. Craft as a meaningful leisure activity had positive effects on the craft makers' well-being by fostering the feelings of self-managing and empowerment.

Keywords: *activity, textile crafts, leisure, well-being*

Introduction

There is well-documented evidence that creative leisure activities contribute to the positive development and well-being of persons of all ages (e.g., Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002; Collier, 2011; Burt & Atkinson, 2012; Bailey & Fernando, 2012). According to Iso-Ahola and Mannell (2004), the opportunity to be involved in self-chosen leisure activity increases well-being and life satisfaction while also potentially reducing psychological discomfort, depression, and anxiety. Leisure activities may help to provide meaning by allowing individuals to have experiences of empowerment. The significance of meaningful leisure activities often becomes most clearly visible during periods of significant stress (Vrkljan & Miller-Polgar, 2001; Reynolds & Prior, 2006; Keponen & Kielhofner, 2006; Verbakel, 2013), during the later stages of life (Nilsson & Fisher, 2006; Reynolds, 2009; 2010) and when one's employment prospects, life options, or social network are limited (Ville, Ravaud, & Tetrafigap Group, 2001; Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002; Lloyd, Wong, & Petchkovsky, 2007; Griffiths & Corr, 2007).

Earlier studies have also shown that intensive participation in leisure activities has been associated with positive developmental outcomes and learning new skills (Reynolds, 2010; Verbakel, 2013). Furthermore, studies have shown that participation in leisure activities offered opportunities to express creativity and provided social connections (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1996; Gabriel & Bowling, 2004; Iwasaki, 2007). Thus, active leisure, according to Iso-Ahola and Mannell (2004), may enhance self-esteem and self-concept. McColl, Friedlander, and Kerr (1986) argued that leisure activities might have intrinsic properties that are revealed only as individuals engage in such activity, or as they describe their experiences related to it.

Verbakel (2013) demonstrated in her recent study that individuals in economically advanced societies highly value relaxation in their leisure activities. Results have also shown that leisure activities are associated with satisfaction in the realms of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Leverson, Danielsen, Birkeland, & Samdal, 2012). Leisure activities are also seen as a significant means of promoting positive mental health and preventing problem behaviour (Casey, Ripke, & Huston, 2005).

Meaningful leisure activities appear to enhance well-being in that they foster hope and positive moods (Nilsson & Fisher, 2006; Collier, 2011). According to Csikszentmihalyi (1997), most of the activities that evoke these kinds of feelings are activities that provide a sense of "flow," a term used here to describe a state of optimal experience where one engages in an activity simply for the sake of the activity itself. Flow is thus characterized by complete absorption in what one does. During a flow-enhancing activity, individuals will push themselves to the limits of their capacity, both physically and mentally, to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Frankenhaeuser (1999) discussed the notion of *den glada stressen* (positive stress) to describe situations in which individuals are active, feel pleasure, and have influence over their own actions. These kinds of actions may be repetitive, regardless they still allow self-development.

According to Statistics Finland (2005), crafts represent one of the most popular self-chosen leisure activities in this country, and 67% of adults in the population report enjoying craft leisure activities. Furthermore, the interest in creative arts and crafts has increased over the years among adult females (Statistics Finland, 2005). Because craft making has remained a popular leisure activity in an economically advanced society like Finland, it is essential to develop our understanding of how it can contribute to craft makers' well-being. The purpose of this study is to understand the central meanings of craft making, as it is experienced and expressed in the craft makers' lives, in order to explain the reason why it has remained a popular leisure activity.

Thus, the study aims to depict elements of craft making that enhance well-being according to participants' reports, as well as to describe the meanings behind this activity.

The study starts with a review of the relevant literature and related concepts. The review draws from a range of literature in order to accomplish the following: first, it positions the paper within the context of existing theory and helps to deepen the analysis of the craft makers' descriptions of craft making; and second, it serves to emphasize the explorative character of this study. The review of craft as a meaningful activity not only provides a basis on which to analyse craft making as an activity but also serves to highlight the connection between crafting and well-being. Following the literature review, the empirical sections present the methodology, data collection and results. The study concludes with a discussion summarizing the results.

Making Crafts as a Meaningful Activity

Craft comprises design and fabrication processes in which only hand-controlled machines are used and the action is based on making items by hand (Gardner, 1990). One essential element of making crafts is that the makers can take full ownership of the activity; they may also determine the degree of difficulty of what they make (Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Riley, 2008). They may choose holistic craft, which includes coming up with ideas and designing, preparing and assessing the product and process (see Pöllänen, 2009). Holistic craft comprises all the phases of the craft process; therefore, if even one of the abovementioned phases is omitted, the activity is then considered ordinary craft. Ordinary, reproductive craft involves copying the product from a model. In this case, the maker uses a ready-made design that involves the aesthetic or technical qualities, or both, of the artefact. Ordinary craft can also be a process in which the maker uses a series of technical solutions (using instructions) or reproduces a previously learned model or technique (Pöllänen, 2009). In any case, both processes provide an opportunity to do something intentionally and without haste (see Myzelev, 2006; Burt & Atkinson, 2012).

For some, the tangible benefit of the crafter's labour are increased motivation (Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001; Johnson & Wilson, 2005), while for others, crafting provides tools for well-being (Griffiths & Corr, 2007). However, in both cases, crafting may make it possible to strive toward a self-chosen goal that people value, which according to Diener (2000) can help individuals to feel better. Thus, a craft product is not merely the end result of the process; it may include a complex variety of values and emotions that shape the identity of the maker (Kojonkoski-Rännäli, 1998). The variety of values and emotions can be seen in the following two processes: the craft making process itself and the process of the craft maker's inner self.

According to Ihatsu (2002), intentionality and holisticity are two important characteristics of craft as an activity. These two dimensions refer to the character of the process and to the craft maker's intentions and goal orientation. The perspective of intentionality focuses on the maker's decisions about the chosen actions. On the other hand, craft has been described as distinct knowledge that is intuitive and expressed through making and doing. Kojonkoski-Rännäli (1998) argues that pleasure derived from handling and making is immanent in human nature. Such pleasure is related to the act of making (Collier, 2011) and bodily kinaesthetic intelligence (Gardner, 1990), which further highlights the meaning of the corporal act of doing as well as motor functions. The significance of physical and bodily experiences in craft making can be justified by the exceptionally high representation of the hands in the brain and motor cortex, which are involved in the planning, control and execution of voluntary motor functions (Hari, 2011). As an activity, craft is based on both the intellectual and physical characteristics of the maker (Anttila, 1993).

According to Gardner (1990), craft entails intuitive learning, which occurs in the craft process as a result of evaluation and skill acquisition. In this way, the craft maker can express and work through his or her feelings in an active manner and simultaneously develop his or her own skills while taking steps toward finding a solution. Tubbs and Drake (2007) have argued that succeeding in a concrete activity may result in strengthening the individual emotionally. More specifically, they argue that through the design process or the process of handling, assembling, and forming raw materials, crafting can help individuals to realise that they can also positively affect and order their own lives. As Collier (2011) found in her study involving textile craft makers, crafting arouses positive feelings and stimulates reconsideration of issues from new perspectives; thus, it helps to clarify problems and allows the crafter to analyse the relations between different events and situations in life.

Nelson, Labat, and Williams (2002) have argued that a person's perceptions of his or her work as a lived experience are an important part of reflection. This kind of abstract thinking may help in handling different kinds of emotions and in solving problems, thereby enabling craft makers to feel grounded and capable of coping with their daily lives (Reynolds, 1999; Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Collier, 2011). The interaction between maker and object may improve the individual's self-esteem (Fisher, 1995; Burt & Atkinson, 2012) and affect the development of self (Schofield-Tomschlin & Littrell, 2001). Furthermore, the crafted products are symbols of the self and are personalised by the makers' histories (Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Mason, 2005). Crafts are embedded with meanings through their creation, and as part of this, they carry the symbolism of the maker and relationships between and within generations (Johnson & Wilson, 2005). Crafting has also been shown to be a means of carrying on traditions and culture (Johnsson, Josephsson, & Kielhofner, 2001).

Based on the previous research, it can be concluded that there is a connection between crafts and well-being. Schofield-Tomschlin and Littrell (2001) have compiled the results of their study among women who create with textiles that the process of crafting had provided their identity and creativity while also serving as a mean of therapy, enjoyment, and self-actualization. However, no single study has thoroughly investigated the meanings of crafting as a leisure activity across the different craft techniques. Most related research on craft making has highlighted the meaning of making crafts in groups (e.g., Johnsson et al., 2001) and in organized activities (e.g., Schofield-Tomschlin & Littrell, 2001), concentrating on a specific technique (needlework: Reynolds, 1997; quilting: Schofield-Tomschlin & Littrell, 2001; Johnson & Wilson, 2005; weaving: Riley, 2008) or from the perspective of occupational therapy (e.g., Reynolds, 1997; 1999; Griffiths, 2008; Collier, 2011). Although crafting has been and continues to be a popular leisure activity among Finnish females, the subjective experiences and expressions of the craft makers' leisure perspectives have not been the main focus in studies of the Finnish context.

Methodology

Method and Data Collection

This study is based on a qualitative study of the written narratives of textile craft makers who had engaged in this leisure activity for several years. The first-person narratives are personal documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006) that offered the craft makers an opportunity to think and write about themselves and describe their actions, experiences and beliefs regarding crafting. In this case, the narratives are stories about the writers' experiences of their interpreted word; they explore personally meaningful things that gather together diverse events and actions with

interpretations and feelings (Polkinghorne, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Writing a narrative was thought to be a suitable method for several reasons. First, researchers have noticed that people in individualistic countries, like Finland, find it natural to be asked about their pleasant emotions and life satisfaction (see Diener, 2000). Thus, it was assumed that people would be motivated to write about their important and pleasing leisure activities. Second, researchers have also noticed that compared to other data-collection methods, writing affords the participants more time to reflect and interpret their own past, interests, needs, and wishes (Freeman, 2007). Written narratives have been found to be a powerful method for the expression of experiences related to personal and sensitive situations and feelings. Furthermore, since such narratives do not require face-to-face communication, they afford privacy for analysis and reflection (Moen, 2006; Reynolds, 1997; Trahar, 2009; O'Brien & Clark, 2010). Using written narratives as the data-collection method helped make it possible to involve a larger amount of participants from different parts of the country despite the considerable geographical distances. In this way, the researcher believed that the knowledge gained from the written narratives would be characterized by multiple voices, perspectives, truths, and meanings (see Bleakley, 2005).

The written narratives in this study are responses to a request published in eight small provincial newspapers in Finland. The request was presented as a loosely formulated assignment that encouraged craft makers to write about the meanings of crafting as a leisure activity to enhance well-being. They were asked to write down their thoughts and experiences about how the activity of making crafts had been meaningful to their lives. It was emphasised that all ideas, thoughts, and experiences that meaningfully improved their well-being in different life areas were relevant. The instruction to the writers was as follows:

Please describe in your own way the meanings of craft making in your life course. You can write freely; for example, you can share what kind of crafts you make, where and when you are crafting, as well as why you have chosen such crafts. If this activity has increased your well-being, please describe how and in which circumstances.

The writers were also asked to share their background information. They were assured that the writings would be treated anonymously and in confidence. This was done to ensure that the writers would write in their own way about their meaningful experiences (see Hammel, 2004). Polkinghorne (1995) has argued that it is often only retrospectively that we come to understand and give meaning to events; at the same time, however, we should take into account the fact that memory is always selective. Another risk that should be taken into account is the possibility that the participants may overstate their experiences (Edwards & Ribbens, 1998). Thus, it is clear that another assignment and guideline would have resulted in a different kind of data.

Participants and the Data

The written narratives of 59 female textile craft makers were used as data in this study. Their ages ranged from 19 to 84 years old; 70% were between 40 and 70 (mean 55 years). The participants lived in different areas in Finland, in both cities and the countryside. This study focuses on the perspectives of female textile craft makers. The total amount of narratives received numbered 92 handcrafters' letters. The initial analysis suggested that there were different initial motives and meanings associated with making textile crafts and woodworking. It seemed that the main reason for men to make textile crafts was the reason to get necessary products for another leisure activity (e.g. live-action role play, dancing competition). In addition, researchers have noticed that there are differences in leisure time between the genders (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000). Thus, in order to obtain more in-depth answers about the relation of textile crafts and well-being, the data

was split up; the results of the second group of narratives (males) will be reported and discussed in a future study.

The female textile crafters' narratives formed a relevant and rich basis for analysis; the data consisted of 128 pages of written text (New Times Roman 12 font with single line spacing). Although the written narratives varied in length (from 100 to 3,100 words), they provided rich descriptions of unique experiences and meanings that the writers gave to craft making. The narratives provided detailed descriptions of crafts that had been done (e.g., techniques, products and their features), the reasons why these crafts were done and the people for whom they were created. Furthermore, the process and experience that the craft making entailed were also described. The narratives were filled with precise details, pictures and photographs. Some of them were even accompanied by crafted items that represented different writers' craft making. This was not requested, but apparently the writers wanted to give an accurate picture of their crafts. However, these items were not taken into account in the analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis used inductive content analysis and a hermeneutic approach as its methodological basis. In this case, there was no predetermined set of criteria at the beginning of the process (Klein & Myers, 1999). Thus, the hermeneutic circle guided the process in an iterative manner requiring in-depth reading and rereading of material. In this kind of analysis theory emerges from repeated review and classification of raw data. This process increased understanding of the material as a whole.

The analysis began with organising and breaking down the raw data. After the preliminary open coding of the female textile hand crafters' narratives was completed, the veritable analysis was conducted in three steps that helped to assemble and divide the data systematically to obtain answers to the research questions. First, each narrative was read carefully several times in order to develop a preliminary understanding of the material. The data-driven principle of the first stage was that there was no a priori hypotheses, no presuppositions and no theorizing in advance. The data was analysed by dividing it into smaller pieces by marking phrases, sentences and significant words as quotations. These quotations formed the elementary units of analysis. Following this, thematically similar quotations were reintegrated to highlight initial themes describing the elements of making crafts which seemed to contribute to participants' well-being.

Second, the computer programme Atlas.ti was used to handle the large volume of data. This program was used as a data management tool for organizing segments of similar or related expressions to identify the themes and to test the applicability of the initial themes to the raw material; that is to say, it was only used to help look critically at those themes which were grounded in the original data (see Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). When the themes were gathered, the narratives were read again to verify the final themes. Atlas.ti was also helpful in the writing process because the quotations were easy to select from the thematic categories.

In the third step, the narratives were reread and the analysis was continued through engagement in a critical reading; the main purpose was to determine why craft making was experienced as an individually pleasing activity and one that enhanced well-being. In this last step, a theory-based analysis was performed on the narratives through the lenses of the "ethos of self-managing" (Kortteinen, 1992) and psychological empowerment (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2005). The analysis showed that the concepts were intertwined together. The narratives were written as a process which is described thusly: it is hard, it is demanding and the person is proud of their ability to manage it (ethos of self-managing, see Kortteinen, 1992). In this process craft makers had the actual ability to control their environment (external empowerment) and they thus felt

more capable of doing so (internal empowerment), which was influenced by positive emotions (psychological empowerment and subjective well-being, see Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2005). Thus, the narratives were viewed as a window into a knowable reality and were analysed first by using the concepts derived from the data; they were then thematically analysed using concepts derived from theory (see Polkinghorne, 1988; Bleakley, 2005).

According to Blom and Nygren (2010), this kind of analysis is adequate if the empirical data seem relatively homogenous. Although the narratives were unique, there were many common expressions and themes which depicted the craft making as a leisure activity. The written data also contained unique components, which made it possible to analyse the meanings and emotions of each narrative to find differences in the descriptions of crafts and well-being (see Mishler, 1991; Richardson, 2003).

To enhance the rigour of this qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Krefting, 1991), the following four criteria of trustworthiness were taken into account: credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Credibility and confirmability were accounted for by identifying the thematic categories and clearly describing the criteria of the analysis. In the analysis, dependability was certified by verifying the steps of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability can be evaluated from the rich data and dense description, but one must also take into account the limitations of the study. Furthermore, the participants' privacy was honoured when quotations were selected to illustrate the interpretation. In this study, the writers were interested in crafting as a leisure activity. For this reason, the research results cannot be generalised to all situations and contexts. The narratives in this study were collected by an announcement; thus, these participants were not on the whole representative of craft makers who engage in crafting as a leisure activity. There may also be other reasons to do crafts as a leisure activity. Experiences may also differ from country to country in different contexts; thus, it is possible that the results are not transferable to other craft makers. However, the results may offer useful information for considering the application of the findings in a suitable context. As Mayring (2007) and Blom and Nygren (2010) argued, in most cases, the conclusions of a qualitative study may be more general than the results found.

Results

The main goals of this study are to depict the elements of craft making which enhance well-being among those people who engage in crafting as a leisure activity and to describe the meanings behind the activity. To begin with, the elements that enhance well-being is presented by a description of those eight subthemes which were found in the analysis of the craft makers' narratives. The meanings of the activity was found in a critical reading of these descriptions and discovering the unifying factors of the narratives.

Elements of Craft Making

Artefacts. The most noticeable features of the narratives were that they gave detailed and accurate descriptions about artefacts that were made during the long-term craft making. The artefacts were useful products that were functional and at the same time aesthetically pleasing for the participants. The craft makers described how much time, energy, and warm feelings were connected to the products and to the making process. The artefacts were depicted through a demanding making process.

Self-made, personalized gifts are given with love. It is much more impersonal to buy something 'finished.' Time is limited, but gifts to family members must be self-made with love. (No. 10, 28 years old).

The analysis revealed that the artefacts were most often made for family members, for the home or as gifts for others. Grandmothers and mothers with young children often wrote that they were doing crafts for children. It was also common to make artefacts for home decoration. The narratives revealed that the self-made artefacts were symbols of the makers' skillfulness.

I have been giving crafts as gifts ever since I began crafting. Most of the gifts I give during Christmas, birthdays, or for housewarming celebrations have been self-made crafts. I am doing crafts because it is meaningful ... and so that my skillfulness can be seen.... Because I am very critical, I try to make perfect, beautiful artefacts. (No. 18, 42 years old).

Craft has helped the craft makers to create cost-effective, unique, long-lasting, and high-quality artefacts. The artefacts were self-designed holistic crafts or ordinary crafts made according to a pattern or model. However, the craft makers of ordinary crafts also often described how they had manipulated the model, changed the pattern, colour, or some details from the original design and, in many cases, reused old fabrics for new garments. More important than making an innovative product, however, were the emotional benefits. For example, the fact that the product was made for the home or for some dear person indicated that it was the human relation that made the product meaningful. The analysis showed that the writers connected the artefacts either to productivity and economy (time and materials) or to creativity and self-expression.

Now, as a mother of little children the degree of the difficulty of my crafts has dropped significantly ... I have to work quickly, because it takes a lot of time to get something ready because of the interruptions; however, I am pleased and I am pretty happy with this. I sew easy garments and reuse old garments.... (No. 7, 39 years old).

I do not do anything according to a model. I design and make a layout ... I am satisfied when I have expressed something beautiful and pleasing. Watching and admiring it. All that is essential for me. (No. 15, 50 years old).

The raw materials. Although materials are an indispensable condition for making, according to the narratives, they may have other meanings for craft makers. The raw materials were described in the narratives as a source of inspiration. The craft makers could also express their values and creativity through the materials. The chosen material in a self-made crafted artefact may also bring forth that which is subjectively reflected in the making process.

It is nice to stroke the unfinished work and sigh with delight. When I go around in shops, I do not always need to buy something. Just going around and viewing will be enough to get a good feeling. However, I am always picking up ideas. (No. 1, 52 years old).

It is difficult to resist the call of some fabric; sometimes it is a colour, sometimes a structure.... (No. 15, 50 years old).

The data also revealed how touching the material and the process of making had deepened the possibility of expressing the makers' inner feelings.

I remember how during the worst part of my sickness I had to go to the shop to touch the textiles; the strong coloured cloths especially seemed to give me strength. (No. 4, 55 years old).

Sense of achievement. According to the narratives, craft was a self-chosen, voluntary activity that offered a sense of achievement. As a process, craft making provided the craft makers with occasions to realize their designs, decisions, and goals. The form of craft could vary according to the craft makers' intentions. The craft makers described that while crafting was something they had to do, the goals and decisions involved in the activity were at their own discretion. The narratives indicated that crafting was a useful way to occupy spare time and strengthen the craft makers' beliefs in self-efficacy. Making handicrafts offered an occasion to work with the hands and, at the same time, make plans, gain self-confidence, and experience enjoyment.

I like the fact that I can have something accomplished ... It's my character to live in a useful and efficient manner. (No. 49, 41 years old).

The analysis of the narratives revealed that making crafts helped the craft makers to have a sense of control over domestic tasks. The findings demonstrated that routine forms of domestic production and maintenance were not as fulfilling as craft making was. The participants described craft as a willingly self-imposed obligation. In other words, the craft makers owned both the project and the process. The craft makers' plans included the kinds of work, for whom they would make the crafts, the materials and techniques that would be used and the kind of knowledge they would need. They described crafting as a concrete and intentional activity that had led to a continuous process of setting personal aims, controlling the external conditions and completing the process successfully.

The most important point in craft making is the fact that I can create something visible. Cooking, cleaning and nurturing, they can also be done with care—but nothing visible will remain.... By making crafts I make the decisions, I can learn something new all the time, I can focus on the making and forget other issues. (No. 3, 46 years old).

Social and cultural dimension. In this study, the context of making crafts was the home. The narratives only touched on the possibilities of making crafts in organized contexts or in the social setting of a group that is wider than the craft maker's own family. Nevertheless, most of the narratives described features that can be connected to social connections and culture.

The narratives revealed that the social dimension of crafting was intertwined with emotionality. Despite the fact that crafting was done alone, it nurtured the feeling of togetherness with family members, relatives, and friends. As visible objects, the crafts had symbolic meanings to family members. Thus, in addition to being considered concrete and visible evidence of kinship and love, crafting was perceived as strengthening family ties. The fact that the product was made for the home or for some dear person indicated that the human relation made the making process or the product meaningful.

Handicrafts bring warmth to our home. Crafts increase the sense of community and strengthen family ties. My daughter keeps asking instructions for sock knitting and the whole family makes something together. Crafts are really increasing our well-being. (No. 8, 49 years old).

Making crafts has connected me and my mother. She is pleased that one of her children is interested in crafts.... also my husband and his parents appreciate my skills. My craft making changed a little bit when I married, and so now I am doing crafts for our family.... (No. 10, 28 years old).

Craft making also meant the continuation of traditions and the passing on of family heirlooms. The data showed that crafting meant the transmission of cultural and intra-family traditions and skills as well as values and memories. The clearest evidence of this was the participants' connection between crafts and family celebrations. Some of the craft makers wrote that they had their own traditions, such as gift giving. For example, one grandmother wrote that in their family, grandmothers had always been providers of knitted products.

Traditional regional crafts were also given as reminders of the family's background, that is, who they were and where they came from. Almost all the narratives revealed that the craft makers hoped that their crafts would be saved for future generations. Crafts were visible products of work that could be passed on to successive generations.

I'm aware of my own mortality; someday I will disappear from the face of the earth ... but with luck, my handicrafts will stay in this world even longer than I will. They will remain in use among others or as decorative items in the homes of others. Crafts are not just thrown into the dustbin. (No. 7, 39 years old).

I want to leave my tracks, even in this small expression of Finnish cultural history.... (No. 9, 30 years old).

The most important thing in crafts is the interaction, the transmission of knowledge and skills across generations. (No. 11, 55 years old).

On the other hand, the analysis revealed that copying traditional artefacts also created ties to minority cultures whose members were afraid of losing their cultural heritage. Making crafts protected minority cultures by increasing appreciation of age-old techniques and artefacts. Learning these traditional crafts helped new residents to make contact with experts in the indigenous community and to gain approval and support from more experienced local crafters.

Feeling that I am Sámi is something different than feeling I am Finnish. I transfer the Finnish identity to my children naturally, but Sámi culture can be transferred to them through crafts. I have wanted to learn the traditional methods and beautiful shapes and the product design which are OK also today—Sámi handicrafts are smart garments. Traditional handicrafts help us to understand the whole culture. ... I have practiced 10 years to make traditional Sámi shoes and now I have the feeling that I am beginning to be aware of the making process and that I am a part of the traditional craft maker experts in our village. (No. 47, 37 years old).

Thoughts and feelings. According to the data, crafting offered an activity that was perceived as pleasing. The craft makers responded that they perceived craft making as the most pleasurable leisure activity in their lives. The concrete artefacts strengthened the feeling of success. The data revealed that all kind of crafts, such as learning a new technique by using ready-made instructions, making variations to a pre-existing pattern or self-designing a project, elicited a feeling of success. Success in making something by hand was experienced as rewarding on such a deep level that it created a desire to repeat the endeavour.

When I met my husband, I knitted socks for him as a present, and he was so pleased that he did not have the heart to use them; thus, I knitted the same kind of pair for him.... (No. 10, 28 years old).

Moreover, self-designing provided an opportunity for learning and self-expression. Those handicrafts were expressions of the craft makers' artistic intentions and creativity, a fact which made the craft making an attractive activity. These women created designs to express their creative aspirations, which is typical in holistic craft making.

Doing crafts I often drift into a 'flow' phenomenon where time seems to disappear. I do crafts alone, not in groups. I do not need teachers. I design myself and I have learned almost all my knowledge and skills by myself. I get joy, for example, when I give a self-designed gift to my aunt.... (No. 12, 19 years old).

The analysis revealed the connection of crafting to relationships and domestic objects, illustrating that handicrafts act as personalised reminders of the maker and their origin. The participants described that seeing their handicrafts in their homes or in the homes of loved ones strengthened their sense of hopefulness. It seems that products made over the years and displayed at home were concrete symbols of life experiences; the memories attached to those products thus gave a sense of meaning. The home-placed products served as concrete mementoes for the older writers.

When my children were small, I sewed all their clothes ... and my children liked them. After all, my handicrafts can be seen in this home. What a wonderful feeling, when you see your handicrafts are being used! Sometimes I feel like a small child, who does something with her own hands and then asks to look at it to get encouragement. I guess this is a part of the adult world, too—I get joy when my family feels joy from my works. (No. 47, 37 years old).

The self-made products at home recall issues during my life-course as well as my old friends ... the past and present, joy and memories. (No. 58, 75 years old).

The therapeutic benefit of crafts was often mentioned in the narratives. Crafting helped the writers to calm down or adapt to stressful situations that were beyond their control. In some cases, the participants wrote about how crafts had helped to prevent intrusive thoughts and disruptions from the outside world.

All these years I have been crafting, this has not been for my own pleasure, but it has had another meaning. I have come to the conclusion that I have fled the present moment, I have covered myself from self-destruction, I have calmed down, I have been able to 'stand up'. (No. 18, 42 years old).

The narratives described crafting as a means to heal the mind—making one feel complete for an entire day, for example. Recreation was described as relaxation and being in a better mood. According to the analysis, craft making is connected to the sensation of accomplishing something tangible in the daily round of activities and rushing to meet deadlines and demands. The findings revealed that craft making diminishes the effects of an urgent life tempo and the feeling of always being in a rush.

What could be more wonderful after a busy day than you can take, for example, a knitting in your hand and then think about the day's events ... If my mind is full of worries, then I take a routine craft which I know well, in order to get my thoughts to work in peace. It makes me sit like glue in one place for at least one hour and then my thoughts tend to be clearer. (No. 10, 28 years old).

When I get properly focused on my work, in a way, I go inside my head and lock everything else outside. (No. 9, 30 years old).

Many of my troubles are forgotten, or they seem smaller or they can be solved by considering them while doing crafts. (No. 6, 27 years old).

Some participants wrote about the ways in which craft had helped them during significant losses and unusually stressful times, such as illness, anorexia, depression, divorce, unemployment and the illness or death of a loved one. When describing these situations, all those who were sick described using craft as an escape, which indicates that these participants used craft as a means of self-protection. Thus, craft had helped these participants to analyse their scattered state of affairs and resist being overwhelmed by difficulties despite the fact that their sense of autonomy had been shaken.

But sometimes different crafts also serve as an escape from everyday life, if you cannot cope with something but you can do something which you can fully concentrate on and forget about everything else. (No. 10, 28 years old).

When beginning a new work you should usually start on something small, but I decided to make it big and sew by hand. It was the tablecloth of my bad feelings and sorrow that became a beautiful field of flowers. As I was working on it, my marriage was already starting to fall apart and craft carried me from one day to the next ... Three whole years went by in a mist I wouldn't like to recall, but I didn't spend one day of it without craft. I made larger patchworks, this time with a sewing machine. Was I connecting the patches of my life? (No. 54, 44 years old).

For the writers, perceiving and analysing reality meant reflecting upon and gaining a sense of understanding and control over events. Some of the craft makers wrote that craft was the only thing they could control in their life. Thus, craft was a coping strategy that provided visible, tangible and manageable challenges. These concrete challenges made unpleasant realities fade away and helped the mind begin to process events gradually and step by step in a way that allowed the person to deal with them.

It was a horrible feeling when your work 'ran out', especially when I had never been unemployed before. I had pain all over my body. At home, I walked from one window to another without being to take anything to begin with. Then crafts were my helper. (No. 56, 54 years old).

For me, craft gave my life back ... it was a turning point in my life, and I could not have survived without crafts. I focused on my crafting so intensively that all my troubles were forgotten, my mind calmed down ... and after a short time all appeared in different light. (No. 3, 46 years).

My life was hard ... I fled to creative madness. So I made small paintings and I painted them with thread and a needle. I used my own ideas and the inspirations from nature. (No. 54, 44 years old).

Four years ago I had breast cancer. I decided to learn something new ... I begun to do bobbin lace working ... I got my mind off of cancer. It was more interesting. (No. 38, 57 years old).

Personal growth. In the craft makers' narratives, crafting was described as personal growth. The narratives depicted clearly how important craft was to the writers. Thus, for these participants, craft was an arena in which personal identities were developed and expressed. The narratives showed that hand skills, products, the satisfaction of achieving self-set goals and feedback from others had raised the craft makers' self-esteem and self-confidence. This was the most important feature for the writers who were working at home. As the following quotations demonstrate, crafting had supported the craft makers' personal growth.

I calm down, I am not cranky and I am much chattier ... as a mother and as a wife ... when I can focus on my crafts. One of the most important functions of craft is the opportunity to raise my thoughts outside the four walls. As a mother of little children and as a caretaker, I am physically tied to being inside. I have noticed that when I can focus on handicrafts for a moment, then I feel better. When I have anything else to do, I begin to see all things as chaos; I am walking around and cleaning up nervously ... If I can make crafts even for a moment, I am relaxed as a mother and a housewife. I am still available for all at home. I have decided that my days will consist of the things which I prefer: home, children, and crafts. (No. 47, 37 years old).

I grow as a person as I am doing something with my hands ... I guess it means that I grow as a person when I am not always wondering and thinking about my own or some other people's acts or sayings, it helps when the matter may rest and mature while I am concentrating on crafts. (No. 47, 37 years old).

According to the narratives, crafting had helped to increase self-awareness and enabled the craft makers to set larger goals for their own lives. The concrete act of making had pushed the self to a higher or a new plane. This kind of experiential knowing by doing may have allowed a greater understanding of life and relationships with others. Because the craft makers described how craft had helped them comprehend life, the crafted items expressed developmental tasks and transitions during their life course. The results revealed that craft was a productive method for encouraging abstract thinking as well as a conduit to successful aging.

Making by hand has helped me to realize many things in my life. (No. 16, 48 years old).

Craft has been a big part of my life in my life course: what would be left without these moments and reminders, so many kinds of things I remember, for example, the tracks from an old fabric in the middle of my curtain, the narrow belt which I sewed to the party dress.... (No. 24, 69 years old).

Development of physical and cognitive skills. The craft makers described how making a new artefact, learning a new technique or making variations to a pattern had all induced development of physical and cognitive skills. Participants described crafting by referring to it as entertainment but, most of all, as skilfulness and learning. The narratives revealed that the craft makers' skilfully produced crafts promoted their aesthetic intent and their ability to estimate their own works. Those craft makers who were interested in design-based crafts, in particular, described their knowledge and skills acquisition. Both the self-expressive creative activities and making an artefact with a new technique or a previously unknown material required a complicated learning process with experimentation and testing.

Crafts mean to me, above all, fun, entertainment, learning new things, self-development and creativity. (No. 12, 19 years old).

Making crafts also reflected the craft makers' values in terms of sustainability. Crafting meant repairing, recycling and retuning items, such as old garments and used articles. This kind of craft making was not only economical but also showed cognitive awareness of and responsibility for actions. These craft makers did not want to throw away useful materials; they resisted overconsumption and the production of short-lived items. Sustainability offered easy opportunities for learning and teaching important values and skills through crafts for children. This kind of situation offered possibilities for the development of physical and cognitive skills for both learner and teacher.

The most important idea in crafts is, among other things, ecology. This means that I use natural materials and that I and my family consider how to use purchased materials in a way that there will be as little waste as possible. (No. 6, 27 years old).

Control of one's own body. The data provided clear evidence of the significance of the sense of control the craft makers felt over their own bodies. The participants described how they had been able to push away the feelings of agony and frustration by engaging in physical activities. The narratives revealed that feelings of control had arisen from handling the materials and equipment and from performing the techniques. The calming and integrative effect of crafting was described as deriving from the materiality of the craft and from performing the activity, such as crocheting lace, jingling knitting needles, banging the looms, cutting up one's sorrows into strips of carpet or working in cross-stitch and petit point without any worrisome matters preoccupying the mind.

Making something by hand is a way for me to handle emotions and solve problems ... I have banged in rage the pain and tears of my several miscarriages into rag rugs. (No. 16, 48 years old).

I have now noticed the strong impression of crafts when life seemed to be heavy. Making creative things in crafts takes my attention completely. Eyes are viewing, the brain is designing, and the mind shapes the outcome. Then the brain sends a message to the hands, the hands are obeying, the mind is shaping the ideas and the result, and the eyes are looking to make sure that all is going well. I feel and model the shape. My body is involved in the process all the time. I seek a suitable working position, adjusting myself to the work. I am fully in my work, forgetting all things, and am able to rest. I cannot think of anything else than my making. My mind is calm, and if I have difficulties in the work I can consider different solutions and make decisions in spite of the fact that the situation is not the same in the rest of my life. I am not satisfied with the rest of my life. (No. 3, 46 years old).

Even though the physical limitations of age prevented some from craft making or participating in craft groups, even seeing and touching the raw materials had benefits in terms of bolstering perceptions of the meaningfulness of life. According to the narratives, memorising, and making notes about the products were also experienced as meaningful activities.

When I retired, I began to make laces and sew ... The time passes quickly, and your hands have exercise, as does your numeracy and memory—you have to calculate the

patch pattern and remember the complex instructions every day. You have to concentrate on currently topical issues. Crafting prevents me from having memory loss. (No. 27, 84 years old).

Crafts are a friend, an entertainer and a comforter. Now at the age of 75, I have osteoarthritis in my hands and I cannot knit anymore. But memorizing, listing and looking at crafts—and now writing this narrative—have brought everything together: the crafts I have done, the materials, the sayings about craft making and making by hand, about clothing and behaviour during my life course. [A long list of old adages]. (No. 58, 75 years old).

Ethos of Self-Managing

The aim of this study was to describe craft making as a leisure activity. In particular, it attempted to determine the main meanings behind the activity. The close reading of the data revealed the so-called “ethos of self-managing” (see Kortteinen, 1992) as a story line in the narratives. In this study, this ethos can be seen in the craft makers’ narratives: despite the fact that they had created a lot of artefacts and, furthermore, despite the fact that crafting had been time consuming and demanding, they had survived and were proud of their craft making. The analysis revealed that crafting had also helped participants to deal with the difficult issues they faced during their life course. Narratives revealed that the women had used crafting as a mean to developing the feeling of self-managing, at least in one life area. They were proud of their skillfulness and self-achievement, and of the self-made products that represented their efforts.

Crafting has been the first thing always ... it is demanding, but when I have something finished, it is wonderful to see and think, ‘I did it’. (No. 46, 62 years old).

This has been quite a list ... (of crafts done, etc.) It may prove, however, that craft, even though it is demanding, brings joy to you and to your dear ones ... it helps you to control your own thoughts, to remove you from everyday things, and it provides awareness of your own competence, success and life. (No. 58, 75 years old).

The data revealed that the feeling of self-managing had empowered the craft makers; they described how they actively organized their craft making in a way so that it increased their well-being. Feelings of well-being were connected to beliefs about whether settled goals could be achieved. Thus, the craft makers had developed their own agency through the activity and positive emotions heightened feelings of psychological empowerment. The narratives also revealed that their success and feedback from others had strengthened their self-confidence and raised their self-esteem. This verified the meanings of craft making.

The described elements of craft making and the ethos of self-managing can be represented as a wheel of crafts with empowering elements (Figure 1). The analysis revealed that the elements that participants characterized as enhancing their well-being could be traced to the following empowering elements of crafts: the raw materials; the artefacts; a sense of achievement; the possibilities for personal growth; the development of physical and cognitive skills; the control of one’s body, thoughts, and feelings; and the social and cultural dimensions related to craft. Crafting may be seen as a flexible resource for facing the challenges that the craft maker has in her life situation. For some, craft making gave inner strength and the courage to slow the pace of life and enjoy a self-imposed activity. For others, it helped in developing a sense of control over their lives while pushing the demands of effectiveness and troublesome thoughts into the background, allowing space for positive emotions.

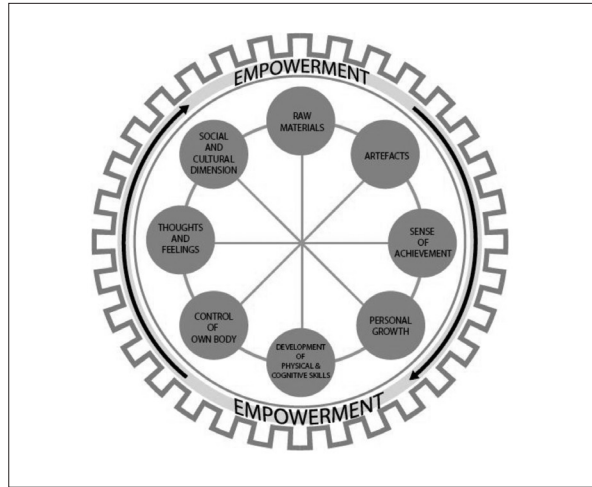


Figure 1. The Empowerment Wheel of Crafts

Discussion

The main goals of this study are to depict the elements reported to enhance well-being in the descriptions of craft making participants and to describe the meanings behind crafting. The findings describe both the intentional and holistical elements of craft making as an activity (see Kojonkoski-Rännäli, 1998; Ihatsu, 2000). It seems that crafting as an activity had intrinsic properties which were revealed as the craft maker engaged in the activity; crafts had elements that enhanced the participants' well-being. Furthermore, it seems that telling and thinking about crafts was also connected to well-being. These findings are similar to those of McColl et al. (1986).

Craft makers named their activity as a leisure activity, although it had economic and therapeutic meanings as well. The narratives revealed that the making as an activity had healed both their mind and their body (see Frankl, 2006). Crafting helped the women to feel free; it was something they were able to rule over. As Verbakel (2013) has noted about leisure, the narratives analysed in this study also demonstrated that crafting as a meaningful activity helped the female craft makers to feel free from timetables, duties, responsibilities and troublesome thoughts, even if only for a moment. This was especially important for those who had pressures from their work at home or at their workplace. As a self-organized and self-controlled leisure activity, crafting provided satisfaction related to competence, relatedness and autonomy, factors that have been connected to leisure activities and well-being in previous studies (e.g., Casey et al., 2005; Bailey & Fernando, 2012).

The context of crafting was most often home, family, kinships, social relationships and traditions, a common finding in previous studies of craft making (e.g. Schofield-Tomschlin & Littrell, 2001; Johnson & Wilson, 2005). The textile craft makers described in the narratives how crafting was connected to the feelings of love and happiness (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) and continuity (see Fisher, 1995; Mason, 2005; Johnson & Wilson, 2005). This aligns with Mason's (2005) comments that crafting helps to bind the craft makers symbolically to the larger environment of family, friends, neighbours, or other groups. It may be concluded that these kinds of personalized histories, together with a sense of serving as gatekeepers to relationships, had

strengthened the long-lasting desire to make crafts and the emotional bond that was formed with crafting as a leisure activity.

In addition, the findings showed that crafting helped to organize thoughts and feelings; it promoted personal space, self-expression, life-long learning, and the development of physical and cognitive skills. Craft-related self-reflection had helped the craft makers to understand self, others, and life. As Gardner (1990), Kojonkoski-Rännäli (1998), and Reynolds (1999) have observed, this kind of intuitive learning may help people to work through feelings in an active manner and simultaneously move them toward finding a solution. Personal growth, or the symbolic pushing of the self to a higher or new plane, had helped individuals to assess values and abilities as well as the meaningfulness of life. As Burt and Atkinson (2012) have argued, it can be assumed that making crafts by hand and without haste had provided space for self-reflections in the hectic pace of life. Furthermore, it also afforded time for personal growth.

As Anttila (1993) and Collier (2011) have noted, the multichannel characteristics of crafts led to the responsiveness to raw materials, the mastery of one's skills and the corporal act of doing. Seeing and touching had supported this process, which points to the significance of bodily experiences in crafts. The analysis revealed that feelings of agony or pain could be pushed away and turned into bodily activity or symbolic imagery by hand work. Also, from this perspective, crafting as a leisure activity helped craft makers to free themselves from unwanted matters (see Frankl, 2006).

The findings of this study align with Schofield-Tomschlin and Littrell's (2001) observations that the meanings incorporated in the making of craft objects is a significant element of crafting. It seems that the nature of the activity relates to the meanings of craft. For example, those who experienced craft as a relaxing activity did ordinary crafts with ready-made designs or previously learned models (see also Bailey & Fernando, 2012). The main goal for such people was relaxation, as Verbakel (2013) has noted regarding people facing subjective time pressures. In this study, while those kinds of craft makers emphasized the activity and the artefacts, they did not emphasize design and self-expression. This kind of ordinary craft may be described with Frankenhaeuser's (1999) concept of *den glada stressen* (positive stress); in other words, the individuals were actively doing something that was recurring, but they felt pleasure because they had influence over their own actions.

On the contrary, those who had difficult times in their lives experienced craft making as contributing to a creative and sustaining self-image that protected the ego or provided ego-uniting experiences. Research studies have shown that the significance of meaningful leisure activities becomes clearly visible during periods of significant stress (e.g., Vrkljan & Miller-Polgar, 2001; Reynolds & Prior, 2006; Keponen & Kielhofner, 2006; Verbakel, 2013; Nilsson & Fisher, 2006; Reynolds, 2009; 2010; Ville et al., 2001; Lloyd et al., 2007; Griffiths & Corr, 2007). These participants made holistic crafts that required new skills, innovative design, and problem solving. This kind of flow-enhancing activity (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) enabled the crafts makers to push their bodies and minds to the extreme to accomplish something worthwhile. For these participants, craft making was synonymous with coping. Thus, so-called holistic craft and ordinary craft played different roles in the craft-making process.

It can be concluded that craft making may have empowering elements (i.e., both ordinary and holistic crafts), and craft makers benefit from the meanings of the activity (recreation and coping). In their findings, McColl et al. (1986) indicated that the participants may use activities according to their own goals, and in this study the participants used their activities as a counterweight in order to achieve a feeling of self-managing and as an empowering element. One

of the main reasons for achieving such empowerment and self-managing may be the form of the self-chosen and meaningful activity, which was appropriate with respect to the participants' intentions and abilities (see Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Riley, 2008).

Previous research has demonstrated the connection between crafts and well-being (e.g., Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001; Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Riley, 2008; Burt & Atkinson, 2012). However, the elements which make crafting a meaningful leisure activity had not yet been thoroughly clarified. The findings of this study revealed that the elements that enhanced well-being also gave craft making a function of empowerment. Studies on subjective well-being have shed considerable light on empowerment as a process. Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005) argued that empowerment consists of both the actual ability to control one's environment (external empowerment) and the feeling that one can do so (internal empowerment), which is influenced by positive emotions. The findings of this study revealed that craft making as an activity makes it possible to settle goals which could be achieved. As individuals gain control and mastery over their lives, learning and utilizing skills to influence life events, they may be empowered. Individuals learn how to manage time, organize themselves, identify resource providers or begin to understand the factors that influence the processes. It may be concluded that crafting as a meaningful leisure activity had positive effects on the craft makers' well-being by fostering the feelings of self-managing and empowerment.

In conclusion, it should be noted that more consideration needs to be given regarding the things people do in their everyday lives. Because leisure activities may be an increasingly important avenue for well-being promoters in the future, there is a need to conduct further research to see if new trends, as well as rapidly changing and technology-rich living, change the nature of leisure-based craft making.

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