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Making With Others: Working with textile craft groups as a means of research

AUTHORS
Emma Shercliff,
Amy Twigger Holroyd

ABSTRACT
This paper discusses making with others as a means of researching the experience of making, with a particular focus on textiles. Group textile craft activities are widespread today; however, there are few documented examples of research by craft practitioners taking place in this context. The activities used by the authors, relating to stitching and knitting, demonstrate that 'making with others' is a highly versatile approach that can be adapted according to the variables presented by diverse research aims and questions. Shercliff's research is explored in detail as a case study, with three group making activities documented and evaluated. These examples are used to identify a number of attributes, which support the comparison and development of research-led participatory textile making activities. The strengths and challenges of these methods are discussed: a key strength is the gathering of rich data during creative activity, while a central challenge is the performance of multiple roles by the practitioner-researcher.

KEY WORDS
Craft, textiles, research methods, practitioner-researcher

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INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the activity of making with others as a means of researching the experience of making, with a particular focus on textiles. It draws on the methods used by both authors in their doctoral research projects, relating to hand-stitching (Shercliff) and hand-knitting (Twigger Holroyd).

Making with others—whether in social groups or formal workshops, working on individual or collective projects—has a long history in textiles. For example, there is evidence of people getting together to knit in groups since at least the eighteenth century (Rutt, 1987). Today, we see people making textiles together in a variety of contexts: in organised guilds and informal groups, via one-off projects and ongoing initiatives, and creating a wide range of work, from the useful to the frivolous to the intentionally political.[1] The skills, expectations, learning experiences and achievements of these people are also wide ranging. This diverse collaborative and social activity is both a fascinating topic of research and a potentially productive means of investigating it: conventional qualitative research methods such as interviews tending to be somewhat removed from the embodied and situated process of making.

The authors began their respective doctoral studies aiming to use group making activities as a means of research, though—as will be explained shortly—their projects were quite different in terms of research aims, questions and focus. Each had professional experience of running textile workshops and facilitating group projects and thus was familiar with the practicalities and characteristics of these contexts. However, they found there was little literature to support them in developing their research activities, with a distinct lack of documented examples of research with textile craft groups to refer to.

This paper aims to address that gap by seeking to establish a critical dialogue around methods based on group making activities, argue for their value in realising research objectives, and provide examples for use by future researchers. A further aim is to generate debate surrounding the issues raised to support further use of such methods in artistic and design research. In order to do this it was felt important to share the strengths of making with others as a means of research, along with the challenges that can arise.

1 / For example, The Quilters' Guild of The British Isles has regional groups across the country and regularly organises collective making projects for its members; informal knitting groups, where participants typically work on individual garments or accessories to wear, have sprung up in many workplaces and social spaces, frequently under the banner of 'Stitch 'n Bitch' (stitchnbitch.org). Notable examples of one-off projects include The Great Tapestry of Scotland—which involved over a thousand volunteer stitchers (scotlandstapestry.com), and the consciously political Wool Against Weapons project which saw thousands of knitters produce a seven-mile-long scarf to campaign against the replacement of the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system (woolagainstweapons.co.uk). Ongoing initiatives include the Big Knit, run by drinks company Innocent, which encourages participants to knit miniature hats to raise money and awareness for the charity Age UK (thebigknit.co.uk).

THE RESEARCH PROJECTS

The authors will briefly introduce each research project here in order to set the scene and to demonstrate that 'making with others' is a versatile approach that can be adapted to suit diverse research interests.

Twigger Holroyd's research explored amateur fashion making as a strategy for sustainability. Although homemade clothes are often seen as sustainable, this view is partly based on a simplistic and romantic attitude, which has received little critical examination. Thus, the research aimed to investigate knitters' lived experiences of making and wearing homemade clothes. A complementary strand of activity involved the development of techniques for reworking knitted garments: this supported the further aim of investigating amateur makers' experiences of designing and remaking. A group of seven amateur knitters, recruited specifically for the project, were interviewed individually before taking part in a series of workshop sessions, spaced over several months. The workshop activities gradually shifted from group discussion whilst making, through structured design and making tasks, to individual projects. Further material relating to the research questions was gathered via an informal participatory knitting activity, run at summer music festivals.

Shercliff's research grew out of her involvement in participatory community art projects and a curiosity to investigate further the physical, emotional and social satisfactions expressed by participants. Questioning the ways in which the relationship between an individual and a group might be articulated through their crafting skills, her study aimed to explore the correlation between the nature of embodied knowledge acquired and practised through the rhythms and patterns of skilled hand-stitching, and the crafting of mutuality and cooperation acquired and practised through participation in collective making. The micro context of this research concerned the dynamic relationship between practical skill, the body and its proximity to tools, materials and other people during actual experiences of making. Her principal research methods involved making textiles with other people in a variety of settings, combined with recorded conversations with participants and close observation of these experiences.

These outlines highlight a key difference between the authors' projects. Shercliff's research placed an intense focus on the material experience of the making process: the characteristics of hand-stitching skills as they are felt and valued by practitioners. Twigger Holroyd took a broader view, examining the relationship between the making process and the wearing of homemade items. However, both authors shared an ontological position—each drawing on their previous experience as practitioners, which contributed to the design of the research. There are epistemological similarities in that they each wanted to explore the nature of knowledge known in (and through) making, and each was interested in the social context of making—hence the emphasis on making with groups, rather than multiple individuals. A further similarity is that of gender: the majority of participants in their activities were female, reflecting a wider gender imbalance in textile craft participation. The association of textiles with femininity and domesticity has a long and complex history (Parker, 1984/2010), and although this was not the core subject of either project, both authors acknowledge an awareness of gender as an important contextual issue.

RELATED METHODS

Before describing their activities in detail, the authors will briefly outline other research methods, which overlap with their own. These methods offered starting points for the development of their ideas and highlighted critical issues. While practice-based research in art and design has a relatively short history, it has a growing literature, which offers a logical starting point for any researcher undertaking work in this area. However, the majority of this literature is concerned with individual practice, where making is used as a reflective tool to examine the practice itself (e.g. Gray & Malins, 2004; de Freitas, 2007). Although they both have individual creative practices, they deliberately set out to use making with others as a central activity in their research, and so needed to look elsewhere for relevant methods.

The authors' emphasis on the processes of making corresponds to the concept of 'creative research methods', developed by David Gauntlett, building on previous work in artistic practice, visual sociology and visual methods. He describes them as 'methods in which people express themselves in non-traditional (non-verbal) ways, through making … a physical thing' (Gauntlett, 2007, p. 25). Gauntlett's work highlights the value of making with the hands, and thus offers an important reference for the participatory textile-based research presented here. However, Gauntlett's projects have used making as a method of investigating 'external' questions, such as identity. In contrast, the authors sought to use making with others to explore themes inherent to the making process.

The anthropological approach of participant observation can be an effective method of investigating first-hand the experience of making with others. Trevor Marchand's extensive fieldwork explores the on-site embodied learning of practical skills through his own apprenticeship to building (Marchand, 2001; 2009) and fine woodwork trades (Marchand, 2010). This usually involves the researcher joining and being accepted by an existing group; Shercliff used this method in one of her activities. However, establishing a new group, and running workshops specifically for the research project—as the authors did in the rest of their activities—differs in that it places the researcher as both facilitator and participant; the researcher's specialist knowledge about making directs the workshop activity. This dual role, of facilitator and participant, can also be identified in action research, a method developed in educational contexts and the social sciences and often used by practitioner-researchers. Key to action research is the involvement of the researcher and participants in projects that aim to improve their situation through the implementation of remedial action (Robson, 1993). Although both Shercliff and Twigger Holroyd were very interested in the experiences of the participants in their research, their intentions were not to implement change.

There are, therefore, several established and emerging methods that share characteristics with the authors' approach to making with others. However, there is no single method that embraces all of the authors' activities, particularly considering their shared interest in learning more about the processes of making and their focus on articulating the material experience of collective craft practice.

CASE STUDY: ARTICULATING STITCH

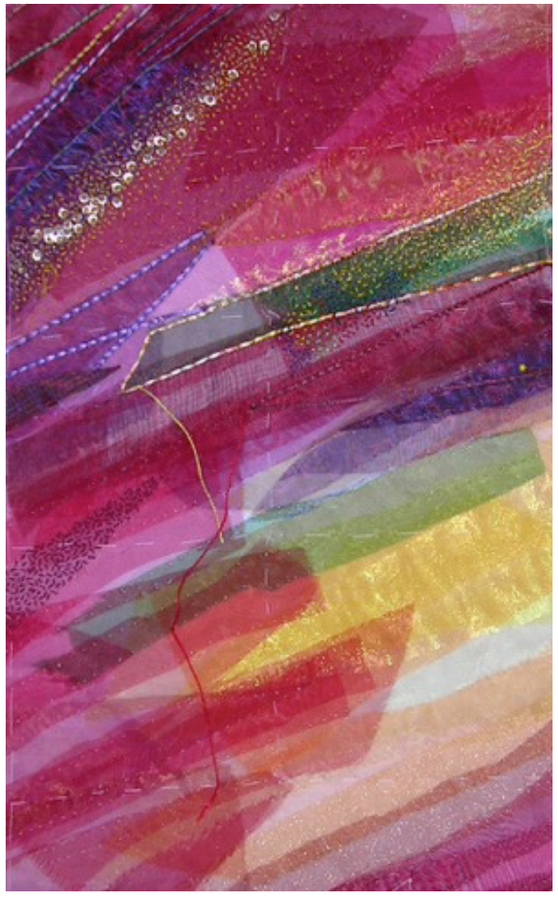
This section focuses on aspects of Shercliff's research as a case study, documenting and evaluating three of the group making activities that she carried out: participation in an embroidery group with regular monthly meetings over two years (Activity 1 in the case study); tightly planned workshops designed to explore a specific question (Activity 2 in the case study); and a commission that arose during the project which was incorporated into the research (Activity 3 in the case study). By describing this case in detail, the authors were able to examine the complexity and richness of one research context, yet draw out insights which they believe can be applied more broadly (Yin, 2003), helping them to develop a critical understanding of making with others as a distinct approach to research. Later on in this paper the discussion will be opened out after including three of Twigger Holroyd's activities (alongside the three of Shercliff's described here) in a table of comparison.

ACTIVITY 1: JOINING IN

Early in her research Shercliff made contact with an embroidery group local to where her family live. This familiarity made it relatively straightforward for her to observe the group working together, and later to join in as a participant observer (Figure 1).

Figure 1 /
Activity 1: collective stitching in the embroidery group.
Image credit: Shercliff.

Shercliff's participation, observation and conversation firstly confirmed the shared goals of the embroidery project. The participants wanted to contribute to a community project that they felt was worthy of their time and effort, and to be a part of a socially stimulating and supportive group that they might not otherwise have been able to access. Secondly, her participation led her to identify what came to be a key focus for the research: she sensed a rhythm of practice emerging between the social function of the group, the talk, and the practical tasks undertaken. Drawing on feminist approaches to linguistics (Lakoff, 1975; Jones, 1990; Coates, 1988) she drew connections between the structure of the conversations and the form of the embroideries, finding that the conversation and the embroideries were jointly produced: the rhythms of one influencing the rhythms of the other, and both serving to strengthen the attachments formed (Figures 2 & 3).



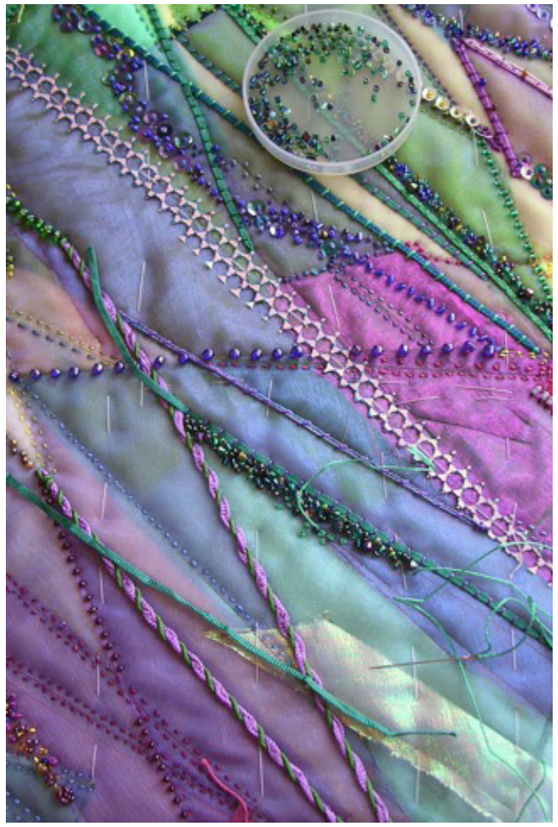


Figure 2 & 3 /
Activity 1: short bursts of embroidered stitches over layered shards of organza reflect the frequently interrupted conversation threads and accommodate varied skill levels and aesthetic tastes.
Image credit: Shercliff.

Shercliff began the research with a sense that the practical knowledge of hand-stitching enables knowing more than just the technical skills of the craft. She found being involved in the group's activities gave access to a type of knowledge, which concerns the craft of mutual cooperation (Sennett, 2012). As with other traditions of oral culture, this knowledge is transmitted through the whole performance: turning up and joining in, helping to set up equipment and sharing tasks. This practical involvement integrates within it a system of behaviour, ideas and practices that transcend the embroideries themselves. By joining the group as a passive participant rather than a project designer or coordinator, Shercliff was able to actively take notice of the mechanisms that hold an individual in the group. After all, this type of knowledge can only be known by participating in the process: 'Knowing is not necessarily a matter of saying and representing what is the case but can also be a kind of practical involvement with the world' (Alcoff & Dalmiya, 1993, p. 235).

ACTIVITY 2: TAKING A THREAD FOR A WALK

At a later stage in the research, Shercliff wanted to explore specific questions concerning people's perceptions and assumptions about hand-stitching as both a functional and aesthetic craft. She was also curious about the words that might be used to describe what the tacit knowledge of hand-stitching feels like. She devised workshop tasks that she hoped would prompt spontaneous and intuitive responses to physical involvement in the stitching tasks, generate discussion and thereby provide a closer view of making. Needing participants who would be comfortable reflecting on their experiences of creative tasks in group discussion, she turned to groups of students who she felt would be able to express a diverse set of experiences and opinions.

One of these structured workshops, held with five fellow research students, explored perceptions of a hand-made aesthetic. Shercliff asked the participants to make value judgements of simple stitching tasks she had executed prior to the workshop, ranking them according to their knowledge of aesthetic appeal and functional quality. They then stitched their own versions of the tasks, following the same instructions she had used (Figure 4), and repeated the ranking exercise. These pieces and the participants' experiences of making them formed the basis of their ensuing discussion. This particular workshop demonstrated that the knowledge gained from doing is a notably different experience from looking. Several participants altered their perceptions as a result of executing the tasks themselves, and their evaluations of Shercliff's original examples changed.

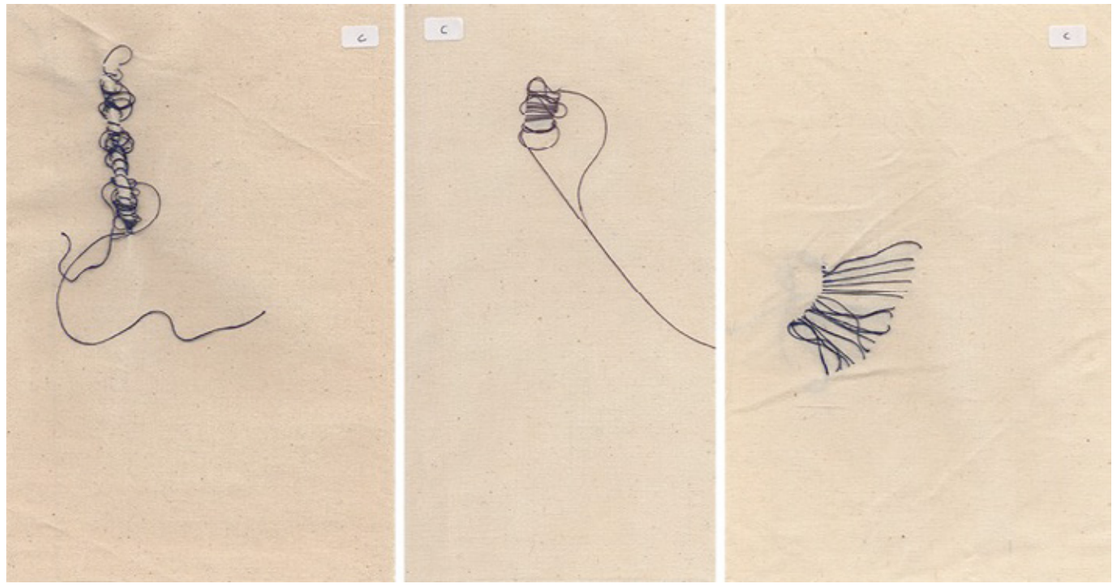


Figure 4 /
Activity 2: Samples stitched by Shercliff (left) and workshop participants (centre, right), following the instruction to stitch a line of parallel stitches without pulling the thread taut.
Image credit: Shercliff.

Another workshop—this time organised with four undergraduate students—comprised a series of tasks designed to focus participants' attention on the manner in which they make stitches, what they choose to represent using stitching, and how they might interpret this in words. Shercliff's aim was again to use their spontaneous responses to the hand-stitching tasks—such as that shown in Figure 5—as a way in to deeper discussion. Initially, the participants found it difficult to describe how they had set about the tasks. The activities were approached without recourse to language, in the manner described by Pallasmaa: 'Artistic images expose us to images and encounters of things before they have been trapped by language. We touch things and grasp their essence before we are able to speak about them.' (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 36). However, when probed, they began to articulate their experiences, and the words and analogies they used gave an insight into the ways in which they understood the physical and emotional components of their skills.

Figure 5 /
Activity 2: Personal responses to found fabrics. A participant's attempt to overpower the material with her stitching in order to transform it.
Image credit: Shercliff.

Shercliff found devising specific workshop tasks to be an effective way of exploring in depth a variety of perspectives on a precise aspect of her research. Both workshops involved small numbers of participants and a high level of trust and intimacy, which enabled her to probe the participants' responses to her questions, resulting in richly detailed conversations containing raw interpretations of their making tasks. Crucially, her own personal and practical knowledge and experience of stitching enabled her to design making tasks that were likely to prompt interesting conversation.

ACTIVITY 3. SKNITCH: DROP-IN MAKING SESSIONS WITH THE CRAFTSPACE COLLECTIVE

Opportunities to work with other groups of participants arose through commissions, and if appropriate these were incorporated into the research. The Sknitch drop-in workshop event organised by Craftspace[2] was one such opportunity. The event took place at the Clothes Show Live[3] in order to encourage young people to try hand embroidery (amongst other sewing techniques) as a way of creatively customising clothes instead of buying new ones (Craftspace Collective, 2011).

Shercliff was commissioned to facilitate mini making projects for participants with little or no experience of stitching (Figure 6). This presented an excellent opportunity—through hands-on demonstration and guidance—to study the emotional and physical sensations of hand-stitching as experienced by novices. In the role of instructor, she sensed the intense concentration, and watched the clumsy, physical awkwardness as participants attempted to embroider. She observed the frustration felt at not finding the appropriate technique and spoiling materials by having to unpick and re-stitch. Often the resources of their own bodies were not sufficient to coordinate these uncomfortable movements, and help from a second person was required (Figures 7 & 8).

2 / The Birmingham-based organisation Craftspace describes itself as 'developing people, ideas and opportunities through contemporary craft' (Craftspace, 2015). It initiates and supports projects led by experienced practitioners that engage local community groups from diverse social and cultural settings in making activities.

3 / The Clothes Show Live is an annual fashion event held in Birmingham, UK, aimed at informing young people about the UK fashion industry. It features workshops and competitions, information on education and training programmes, and a large retail fair.

Figure 6 /
Activity 3: Learning to stitch at the Clothes Show Live.
Image credit: Joey Vivo for Craftspace.

Figure 7 & 8 /
Activity 3: The physical awkwardness of learning to stitch.
Image credit: Joey Vivo for Craftspace.

For many creative practitioners, responding to commissions to undertake workshops is an integral part of their practice. In this instance Shercliff proposed a workshop that simultaneously responded to the commission and addressed themes arising in her research. The opportunity provided valuable readymade access to a context and group of participants that would have been difficult to organise independently. However, it highlighted potential incompatibilities between the dual roles of researcher and practitioner. For example, as a researcher Shercliff was interested in small practical details and unforeseen turns of events which normally slip by unnoticed in the context of a busy user-centred practical workshop; but, having committed to the activity as a practitioner, there was a limit to how much she could stop and reflect on these events. Documentation raised problems: in a natural workshop setting, video or photographic documentation for research purposes can obstruct the flow and pace of activity. Shercliff found herself reliant upon another staff member who was taking photographs for a different purpose.

REFLECTIONS

One of the aims of this paper is to argue for the value of 'making with others' in realising research objectives. Shercliff's activities provide evidence of the flexibility of this approach: all three fed her central research question—exploring ways in which the relationship between an individual and a group might be articulated through their crafting skills—but took quite different forms and allowed her to approach aspects of the question from different positions. The authors will now discuss a number of insights which emerge from this case study and which include Twigger Holroyd's activities to provide further comparisons.

VALUING EXPERIENCE

Shercliff drew on her specialist knowledge about making, and facilitating making in groups, to direct the varied workshop activities; Twigger Holroyd similarly used her prior experiences to support the activities she carried out. In practical terms, this specialist knowledge included a tacit knowledge of the techniques of hand-stitching and hand-knitting, relevant tool use and manipulation of materials.[4] This knowledge enabled Shercliff to join in with the embroidery group and execute the tasks as a participant (Activity 1); she then drew on the same store of knowledge to plan the tightly structured workshop tasks (Activity 2). Similarly, Twigger Holroyd's making knowledge allowed her to judge in advance the kind of workshop tasks to design, the instructions to give participants and how to plan and organise sequences of tasks.

More fundamentally, the authors' tacit knowledge of making meant that they recognised the sensations, responses and actions of participants and were able to direct their attention to examining this. They experienced interactions with other people through making, and used making to identify what was pertinent about the experience—as Michael Polanyi writes, 'it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning' (Polanyi, 1966/2009, p. 18). Making practical work enabled them to focus the mind, through the body, on gestures, movements, sensations and emotional responses, and they drew upon this 'feeling through' to address their research questions. In cases like this, the insights that arise from using and reflecting upon one's own experience within the research illuminate details that might otherwise be overlooked, or even missed entirely.[5]

Furthermore, the authors explored ideas through their individual making practices as the research developed. Having spent time interviewing and observing stitchers, Shercliff used her own making to 'make sense' of the information she had gathered: 'creating critical understandings about that practice both through action and reflection on it' (Gray & Burnett, 2007, p. 22). By reflecting in this way, her own practice helped her to identify and describe the salient characteristics of hand-stitching, highlight key themes within the material gathered and refine her questions in order to pursue the investigation from alternative positions. Twigger Holroyd used her own making practice to test out the re-knitting techniques, identifying problems the participants might encounter, establishing a personal, 'inside' knowledge of the process and building a vital bond with the group.

As experienced practitioners, for whom making is an integral and longstanding part of life, the danger was that the authors might overlook the value of their own practices to the research. Their specialist knowledge and experience gave them an invaluable closeness to the experiences of their research subjects. This familiarity with the processes of making allowed them to ask particular things that may not occur to an 'outsider', but also perhaps to take their experience for granted.

4 / Tacit knowledge refers to the phenomenon of the body learning how to do something practical—like cooking, driving and making things—and to consequently store this knowledge to use intuitively. It is acquired from watching others and by practising, through physically engaging the body as opposed to reading instructions in a book. Literature in the field of craft cultures examines this in greater depth (e.g. Dormer, 1997; Sennett, 2008; Pallasmaa, 2009).

5 / Bolt (2007) makes this point using the example of David Hockney's research into the drawing methods used by the painter Ingres. It was because of Hockney's own practical knowledge and experience of drawing, particularly as a portrait painter, that he suspected the speed and quality of Ingres' small sketches were not solely due to his proficiency and skill. Hockney's own use of cameras suggested to him that Ingres had made use of similar devices. He ascertained that Ingres had used a camera obscura. This detail concerning Ingres' working methods had until then been missed.

COMPARISONS AND VARIABLES

As explained, the authors used their specialist knowledge to guide a range of group making activities, while exploring quite different areas in terms of research context, aims and questions. In reflecting on the three making-based activities described in Shercliff's case study, and also three making-based activities carried out by Twigger Holroyd, a number of attributes were identified which could be used for comparison, namely: format/ group type; participants' gender and age; type of venue; number of participants; duration of session; regularity of sessions and duration of project; role of researcher; researcher's involvement in making task; nature of group activity; nature of conversation; individual or collective task; method of data collection; and focus of analysis. The following table demonstrates how these attributes were used to find similarities and differences between the six making-based activities.

	Case Study					
Activity	**1. Joining in (Shercliff)**	**2. Taking a thread for a walk (Shercliff)**	**3. Sknitch drop-in making sessions (Shercliff)**	**4. Knitting and talking (Twigger Holroyd)**	**5. Re-knitting studio (Twigger Holroyd)**	**6. The Knitting Circle (Twigger Holroyd)**
Format / group type	Community embroidery group	Groups set up for research	Drop-in	Group set up for research	Group set up for research	Drop-in
Participants' gender and age	Women aged mid-50s to late 80s	Students – women, 1 man aged 22-52	Girls and boys aged 9-15	Women aged 44 to 66	Women aged 44 to 66	Women, men, girls and boys of all ages
Type of venue	Village church community hall	Art schools	Large public event	Researcher's studio	Researcher's studio	Summer open-air music festivals
Number of participants	14 with 7 regular members	5	Roughly 40	7	6	Hundreds in total; up to 40 at any time
Duration of session	3 hours	1-2 hours	9.5 hours	2 hours	6 hours	Around 10 hours per day; each festival runs 3-4 days
Regularity of sessions and duration of project	Weekly meetings over 2.5 years – researcher attended monthly	1st of 3 one-off sessions	One-off event running for 2 days	1st of 7 group sessions, spread over 4 months	6th of 7 group sessions, spread over 4 months	Knitting Tent visits 1-4 festivals every summer
Role of researcher	Participant-observer	Facilitator	Facilitator and instructor	Facilitator	Co-ordinator and technical resource	Instigator (not directly involved during activity)
Researcher's involvement in making task	Researcher joining in set tasks	Specific tasks set by researcher	Open activity overseen by researcher	Open task set by researcher	Broad brief set by researcher	Open activity set up, 'task' understood via signage and material
Nature of group activity	Hand-stitching large embroidered panels for village church	Hand-stitching small samples for researcher	Trying out basic hand embroidery, making small samples to display	Knitting small samples whilst talking	Developing plans for re-knitting individual garments	Contributing to shared knitting, leaving comments on tags
Nature of conversation	Informal conversation about general topics and making tasks	Focused discussion about specific themes to do with making	One-to-one instructions	Focused discussion of researcher's open questions about making	Informal conversation about individual projects and making tasks	Informal conversation about making, some in response to prompt
Individual or collective task	Collective	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual	Collective
Method of data collection	Photo, audio recording and journal notes	Audio recording and pieces made	Photo and journal notes	Audio and video recording and journal notes	Photo, audio and video recording and journal notes	Hand-written tags
Focus of analysis	Words spoken and physical actions	Words spoken and pieces made	Physical actions	Words spoken	Words spoken and physical actions	Words/ images written/ drawn

Table 1 / Comparison of six research activities involving making with others.

To highlight just one of the many comparisons which can be made using this data, similarities can be identified between Activities 1 and 5. Twigger Holroyd's 're-knitting studio' activity (Activity 5) took on a life of its own—becoming more like Shercliff's ongoing project in Activity 1—as the participants gained understanding of, and confidence in, their individual projects. It takes time for researchers and participants to reach a level of intimacy, which potentially nurtures a unique depth and quality

of conversation. In these cases the environment induced by the making activity itself facilitates 'raw' comments from participants that can reveal new or unexpected insights about the making. Meanwhile, the workshops in Activities 2 and 4 are comparable in that they were both structured to investigate responses to a particular theme. However, Shercliff designed specific making tasks in order to generate conversation, while the activity carried out by Twigger Holroyd involved the preparation of specific questions to ask of participants as they worked on an open, technically undemanding making task.

Although Activities 3 and 6 both involved the learning of new skills, in Activity 3 this was the main focus for the researcher, while Activity 6—Twigger Holroyd's drop-in 'Knitting Circle' festival activity—catered for all levels of experience in a more 'open' project. In this example, the participants were left to experiment and produce whatever they wished as a contribution to the shared project. Furthermore, the role of the researcher differed in that Activity 6 was designed to run without Twigger Holroyd's direct intervention, whereas Shercliff's presence in Activity 3 was essential in order to demonstrate and assist participants as they grappled with learning how to stitch and, in the process, observe participants' physical actions and responses to the tasks.

STRENGTHS

The authors see these participatory making methods as having three key strengths. Firstly, it was found that making supports open, constructive conversation, which helps to gain a detailed understanding of the opinions and experiences of the participants. Others have made similar observations. Stitchlinks (2008, p. 3), for instance, suggests that 'being occupied at a certain level appears to prevent the brain from applying its normal prejudices and limitations, which helps to lower barriers making it easier to talk more intimately'. Furthermore, making can slow the pace of conversation, allowing participants to give thought to topics before contributing, rather than—as can be the case with interviews—feeling pressured to generate an instant opinion (Gauntlett, 2007).

Secondly (relating to the gathering of data during the creative activity), rather than talking to makers about their practice retrospectively, the authors were able to hear the participants' feelings first-hand as they engaged in making. Moreover, they were able to draw on much more than words: the spontaneous use of practical skills allows embodied knowledge to come to the fore. Because different types of information can be observed and gathered when making together—visual, oral, experiential and emotional—connections between doing and thinking can be captured simultaneously, and drawn out in informal conversation with participants.

Thirdly, while these group making methods are effective in accessing the knowledge that emerges 'in the moment' of making, they also reveal changes in perception which occur during the process. Even within a single workshop (Activity 2), Shercliff was able to investigate how participants' judgements of simple stitching tasks changed before and after trying them out themselves. In the series of sessions Twigger Holroyd conducted, she was able to observe more gradual changes in the participants' attitudes.

CHALLENGES

Alongside these strengths, the authors encountered a range of challenges in their research. From a practical perspective, there is the challenge of how to capture the making experience. Reflexive note-making after the action helps to turn it into words, although some of the spontaneity of sensation when in contact with tools and materials is lost. In this respect, video and audio recordings were found to be an important asset, providing documentation that can be revisited after the event and often revealing detail that had been missed during the sessions. Of course, video recordings carry their own challenges: Twigger Holroyd used multiple webcams and separate audio recorders to capture the informal conversation that occurred throughout a day-long workshop (Activity 5). While this created incredibly rich data, transcription was not straightforward. Furthermore, there is the issue of where to position the camera, balancing the need to capture the action with the danger of intimidating the participants.

Another challenge relating to these methods arises in terms of analysis: how to make sense of all this data? Of course, analysis needs to be appropriate to the research questions, and thus the authors adopted different strategies. Shercliff was primarily concerned with the 'micro context' of making, and so focused her attention on the physical and visual relationship between the positioning of the body, tools, stitched motifs and hand movements as well as the spoken words. She also used her own making as a means of analysis, sensing what mattered from the point of view of the maker and identifying key themes for further investigation. Because Twigger Holroyd was primarily interested in the participants' interpretations of their activities, she focused on their words, using the physical action only as the context for the conversations. She analysed these conversations using thematic coding and a constant comparative method (Robson, 2011), allowing topics to emerge from the workshop data.

A more fundamental challenge relates to the multiple roles the researcher must simultaneously perform when using these making-based methods: researcher plus facilitator, instructor, host, maker and/or participant. When working within these multiple roles, one finds oneself both on the outside of the experience looking in, and also at the centre of it. If the subject of research concerns the experience of making, it remains in part inaccessible by the very fact of being a researcher—a role requiring a critical distance that prevents the experience being had fully. In his essay 'Altogether Elsewhere', Edmund de Waal (2002) discusses markers of authenticity in craft practice and, although his subject is the Western craftsman-ethnographer in foreign lands searching for authentic products and practices, it is possible to identify with what he describes as:

> ...the positioning of the Western craftsman-ethnographer as both 'the man apart', the dispassionate onlooker able to observe the goings-on rationally and impartially, and also to be the intuitive, instinctual colleague of the peasant craftsman, to crouch next to the loom or wheel and enact the pantomime of shared skills. This is the taxing position... the problem of 'being there'. (de Waal, 2002, p. 185)

In the authors' projects, they instinctively felt their way through this conundrum, sometimes prioritising their role as participant, sometimes as facilitator—their past experience and specialist knowledge of making enabling them to move easily between these roles. On reflection, they more fully appreciate the practical and methodological challenges concerning the generation of knowledge associated with this issue. For example, having cited the centrality of their practical experience to their research, this raises questions relating to the varied contexts of that experience, its interpretation and its influence on the design of the research. It is important to consider that in group making activities researchers and the researched 'are positioned differently in relation to both the production of knowledge and the kinds and range of knowledge they possess' (Maynard & Purvis, 1994, p. 6). These concerns will remain central to future enquiries.

CONCLUSION

In this paper Shercliff and Twigger Holroyd have described and reflected on their experiences of 'making with others' as a means of research, examining aspects of Shercliff's project in detail as a case study. They have demonstrated the variety contained within this umbrella heading; even within their two doctoral studies, they were able to identify six distinct strategies, which have much in common, yet vary from one another in multiple ways.

They have discussed the rich material these activities enabled them to access, and thus argued for the value of making with others as a means of realising research objectives. Key strengths of this approach include the intimacy of conversation shared between researcher and participants, and the spontaneity of data gathering allowing the researcher to get close to an otherwise elusive experience. However, they each found the multiple roles of participant, instructor, workshop leader and researcher challenging.

The central motivation in writing this paper was to address a knowledge gap which the authors discovered in the early stages of their research projects—despite the vibrancy and diversity of contemporary textile craft groups, there is little academic material supporting the researcher to develop investigative activities in this context. The authors have offered insights from their research experiences in order to assist others considering making with others as a means of research.

The authors conclude with two suggestions for future researchers working with textile craft groups. First, they would encourage these researchers to develop and adapt their own strategies, appropriate to their own particular contexts. The logistics of the authors' projects influenced the decisions to undertake the activities described here—different timescales, locations, budgets and research interests would have led to different strategies. This flexible approach needs to be maintained during the research itself, allowing the researcher to learn, adapt and re-focus as the project progresses. Second, the authors would encourage others to pick up where they have left off, documenting and discussing their activities in order to construct knowledge in this area. As greater numbers of textile craft practitioners seek to conduct research with communities of makers, there is a need for a rigorous and critical dialogue to be developed around this highly productive—yet far from straightforward—approach to research.

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About the Authors

Emma Shercliff (lead author)
Arts University Bournemouth
eshercliff@aub.ac.uk

Emma Shercliff is a textile maker, writer, researcher and educator. She is currently a Senior Lecturer in Textiles at the Arts University Bournemouth specialising in stitched textiles. Her research explores textile making in social and educational contexts, the differences between implicit and explicit forms of knowledge, and the meanings of hand-making within post-industrial digital cultures. Following the completion of her PhD in 2014 at the Royal College of Art, she has been awarded a Research Fellowship at the Arts University Bournemouth to investigate the use and development of textile making workshops as creative research methods.

Amy Twigger Holroyd
University of Leeds
a.t.holroyd@leeds.ac.uk

Amy Twigger Holroyd is a designer, maker, writer and researcher. Through her knitwear label, Keep & Share, she has explored the emerging field of fashion and sustainability since 2004. Her work has been featured in many books and publications, from Vogue to Fashion Theory. In 2013 Amy completed her PhD at Birmingham Institute of Art & Design, investigating amateur fashion making—which she describes as 'folk fashion'—as a strategy for sustainability. Amy is now a Research Fellow in the School of Design at the University of Leeds, working on Design Routes, a three-year research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.