

# SOCIALLY ENGAGED STITCHING

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# STITCHING RESEARCH PRACTICE

How does stitch, as a socially engaged and participatory method, offer different understandings of what research can be?

Two examples of the outcomes this type of research can produce:

- Women & Domesticity Duster Project
- The Domestic Academic Quilt

# MAKING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

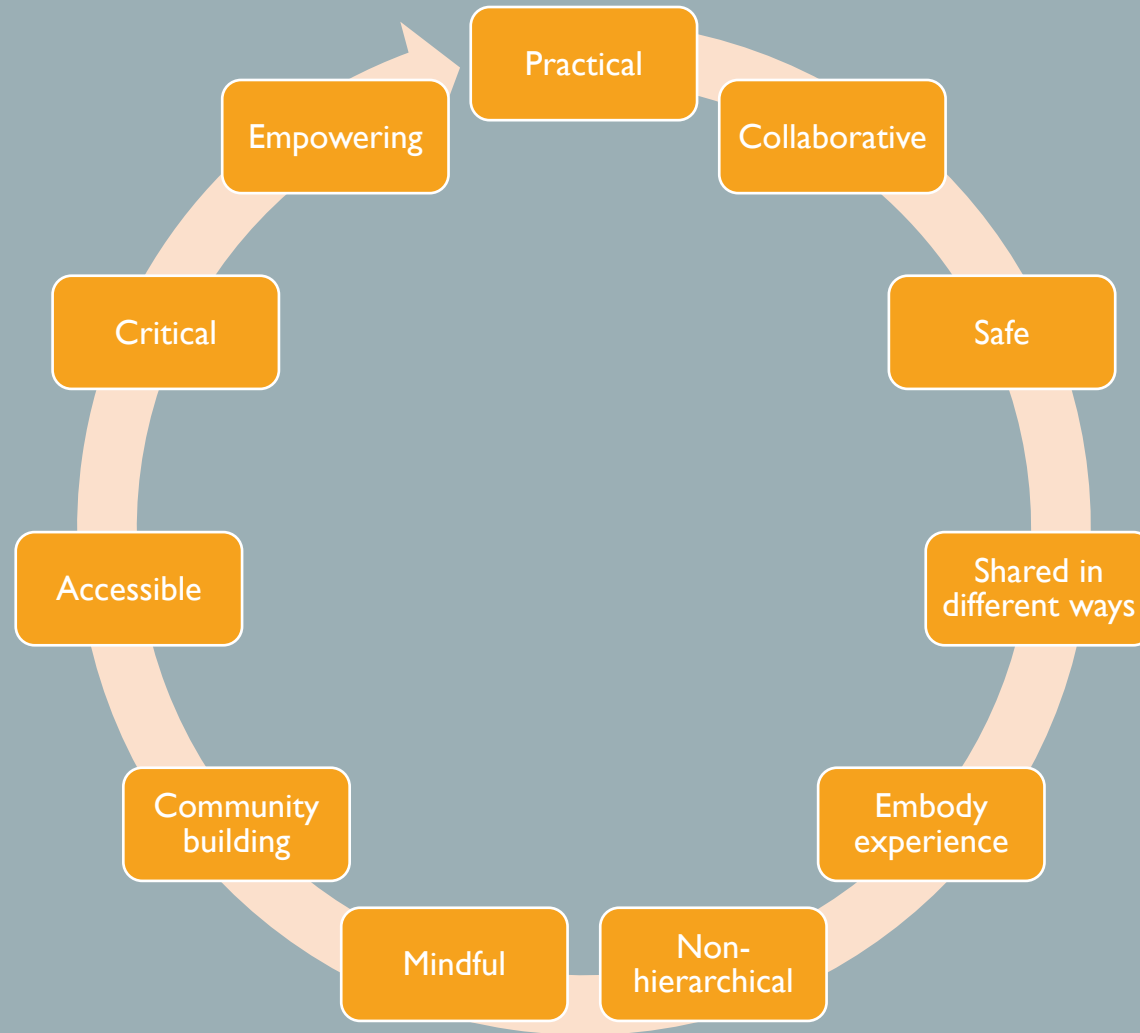
‘Making is connecting...because through making things and sharing them with the world, we increase our engagement with our social and physical environments’.

‘Making things gives us a sense of wonder, agency, and possibilities in the world.’

*David Gauntlett (2011) Making is Connecting*

I argue that:

# SOCIALLY ENGAGED STITCHED RESEARCH CAN BE...



Two examples...

## WHY STITCH? WOMEN'S LEGACY

In *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years* (1994) Elizabeth Wayland Barber argues that working with thread: spinning, weaving, sewing etc., historically became a women's primary means of earning money out of practicality and necessity.

The feminine link to embroidery is strong. In *The Subversive Stitch* (1984) Roszita Parker describes how it 'has provided a source of pleasure and power for women, while being indissolubly linked to their powerlessness' (Parker 11).



# THE DUSTER PROJECT

Women & Domesticity – What's your Perspective?

2014 – Date

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

Invites perspectives and experiences on women and domesticity to be hand-embroidered onto a duster

Established in 2014 and exhibited widely

Dusters signify the low status of invisible domestic labour

Practice-based and collaborative

Ongoing call for contributions

Without exclusion

Gives those who are silenced a voice

Starts conversations that entice social change

## WOMEN & DOMESTICITY WHAT'S YOUR PERSPECTIVE?

Love it, loath it, resent it, or embrace it?  
An out-dated expectation or a predictable reality?  
What does it mean to you personally?



### STITCH YOUR THOUGHTS ONTO A DUSTER

Then join others in an exhibition. Don't be distracted by the duster, it's not about cleaning, it's about your personal views and experiences. It could be a statement, memory, quote, or question - it's up to you. Entries welcome from experienced stitchers to those who can hardly thread a needle - it's your opinion that matters.

For more information visit: <https://domesticdusters.wordpress.com>

Donations made to Women's Aid

# SHARING THIS RESEARCH

Active participation and discussion is fundamental to this research project.

It is shared via in a variety of social settings:

- Community pop-ups
- Exhibitions and workshops
- Museums and art galleries
- Academic conferences/symposiums
- Academic publications
- Social Media (Blog and Instagram)
- Word of mouth







Within this practice: dialogues emerge as words and images embroidered upon the dusters



Thoughts and conversations spark when work is exhibited



Stories are shared, along with a sense of solidarity and belonging



**vanemarr** ...

**vanemarr** Inspired by #suffragette banners: 'Domestic is not a Female word' stitched by myself this week. I made it in response to a paper I'm writing but it seems quite timely after the UK government's insulting Stay at Home ad that came out this week (now withdrawn) which depicts us ladies doing all things domestic. 😘 Perhaps it's time to start a #domesticrevolution ? #domesticdusters #craftist #craftivism #bethechange #houseworknohousewife #woodenspoon #embroideryart #fiberart

6w

**hazelarah** I completely agree!

👍 🗨️ 📌

Liked by **kayleighpeters\_ceramics** and **214 others**

JANUARY 30

😊 Add a comment... **Post**

Digital outcomes are tagged, shared and commented upon via social media



A socially engaged, participatory community of practice is created and sustained

# THE DOMESTIC ACADEMIC QUILT

Finding Time to Write and Care in a Global Pandemic

2021

## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Call out to join a collaborative project, stitching and storying their experiences of attempting to complete research during lockdown.

Each participant answered a questionnaire, attended two online workshops, completed a physical fabric quilt square and recorded a short voice over.

Dates and deadlines were arranged to fit with school times and holidays.

Outcome is an interactive quilt, available online, and a physical quilt for exhibition (Covid permitting).

Due to the nature of the funding received, this project is UK based. The background of those who responded to the call has led to a focus on CIS gender women in heterosexual relationships.



# WHY THIS MATTERS

Document the impact of COVID-19 through an accessible output

Address gendered inequalities, enticing policy changes and discussion

Acknowledge damage to women academic's mental health and work/life balance

REF 2024 – will women be under-represented?

Protect women's roles and credibility

Create a uniquely engaging outcome, easily shared online in a variety of contexts.

Employ creative, craftivist and autoethnographic practice

Opportunity to repair mental health through creativity and community





## WHY STITCH A QUILT?

‘Quilts stimulate memories of warmth, security and comfort. They are also inexorably linked to the feminine’

*Sue Prichard (2010) Quilts 1700-2010, Hidden Histories, Untold Stories.*

Autoethnography is: ‘research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political’.

*Ellis, C. (2004). The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography.*



# RESEARCH METHOD: WORKSHOPS

## **Workshop One**

Split into two groups of twelve for ease of sharing and available time.

Guided sharing of experience with drawing and paper/fabric manipulations prompts and exercises to build a visual outcome.

## **Drop-in-and-Stitch**

All welcome.

Stitching together broke down boundaries, built on previous workshop conversations. Sense of community and collaboration.

## **Independent Work**

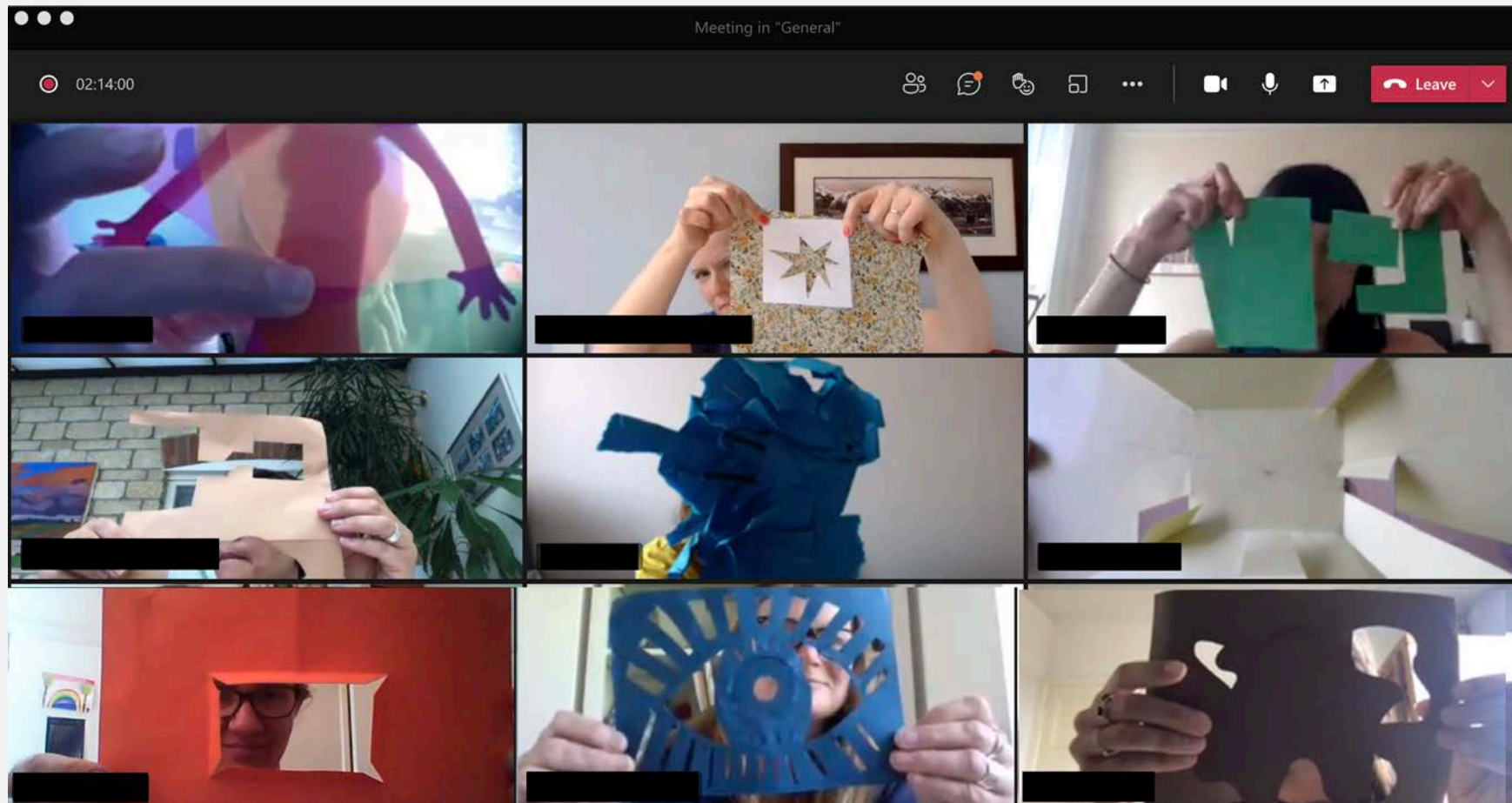
Each of the participants created their quilt panel in their own home. This addressed challenges of space and time as it could be completed around other activities.

## **Workshop Two**

All participants

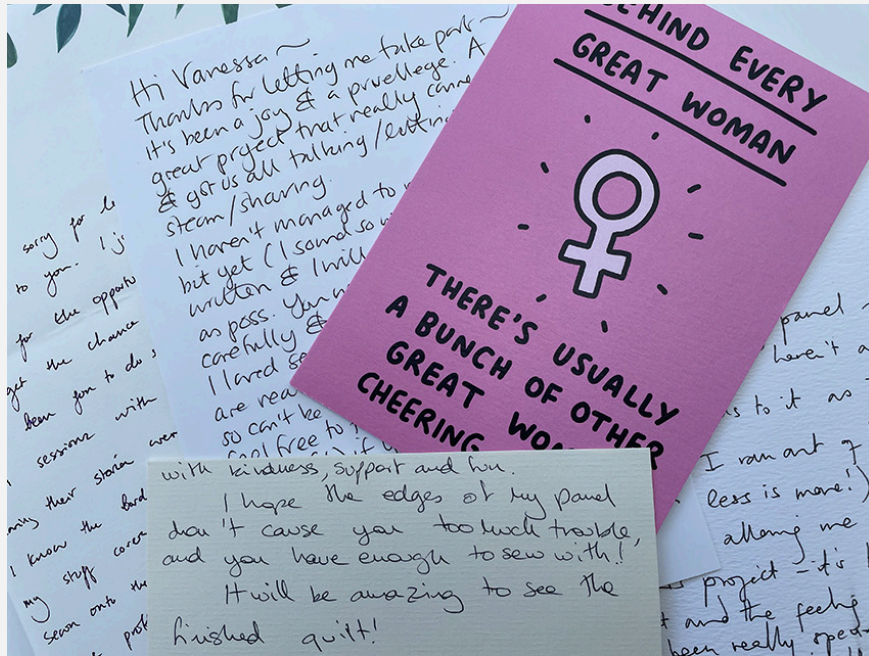
Presenting and sharing completed or in progress quilt square to the group.

Square then posted to me to photograph and stitch together.



Online workshops via Teams enabled busy working mothers and carers to participate. Babies were fed, chicken pox nursed, and home schooling supported whilst we met.

# BUILDING A RESEARCH COMMUNITY: “EVERYONE NEEDED TO SHARE”



“...the feeling of community has been really special at a time of so much despair”

“It’s been a joy and a privilege. A great project that really connected and got us all talking/letting off steam/sharing”

“...[being on Teams] with the others – seeing their work and hearing their stories was inspiring, humbling and moving”



# SHARING THIS RESEARCH: IN PERSON

Exhibition

Conferences

Tangible

Impactful

It's huge - needs storing





## SOCIALLY ENGAGED STITCHING

- Enables dialogues that are accessible and tangible
- Brings people together in new and different ways
- Breaks down barriers
- Facilitates solidarity and shared purpose
- Is inclusive and non-hierarchical
- Challenges pre-existing notions of rigorous academic research
- Creates communities of practice

## FINAL THOUGHTS

‘The very essence of craftivism lies in creating something that gets people to ask questions; we invite others to join a conversation about the social and political intent of our creations’.

*Betsy Greer (2014) Craftivism: The Art & Craft of Activism.*

This conversation, can begin with a single stitch...