Supporting Diversity
in Craft Practice
through Digital
Technology Skills
Development

Project Report

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Project Report: Supporting Diversity in Craft Practice through Digital Technology Skills Development

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Foreword

Every successful business, from microenterprises to big brands, knows the importance of a strong authentic digital presence. Building and sustaining an online presence is critical in promoting creative businesses.

Supporting Diversity in Craft Practice, by Dr Karen Patel, examines the creative drivers and some of the challenges facing black and minority ethnic (BAME) women makers in the UK specifically in relation to their online profile and presence.

In promoting craft businesses, the story of the maker is often deeply entwined with the craft product itself. This raises serious challenges to BAME women as, according to the Amnesty International evidence cited in the research, black women receive more online abuse than anybody else.

The research participants shared rich insights into the depth of their commitment to their craft, at the same time as revealing their concerns about what such exposure might bring.

The perception of craft in the families and cultures of the participants varied. Some saw it as part of everyday life, as routine as cooking or cleaning, and therefore it was devalued as domesticated, feminised work and not seen as a suitable or secure career choice. Others saw the significance of its place in upbringing and culture, and valued the importance of craft techniques.

The Crafts Council recognises that for the UK craft sector to continue to be world-leading we need to support and champion a diverse range of makers. It is why we are pleased to be a partner in this research to try to understand more about the challenges individuals face.

Dr Patel's research will feed in to how we support makers from any cultural background and at any stage of their career. We will do further work to promote BAME social media and brand role models and to create safer spaces for their businesses to grow.

We look forward to being a partner in the next stage of Dr Patel's work.

Rosy Greenlees

Executive Director
Crafts Council

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Introduction

This report presents findings from the AHRC Creative Economy Engagement Fund project 'supporting diversity in craft practice through digital technology skills development' which involved a collaboration between Birmingham City University and Crafts Council UK. The project aimed to provide insights into the experiences of black and minority ethnic (BAME) makers in the UK, and explore whether social media skills development could enhance the online visibility of diverse makers.

According to the Craft's Council's report on the demographics of the UK craft sector, *Who Makes?* (Spilsbury, 2018), people working in craft occupations full-time are:

- more likely to be male than the average across all occupations in the UK

- more likely to be from white ethnic groups

The data suggests that the UK craft sector workforce is not diverse, and this is characteristic of workforce demographics across the country's creative industries (Banks, 2017; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2018; Saha, 2018). Given that many craft traditions originate from Africa, Asia and South America, the latest Crafts Council data suggests that while there has been an increase in BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) participation in craft since 2014, the participation rate still only stands at 17.2% (DCMS, 2018).

What can be done to support greater diversity in the craft sector? This project explored how digital technology, particularly social media, could support greater diversity in craft practice through raising the online visibility of craft by women of colour. 'Diversity' can mean a variety of things and can be an ambiguous term, encompassing race, gender, sexual orientation, disability and class, for example. For this report our focus is on women of black and minority ethnic (BAME) origin. Women from BAME backgrounds were approached for this research based on my previous research on artists' use of social media. In that research (see Patel, 2017) I found that the women artists tended to share the work of other women online, which I characterise as 'mutual aid'. While this is a potential positive of social media use, my research also found that online spaces for creatives (such as art hashtags, groups) were dominated by white, middle-class aesthetics and practitioners. The decision to focus on UK women of colour for this project was directed by my previous work, but this does not exclude intersectional[1] experience. This project responds to key challenges related to inequalities in creative work and growing concerns about the 'digital divide' (Ragnedda and Muschert, 2013) potentially reinforcing these inequalities. Inequalities and lack of diversity need to be addressed in creative work so that all voices and experiences are visible in our creative and media landscape – the Arts Council's 'creative case for diversity' (Arts Council England, 2019) emphasises this.

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[1] Intersectionality is defined here as the interconnections between different social categories such as race and gender, and how they relate to individual experiences of oppression and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989).

The project involved interviews with 17 women makers who self-identify as from a BAME background, and two public social media workshops held in London and Birmingham. The interviews were about the makers' background, career trajectory and social media use, while the workshops were a knowledge exchange format, where participants discussed and worked through the challenges they face when using social media as part of their practice. While everyone's experiences and pathways into craft practice were unique among participants, the challenges they face with social media were shared.

This report highlights three key findings from the interviews and workshops which provide important insights into the experiences of BAME women makers and their social media use. These findings include:

1. The significance of cultural background and family in craft practice – including cultural expectations of young BAME women, cultural perceptions of craft and family expectations

2. The challenges of using social media for BAME women makers – including lack of confidence, risks of feeling exposed online and skills needs

3. Opportunities and positive aspects of social media use for BAME women makers – including possibilities for creating safe spaces online, opportunities for sharing and knowledge exchange, online community building and greater visibility of diverse forms of craft online

These insights are based on a relatively small sample of participants over the course of a 12-month project. With this in mind I provide suggestions on further research and activity required to support diversity in the UK craft economy, building on the initial findings in this report.

Background: diversity in the craft sector

The lack of diversity in the creative industries is well documented, with increasing academic interest in the persisting inequalities in the creative and cultural industries workforce (Banks, 2017; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2018; Saha, 2018). This criticism tends to centre on the media and cultural industries, with film and TV receiving the most attention (see Saha, 2018; Wreyford, 2018). The work of Mark Banks (2017), Dave O'Brien and Kate Oakley (2015) draws attention to the lack of diversity in the wider cultural sector, particularly the arts. Despite this increased academic interest in diversity in the creative and cultural sector, relatively little has been done on the craft workforce, despite increased research and policy interest in the handmade in the creative economy (Grodach, O'Connor and Gibson, 2017). This is likely due to the lack of readily available data about the craft workforce in the UK, with a large proportion of makers operating as freelancers or sole traders.

The *Who Makes?* report by Crafts Council UK (Spilsbury, 2018) provides some insight into the makeup of the craft sector in the UK. The report draws on the Labour Force Survey to provide demographic data of craft sector workers both within the creative industries and craft jobs in other, non-creative sectors. It estimates that there are around 129,000 people in craft occupations, with 78% of those in full-time employment being male. Women makers are more likely to be self-employed and part-time (36%) suggesting that they are in a more precarious position in the craft sector than men.

In terms of ethnicity, the report suggests 4% of people working in craft occupations are from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background. However, it highlights that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) data from the *Taking Part* survey suggests that adult craft participation among BAME groups has increased by 5.2 percentage points to 15.3% between 2014/15 and 2016/17. This is compared to participation by white ethnic groups, which increased by only 1.7 percentage points to 22.6%. It is worth noting that the *Taking Part* survey does not include craft practice which is solely for the purposes of paid work or academic study.

More recent data from the 2018 *Taking Part* survey indicates that BAME participation in craft has increased further to 17.2%. This suggests that more people of BAME origin are participating in craft, however it is unclear what the nature of this participation is. While more people of BAME origin may be participating in craft, it does not appear to translate to making a career out of it or entering into a craft occupation.

Other protected characteristics reported on in the *Who Makes?* report include age and disability. People in craft occupations are more likely to be older than the average across all occupations, and 17% of those working in craft occupations suffer from a work-limiting health problem or disability, which is higher than the average across all occupations. While there is no data in the *Who Makes?* report on class, it suggests that those working in craft occupations are less qualified than all workers across the economy. However, there are variations across individual craft occupations, and it would be reductive to discuss class based on educational qualifications. There is also no data in the report on sexual orientation, or on individual ethnic groups. Given the limits of the data available on the craft sector (Bennett, 2018), it is difficult to obtain a

full picture of the craft workforce. However, the data from the report suggests that the craft sector in the UK is not diverse, reflecting wider trends in the cultural and creative industries.

Research on craft spaces online suggest that they too are relatively homogenous. Susan Luckman's (2015) analysis of Etsy's 'featured shop' profiles demonstrate that they paint a mostly North American, white, middle class and relatively privileged picture of home-based craft practice. With Etsy and social media sites providing relatively accessible opportunities for individual makers to sell their work online and gain recognition, why are such spaces predominantly white? Could social media help to support greater diversity in the craft sector? The next section outlines the methods used to explore these questions.

Research methods

In this project I carried out interviews with 17 makers from all over the UK, recruited via the Crafts Council's website and online directory, and through my own connections in Birmingham with Craftspace. I also held two free public social media knowledge exchange workshops for makers, one in London and one in Birmingham, with a total of 19 participants. Of the 19 workshop participants, seven were recruited via the interviews, the other participants found out about the workshops via the Crafts Council's website and word of mouth.

All participants were makers who identified as women and of BAME origin. Their career stage varied, with some recently finishing University, others now working on their craft practice after a different career or raising a family. They were mostly from London and Birmingham, and this is because of how they were recruited - with the Crafts Council networks and reach in London, and my connections with Craftspace in Birmingham, and this led to the decision to hold two workshops in those locations too. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 30 minutes to an hour. The makers discussed their background, career progression, craft practice and experiences in the craft sector, and their use of social media. Interviews remain a suitable research method to allow the "voices of the researched community to emerge in a study" (Luckman, 2018:316) which was important in this project. The interviews were voice recorded and professionally transcribed. The transcripts were then thematically coded and analysed in NVivo. All interview participants provided informed consent, with the option to have their names anonymised. For those participants who chose to remain anonymous, pseudonyms are used.

The workshops followed a knowledge exchange approach to addressing the challenges of using social media. One was held at Canada Water Culture Space in June 2018, and the second workshop was at STEAMHouse in Birmingham in October 2018. The workshops were facilitated by myself, and I drew from both my previous research and my experience as a social media practitioner. Rather than imparting information which participants could find online, I encouraged participants to critically engage with social media and share knowledge between them to address challenges with social media use. This approach allowed participants' existing knowledge and skills needs to emerge during the workshops, and encouraged multi-faceted discussions about various aspects of social media use and the experiences of women makers who identify as BAME. I recorded observations and reflections about the workshops which are published in two blog posts on the Crafts Council website (Patel, 2018). The public-facing reflection of the research process proved useful for transparency and accountability, and to aid ongoing recruitment for the project.

Cultural background and craft practice

"I was born in Bangladesh so I grew up quite embedded in my own culture. In Bangladesh, as I grew up my aunts all embroidered. My mum made all our clothes. It was just what you did. Everybody had the skills."

Majeda, Textile Designer, London

For many of the participants in this project, craft practice was integral to their family life and environment growing up. Participants who were born in Asia and Africa and now live in the UK described how craft practice was prevalent not only in family life but within communities. Majeda, quoted above, said when she was growing up "everything was made from scratch", and the women in her family spent a lot of time in the home, making and cooking. Jemima, a jewellery designer born in Nigeria and living in London, described how her background inspired her love for craft:

"If one has been brought up in countryside that is when you discover the beauty of artisans. The making has a value, and that was where I got my interest in making from. For me to be able to make, it is my background where it came from."

Jemima, Jewellery Designer, London

An important motivation for participating in craft for many of the participants was related to their background and upbringing, often outside of the UK where certain craft traditions persist within communities. Tusheeta, a jewellery designer in Birmingham, described her experience of making in her home country of India, where "the crafts people were the people with all the skills." And where craft practice is "something very traditional, something which is very labour intensive, highly skilled and done as a community." For many of the makers interviewed the prevalence of craft in their culture and upbringing informed their impulse to carry on making into adulthood.

Craft, identity and preserving techniques of the past

With craft being an important part of many of the makers' backgrounds, the reasons for their participation go beyond the recent growth in craft, or the 'maker movement' and increased opportunities to make and sell, driven by online platforms such as Etsy (Luckman, 2015). Many of the makers interviewed felt they simply had to make because it was a part of who they were. Jemima expressed this, and said she felt like she was "on a different planet" when she was making. Jules, a textile designer in London, said that the process of making was important for her health and wellbeing:

"I enjoy the tactile element of it, the process of actually using the knitting machine, choosing the colours.

Also, I find that it helps me health-wise as well. I find making is very therapeutic and I think, if I was just to have all of the collection made for me and all I would be doing is selling it, I'd just be a salesman. I wouldn't be a maker. So it would be very different. I don't think I'd be very happy about that."

Jules, Textile Designer, London

Other participants expressed a similar love for the process of making, which never left them even while working in other occupations. These stories highlight the importance of making in the everyday lives of participants, and the importance of encouraging creativity and individual flourishing.

For some there was a sense of responsibility to preserve techniques and expertise of the past. For example, Amarjeet, a textile designer based in London, talked about wanting to preserve craft techniques from her Indian heritage. She described how she is learning the embroidery technique of 'phulkari' which means 'flower work'. She said that the technique "died out a long time ago" but there are groups of women in India looking to revive the craft, and she is looking to visit the country to learn more. Amarjeet described some of the phulkari pieces she has received as "mind-boggling" in reference to the detail and complexity of the embroidery.

There was a concern expressed by others about the potential 'dying out' of craft in their culture. Arati, a scarf designer based in London, describes where she is from in India, where it remains that traditional clothes are made and tailored, but younger generations are increasingly wearing Western clothes or buying ready-made Indian clothes. She said:

"The younger generation doesn't seem to be interested in making their own. I know my mother used to make all our clothes when we were children. She was interested in that. She used to even make dad's shirts. People aren't interested in that anymore."

Arati, Silk Designer, London

Arati is another example of how craft was integral to background and upbringing, inspiring her to pursue craft later on. Arati began her career in book design in India after completing an undergraduate degree in graphic design. She began her painted silk business in 2013, after moving to the UK in 2009. Arati was inspired by the making in her upbringing but wishes she had paid more attention to it.

Arati was able to study towards a creative career and eventually move into making, but that was not the case for some of the other participants.

Craft discouraged by families

Some of the women in this project described how they were discouraged from pursuing any type of career in craft, because it was not considered a secure career choice. Instead they were persuaded to go to university to study towards other, seemingly more prestigious occupations such as lawyer or doctor. Amarjeet, who is from a British South Asian family, said that she had always wanted to be creative from a young age, but it was actively discouraged by her father. She said:

"I've always wanted to do art, but it was a big struggle with my […] father. He just thought, "No, it's not something that good Asian girls do," so I had a battle on my hands. I didn't go to university because he refused.

My family are really great. They support me quietly, but they don't really get what I do. When I'm saying, "Oh, I'm doing this work for an exhibition," they look at me like, "Why? Are you selling?" "No?" "So, why are you doing it?"

It's a bit difficult, but I've plugged away and I've just thought, "This is what I want to do."

In Amarjeet's quote it is clear that cultural expectations of British South Asian women can sometimes be a hindrance to creative career aspirations.

This is in tension with the contemporary expectation for young women in particular to 'do what you love' as Angela McRobbie (2016) has highlighted. She argues that the contemporary increase in entrepreneurial creative work in Western economies is facilitated by new and social media but ultimately driven by the idea that young women increasingly do not want to do the jobs their parents did. The idea that craft is not a viable career option for the women in this research may also be linked to the status of craft within their cultural background. As McRobbie and also Rosalind Gill (2010) have highlighted, precarious creative and craft careers are often held up as an ideal model of work characterised by self-expression, flexibility and autonomy. However, where some of my participants are from and where they are brought up, craft is ubiquitous and part of everyday life, as routine as cooking or cleaning, and is thus a form of domesticated, feminised work which tends to be devalued (Hochschild, 1997). Parminder Bhachu (2005) highlights this in her work on the British Asian fashion economy, describing how initially, it was a need based economy, "in which such skills were critical if you wanted your children, yourself and your men to be clothed" (2005:4), in a similar sentiment to Arati's quote earlier in this section. Bhachu importantly highlights the craft and entrepreneurial skills the women developed, which make a crucial contribution to the British fashion economy.

For the women in this research, their progression into a craft career is characterised by the tension between cultural expectation and norms, and the desire to start their own craft business to do what they love. The cultural perceptions of craft as a less secure career could be contributing to the relatively homogenous craft sector, both online and offline. As a result of this, makers try to establish a career later in life (Luckman, 2018). Indeed, most of the participants in this research had other careers before returning to craft practice later on. It is also important to consider how for many of the makers, craft practice is something they feel they 'had' to do, whether they make a career out of it or not.

In this section I have provided some insights into the experiences of a group of women in the craft sector whose practice can be both inspired and hindered by their cultural background and upbringing. In the next section I will focus on social media, and some of the challenges they face when using social media as part of their craft practice, highlighting some of the potential barriers contributing to the lack of diverse craft visible in certain online spaces.

Challenges of using social media for women makers of colour

The interviews and the two social media workshops for this project highlighted a series of challenges for the makers using social media as part of their practice. Many of the challenges apply generally to most creative practitioners using social media, such as having the time to maintain social media platforms and feeling the pressure to keep an online presence up to date, which I have acknowledged in previous research (see Patel, 2017). In this section I will focus on the challenges which were specific to the group of makers who participated in this project, and may resonate with other makers. These challenges centre on a lack of confidence with using social media, both in terms of practical skills and in putting themselves 'out there' online.

Skills gaps and confidence

Arati: "Blowing your trumpet, yes, it's not our thing."

Karen: "Yes, I hear that a lot actually."

Arati: "The thing is, we don't get business training. We get taught how to do things and how to make things, but nobody tells us how to sell it."

For makers who wanted to begin selling their work online and use social media, many felt they did not have the skills or confidence to do so. Many felt that they did not have the right skills to use social media to promote their work, not only in terms of using the platforms effectively, but also in the presentation of their work. Photography was a particular issue. One maker invested in her own camera and lighting equipment and self-taught her product photography by following online tutorials. However, this is simply not possible for everyone. The various skills required to run a craft business were often acknowledged in interviews, with many feeling they did not have them.

"It's not even only marketing. Photographing, see what I mean? This craft business involves so many things, that we do not understand, at all".

Jemima, Jewellery Designer, London

"I'm a person who finds social media and computers so difficult. I've done 12 years of my craft art and I've only just got a website this last month, it's taken me that long. I'm so not interested in that bit, but then everyone says that's what you've got to do."

Lisa, Textile Designer, Birmingham

In talking about photography and getting a website, Jemima and Lisa both refer to the types of skills makers now need in order to build a presence online. In Lisa's quote she mentions that learning how to use a computer was something "everyone" told her she "had to do". There is a sense here that she is concerned about being left behind, not being able to keep up with "everyone" who is engaged with the digital. For Majeda these concerns related to some of the specifics of social media:

"I use hashtags every now and then. I just use the same hashtag or two or three. It's 'craft', 'weave', you know? It's probably very limited. I've got no idea how to even begin engaging with hashtag communities."

Majeda

Again here there is a sense of needing to engage with online communities, but a hesitance with where to begin. The functionality of some platforms can indeed be an obstacle, which was evident in the workshops where some participants did not know what a hashtag was. This was also the case for Lisa, who struggled to use Facebook when she first installed it on her smartphone. This almost resulted in her missing out on potential opportunities:

"I didn't even know that on Facebook there's a button, if people don't know you and they leave you a message. I'd missed an important bloody message from [a company] in Birmingham, they were asking me to go into schools as an Asian musician and do workshops. But because I didn't know there was that button there I missed that bloody email."

Lisa

These insights are concerning, and demonstrate that social media and digital skills should not be taken for granted. Attendees at the Birmingham workshop said that they appreciated the free social media training provision which they could previously access via Google's Digital Garage facility in central Birmingham, which provided free face-to-face advice for people looking to develop digital skills. The facility closed in summer 2018. The workshops in this research demonstrate there is a need for such free provision, which is crucial in order to address concerns about the 'digital divide' which some suggest is increasing (Ragnedda and Muschert, 2013). I suggest that by not addressing digital skills needs and provision, existing inequalities in craft and the creative industries in general will only widen. The stories in this section demonstrate the increasing need for digital skills in order for craft practitioners to continue making a living from their work.

A second challenge relates to having a presence online, and the potential issues which can arise from that, particularly for women of colour.

Online presence and feeling 'exposed'

"Do I really want to open myself up to criticism? Do I want the whole world to see what I'm doing and then people saying, 'Well, actually, no, it's pretty rubbish. Why are you doing this? Give it up, girl.'"

Amarjeet

The above quote by Amarjeet demonstrates her hesitance in posting about her craft work online, and the potential to open herself up to criticism. Many of the participants in this research were hesitant about 'putting themselves out there' on social media for fear of criticism of themselves and their work. Some participants have tried to address this by posting very little about their personal life, maintaining a clear boundary between the personal and professional in their online presence. However, in creative and craft work the story of the maker can be equally as important as the craft product itself, particularly in online selling (Luckman, 2015).

One participant said that her ethnicity made her hesitant about posting about her personal life or even putting a picture of herself online:

"I just got onto Instagram a year ago, trying to build that. That's one of the hardest things to do. A couple of months ago, I put my face on it, which I never thought I would ever do, because I was more scared of being- okay, I put my face on it, I'm ethnic, people wouldn't rate my work as much and stuff like that. I was thinking because of the colour of my skin."

Nascine, jewellery maker, London

Nascine told me she was worried she would lose followers if they saw who she was. When I asked her why she felt like that, she said it was "just a feeling" she had which she felt was silly. She said: "I'm from the Caribbean. It's a small island coming into a big world, and, knowing everything from my background, it can be a bit scary to say, 'This is the big wide world. How are they going to ever see you?'" A similar conversation arose in the Birmingham workshop, when two of the participants, who were black women, also said they did not post a picture of themselves online, for fear of it potentially devaluing their work or exposing themselves to criticism.

Recent studies have found that black women receive more online abuse online than anyone else (Amnesty International, 2018; Litchfield et al, 2018) and so the concerns shared by the black women I worked with in this research are crucial to highlight. Litchfield et al notes the "intersectional oppression" faced by tennis player Serena Williams online, and suggest that social media platforms such as Twitter could potentially reproduce inequalities, because such online abuse is rarely addressed.

With social media being increasingly essential for makers yet potentially fraught with risk, particularly for women makers of colour, are there potential opportunities for change? The next section outlines some of the positive possibilities for women makers of colour using social media, drawing on insights from this research.

Opportunities of using social media

From this research there are two ways in which women makers of colour can use social media for the benefit of themselves and their practice: utilising the principle of 'mutual aid' and creating or getting involved with online safe spaces, to share knowledge and grow confidence.

Mutual aid

'Mutual aid' is a term I adopted from De Peuter and Cohen (2015) who use the term to describe creative workers mobilising to resist unfavourable labour conditions. In my research on artists' use of social media (Patel, 2017) I use the term 'mutual aid' to characterise the activity of women artists online, who preferred to share the work of other women, more so than promoting their own work. The strategy of sharing the work of other women online fostered a reciprocal relationship, whereby sharing the work of others could mean that they could return the favour in the future. The act of mutual aid I argue could contribute to an amplifying of online visibility of women's art, and the same could apply to women makers of colour. Finding other makers through Twitter and Instagram hashtags, Facebook and LinkedIn groups is one way to begin fostering these relationships. Meeting at events and workshops 'offline', then following each other online is another method to find other like-minded makers online.

Finding and/or creating 'safe' spaces online

The possibility of creating relatively safe spaces online for women makers of colour was discussed in the workshops. By 'safe', this means an online group or environment that is supportive, encouraging and fosters the exchange of advice and knowledge. Whereas mutual aid is designed to enhance online visibility, safe online spaces can be used to build confidence and skills. One such example could be the Twitter hashtag #BAMECraftUK, created by workshop participants for this project. Conversations and knowledge could be shared on this hashtag between participants. Another possibility is a Facebook group which can be set to private, or an Instagram 'pod' whereby when a maker has a post they want to be shared, they send it via direct message to a group of friends to share, a form of 'mutual aid' which can raise visibility, but in a relatively private and safe way between online friends.

Social media does have some positive possibilities for makers, however that does not obscure its issues, and will not completely address the persisting societal concerns around inequalities and discrimination, which are as stark in the creative industries as anywhere else. The next section outlines recommendations for next steps.

Conclusion and recommendations

This report presents findings from a 12-month AHRC-funded project exploring how social media could support diversity in craft practice. The research provides insights into the experiences of women makers of colour based in the UK, mostly in London and Birmingham. It highlights the role of their culture, background and upbringing on their practice, some of the barriers they potentially face to a craft career and the current challenges and opportunities of using social media. The makers were all

women from a black or minority ethnic (BAME) background, and this report provides important qualitative insights into their experiences. Further research could explore other intersectional experiences of makers, encompassing class and LGBT+ makers, for instance.

In addition, research in this area should consider craft practice outside of the large metropolitan cities of London and Birmingham, particularly within communities where craft practice may be occurring, but is not necessarily visible online. It would be useful to highlight the types of 'everyday' craft practice occurring within families and groups whereby the makers do not seek to sell their work, but instead do it because they love it, much like some of the women highlighted in this report. Such insights would add to our knowledge of the UK craft sector, which remains centred on occupational crafts and increasingly the online marketplace.

Drawing on insights from this research, I recommend the following steps for research and policy:

- Many makers do not know where to start with social media, and free digital skills provision, in the style of Google Digital Garage, is scarce. Free digital skills training which is open and accessible can go some way to helping makers build their digital skills and confidence. The model used in this project is a good example of how connecting with local creative hubs such as STEAMhouse in Birmingham can help to facilitate this.

- In research and policy, it is important to voice the experiences of individual makers and their motivations, as this research has attempted to do. However, caution is required with any research or schemes which attempt to address 'diversity' (Saha, 2018). It is crucial to acknowledge intersectionality in such schemes and to consider the needs and experiences of individuals wherever possible.

- This research has shown how craft practice is important for creativity and wellbeing. In order to address inequalities in craft and the wider creative sector, recent work on cultural capabilities (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017) and sustainable prosperity (Oakley and Ward, 2018) is instructive, in that it encourages research and policy to foster creative opportunities for all. The notion of sustainable prosperity is useful in that it purports that "people everywhere have the capability to flourish as human beings – within the ecological and resource constraints of a finite planet". While it is crucial to continue to make the economic case for craft, it is also important to acknowledge its positive impact on health and wellbeing for individuals, and further research could be done to highlight this.

This project will be followed on with a two-year AHRC Leadership Fellows project, 'Supporting diversity and expertise development in the contemporary craft economy' which seeks to address some of the calls for further research highlighted in this report and extend the reach and impact of this initial project. Comments about this report are welcome, please contact me at karen.patel@bcu.ac.uk.

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