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Pöllänen Sinikka

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Crafting Well-being:

Meanings and Intentions of Stay-at-home Mothers' Craft-based Leisure Activity

Sinikka Pöllänen and Laura Voutilainen

Introduction

In nearly all societies, motherhood is a socially identified institution with its own cultural norms and expectations (Berg, 2009). The stereotypical, role of a “good mother” and an attitude of care commonly attributed to stay-at-home mothers may be pressure-generating (Shpancer, Melick, Sayre, & Spivey, 2006; Warner, 2005; Parker & Morrow, 2017). Findings have indicated that stay-at-home mothers are expected to be selfless, show great concern for the welfare of others, and desire harmony with others (Bridges, Etaugh, & Barnes-Farrell, 2002; Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002). Given these expectations, mothers are often forced to balance their own wishes and needs with external expectations and with the day-to-day realities of their lives (Berg, 2009; Zimmermann, 2000). According to Foley (2005), even today, domestic burdens pose a challenge to women with young children even though they appreciate their time with their family. Being a full-time mother is intensive, repetitive, and emotionally absorbing (Hays, 1996). The increased interest in the role of a homemaker and the ideal notion of a cozy home may also bring pressure on mothers (Soronen, 2014; Parker & Morrow, 2017). It is no wonder then that research has shown that stay-at-home mothers may be under more stress and are possibly more fatigued than women who work outside the home (Zimmermann, 2000). The well-being of stay-at-home mothers is also at risk because of contemporary lifestyles wherein mothers live in isolation, without the support of other mothers like

them (Warner, 2005). Kivelä (2012) found that spending long periods of time home alone may, in some cases, undermine a mother's self-esteem.

However, several researchers (e.g., Bailey & Fernando, 2012; Burt & Atkinson, 2012) have shown that creative leisure activities can play an important role in enhancing an individual's well-being. These studies have demonstrated that self-chosen leisure activities may lead to an improvement in mood and reduction in psychological discomfort, depression, and anxiety (e.g., Bailey & Fernando, 2012; Casey, Ripke, & Huston, 2005; Mannell, 2007). The significance of meaningful leisure activities becomes particularly evident during periods of stress (Verbakel, 2013) and when, for example, one's social network is limited (Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002).

Like a therapeutic medium, leisure activities contribute to an individual's positive self-development and overall satisfaction (Ábrahám, Velencei, & Szabo, 2012; Caldwell, 2005). According to Levenson, Danielsen, Birkeland, and Samdal (2012), leisure activities are associated with positive emotions and improved self-identity as well as with an improvement in one's social connections, sense of acceptance and lifelong learning. These studies underline the belief that leisure involves meaning-making, satisfaction with one's competence, and autonomy. In particular, indulging in leisure activities plays a crucial role in fostering relaxation and helping one shut out negative thoughts, thus enabling one to develop a positive mindset (Mannell, 2007). Leisure has helped people find optimism and a new meaning in life (Caldwell, 2005). Iwasaki and Mannell (2000) saw leisure friendships as a coping strategy that helps people cope with stress in different ways. For example, Kleiber, Hutchinson, and Williams (2002) noted that leisure may enhance well-being by providing people with social support and decreasing their sense of loneliness and isolation.

Early research showed a connection between crafting and subjective well-being (e.g., Bailey & Fernando, 2012). Mason (2005) found that crafting, as the process of designing and making a tangible, handmade product, is perceived as a meaningful activity that contributes to a healthy lifestyle by promoting a person's subjective sense of inner well-being and a positive life experience. According to Collier (2012), first and foremost, crafting provides women with opportunities for growth, development, and psychological wholeness. It enhances self-esteem and offers a means of self-expression (Reynolds, 2004). More widely, Riley (2008) argued that crafting helps enhance women's sense of self. Johnson and Wilson (2005) noted that crafting also has impacts on the craft maker's relationships with others—the craft serves as a symbol of the crafter and his or her relationships with other people and traditions. Thus, crafting (e.g., knitting, crocheting, sewing) is not solely a technique, and the completed product is not only the end result of a process. Crafting, rather, encompasses a complex variety of values and emotions and shapes the identity of the maker (Riley, 2008; Collier, 2012).

In the new millennium, there has been an increasing amount of research on the lives of stay-at-home mothers (e.g., Delap, 2011 on housework; Zimmermann, 2000 on marital equality; Bridges et al., 2002 on care attributions; Shpancer et al., 2006; Kivelä, 2012 on career interruptions; Parker & Morrow, 2017 on intensive mothering). Recent studies have also reported on the well-being of mothers of young children (e.g., Noy, Taubman-Ben-Ari, & Kuint, 2014; Lloyd & O'Brien, 2016). For example, it has been observed that the mother's social isolation, stress, and fatigue might pose a risk for the well-being of the whole family (Kivelä, 2012; Warner, 2005). The mother's well-being, though, can improve in response to her children (Barling, MacEwen, & Nolte, 1993) and parental role (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002). Some studies on leisure have concentrated on coordinating family life with leisure activities (e.g., Allan & Crow, 1991; te Kloeze, 1999) and on the connection between motherhood and leisure-based networking (e.g., Parry, Glover, & Mulcahy, 2013;

McDaniel, Coyne, & Holmes, 2012; Valtchanov al., 2016). To date, however, only a few studies (e.g., Freeman, Palmer, & Baker, 2006) have concentrated on stay-at-home mothers' leisure activities and their role in enhancing their overall well-being.

Although crafting has been a popular leisure activity among Finnish women (Taito Group, 2012) and international studies have found craft to enhance the maker's subjective well-being, only very few studies (e.g., Author, 2015; Kouhia, 2016) have focused on the meaning of crafters' leisure activities in Finland. Furthermore, none of these studies have concentrated solely on younger female textile crafters nor stay-at-home mothers, whose recreational opportunities may be limited. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the meanings of and intentions behind craft-based leisure activities among stay-at-home mothers. This study attempts to shed light on the meanings of craft in relation to the mothers' well-being in their everyday lives and on their perception of the significance of craft to the well-being of their families. In this regard, this study focused on the significance of stay-at-mothers' crafting (meanings) as a leisure activity and on the purposes they seek to achieve through crafting (intentions). This research analyzed crafting as a leisure activity from a theoretical perspective based on craft science. *Leisure* was conceptualized as an activity which is separate from obligations and to which the individual turns at will. *Leisure activities* referred to practices that have developed specific associations with pleasure, recreation, and well-being (see Rojek, 2009).

Research Methodology

Participants and Data Collection

The study's participants were recruited from a closed Facebook group of Finnish craft enthusiasts. The members were all required to be stay-at-home mothers with at least one child under school-going age and whose hobbies included crafting. The use of purposive sampling with homogeneity in a given context was justified, because these participants could offer meaningful insights into the topic of the study. As Shenton (2004) stated, researchers must familiarize themselves with the culture and context of their study. Because the online community in this study was an interest-based, closed community without common task-related activities, group access required the researchers to become members. Moreover, one of the researchers was already a member of the group before the research project began, and she was thus familiar with the discussions that took place there. Therefore, the researchers fulfilled the criteria by having prior knowledge of the group's culture and context through their discussions and interactions.

The participants included 34 women aged 23 to 40. The participants lived in different parts of Finland, ranging from the cities to the countryside, where there was likely considerable geographical distance between the members. They belonged to two-parent families, with only three of the participants being single parents. Each participant had between 1 and 5 children, but most of them had two children, which is the average number of children per family in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2015). Most of the participants had a university degree, with only one-third of them being elementary or secondary school graduates. Although it was a general interest craft group and the members made all kinds of handicrafts, the most popular crafts were knitting and sewing. Half of the participants had practiced crafting as a leisure activity since childhood, and the other half had taken it up as a leisure activity after the birth of a child or a difficult life experience.

Each participant was invited to write a personal narrative about her life in general and about her crafting activities in particular (see Bleakley, 2005). This was written in response to an open-ended

assignment that requested the participants to write about what crafting as a leisure activity did to enhance their well-being. Each respondent was provided the opportunity to participate in the study anonymously, in her own way and at her own pace. We considered the narrative form to be a suitable method of data collection because the request was open-ended and did not require face-to-face communication. It further afforded the respondents the privacy needed for meaningful reflection and analysis (see O'Brien & Clark, 2010). According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), memory is always selective, and research participants sometimes might overstate or give too little weight to their experiences from the distant past, as well as give socially desirable answers. As Polkinghorne (1995) noted, we can understand and give meaning to things only in retrospect. Therefore, in this study, we relied on the notion that we all organize our experiences as a whole story in dialectic with the past, present, and future (Ricoeur, 1995; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). We also assumed that anonymity, along with sufficient time, encouraged the participants to reflect and write their own narratives as they had experienced the past.

The data revealed, as Bleakley (2005) has highlighted, that the narratives contained multiple voices, perspectives, and meanings. Although the written narratives varied in length, they provided rich descriptions of the participants' unique experiences and the meanings that crafting held in their lives. They were written in the form of stories about the participants' experience of their interpreted worlds, and they explored crafting as a personally meaningful leisure activity, gathering together diverse events and actions and their interpretations and feelings about their lives (see Polkinghorne, 1995). As Bauer (2000) has noted, written data can help researchers understand participants' feelings, thoughts, memories, and plans in greater depth than the writers may themselves be aware of.

Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using a phenomenographical approach as its methodological basis. As is typical, at the beginning of the process, it was strongly iterative and comparative, with no predetermined set of criteria (see Bowden, 2005). As per the principles of phenomenography, our focus in this study was how a phenomenon was experienced by a group of individuals (see Larsson & Holmström, 2007; Collier-Reed, Ingerman, & Berglund, 2009), specifically, in this case, the essence of the stay-at-home mothers' experience and perception of their crafting activities as a collective.

The hermeneutic circle guided the process in an iterative manner, requiring in-depth reading and re-reading of the material. The analysis was conducted in five stages: The initial analysis was based on a non-linear process that proceeded from the bottom up. This group-oriented process helped the researchers deepen their understanding of the material as a whole and describe the phenomenon at a collective level (Collier-Reed et al., 2009). The second step involved displaying data, analyzing written phrases as open-ended dialogue, and finding and interpreting relevant phrases and ideas.

Thereafter, in the third step, we generated an initial set of categories based on the similarities and differences in the participants' expressions, with the goal to gather insights into the group's level of crafting, their focus with regard to craft activities, how they described their way of crafting, the reasons they indulged in crafting, and what it meant to them. This set of categories along with relevant notations became the elementary units of our data-based analysis, aimed at finding categories of meanings (see Bowden, 2005). The goal of the fourth step was both to identify what mattered to the participants and to convey a general sense of the meanings behind it for the participants as a whole. Thus, we integrated preliminary descriptions of each crafter's predominant way of understanding her crafting into higher-level descriptions of the categories. We divided the

intentions behind craft-making into the following categories: home-centeredness, items as fingerprints, crafting as a mental resource, personal growth and identity, and social relationships.

As is typical in the phenomenographical approach (Larsson & Holmström, 2007), the focus was on comparing different perceptions, not so much on the phenomena or the people being examined themselves. Therefore, we continued to analyze the participants' intentions behind their leisure activity through the lens of their perceptions of its significance to their well-being. Accordingly, in the last stage of analysis, we attempted to deepen our understanding of the stay-at-home mothers' purposes in crafting by reading each narrative to find differences among them (see Bowden, 2005). We did this by looking for non-dominant ways of understanding and by constructing a map of the main categories (see Bowden, 2005). This stage revealed three key intentions behind crafting with regard to one's well-being—crafting was seen as an escape from daily routines and worries, crafting was a form of enjoying one's family-centric life, and crafting was a way to enhance one's self-realization. As usual, these three categories were not completely separate from each other, but each had their own unique characteristics. The key differences were in why, how and what kind of crafts were made and where they were shared. The categories helped identify how the participants' crafting habits differed from each other while also summing up the most important data elements.

According to Collier-Reed et al. (2009), the active role of researchers has to be acknowledged, as their interpretation of respondents' narratives can reflect their own subjective experiences and worldviews. Respondents voice their perceptions and thoughts in their own words, but the researchers' task is to interpret and combine them to form a new entity (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Accordingly, we have explained as clearly as possible how we interpreted the data. The in-depth descriptions we have provided make it possible to assess the validity and confirmability (Shenton, 2004) of our research results. Finally, we have selected privacy honored quotations that

give voice to the participants. This study was conducted by two researchers, which allowed us to both work independently and challenge each other's interpretations to avoid any subjectivity or bias toward verification (see Flyvbjerg, 2006). We therefore utilized peer scrutiny when analyzing the data and revising the categories during analysis (see Shenton, 2004). This process was conducted from the perspective of craft science, and the interpretations and conclusions were based on the meanings and intentions behind crafting (the significance of crafting and the purpose sought to be realized through crafting). Thus, we hope that our interest in crafts has introduced contextual validity to our research and offered theoretical insights and conceptual perspectives on the meanings of crafting in this particular context (see Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Since the participants were part of a relatively homogenous group, the research results cannot be generalized to all crafters. In addition, experiences and contexts may differ from country to country, as well as the reasons for taking up crafting as a leisure activity. As a result, we must take into account that the present study's findings are not transferable to other contexts. Though, as Blom and Nygren (2010) argued, the conclusions of a qualitative study may be generalizable, because the findings may be applicable in suitable contexts.

Results

Based on our data analysis, we arrived at the following five categories of meanings behind stay-at-mothers' crafting as a leisure activity: home-centeredness, items as fingerprints, crafting as a mental resource, personal growth and identity, and social relationships. We have also defined three key intentions behind crafting and how it helped enhance the stay-at-home mothers' and their families'

well-being: crafting as an escape from one's daily routine and worries, crafting as a way to enjoy one's family-centric life, and crafting as a means to enhance self-realization.

The Meanings of Crafting

Home-centeredness

All of the respondents stated that crafting was a leisure activity that gave them something of their own while still allowing them to be present for their family. The participants described their lives as being home and family oriented. Many participants noted that they began crafting more after the birth of their children, not only because of their new life situation but also because they wanted to spend more time at home. For the participants, crafting was a flexible leisure activity that could be picked up when there was time and interrupted as necessary. Most of them participated in crafting when their children were asleep, and most participants organized their household duties and schedules to set time aside for crafting. During the daytime, crafting allowed the participants to take short breaks, and in the evenings, it offered the opportunity to spend time usefully while, for example, watching TV with their spouses.

I craft in intervals: I make patterns when my children are sleeping, I cut the fabric when their father prepares the evening meal, I crochet while watching TV or outdoors while the kids play in the sand. (N32, 37 years, 3 children)

Crafting is a suitable hobby for a single parent, because it can easily be practiced at home when the children are asleep. No need to leave home and organize a babysitter. (N10, 29 years, 1 child)

The participants' viewed crafting as a pleasant, satisfying activity that had the added benefit of helping them create concrete, economical items for the home and for their family members. Decorating their homes with the products of their crafting helped them to experience their domestic environment as their own creation. The data analysis revealed crafting to be a meaning-making activity that helped strengthen family ties. Some participants also engaged in crafting with their children, who helped in the design and making of crafts. This was not only a way to teach their children new skills, but also a means to convey their family values to them.

We want to teach our children the importance of making things with your own hands. I want them to realize that making things is more meaningful than simply buying things from a shopping mall. (N18, 34 years, 2 children)

Even still, because the respondents' lives were essentially home-centric, some of them felt that taking time for themselves was a bit selfish, even though they believed they were entitled to it. The most common reason for this was lack of time and the compromises they had to make with their physical well-being and getting adequate sleep.

Occasionally, I get physical aches and pains if I sit and make crafts for too long, but I still keep doing it... (N30, 31, 5 children)

I make sure that my hobby does not take up too much of my time. I try to do it in a way that it does not get in the way of my being a good wife and mother. (N26, 30 years, 1 child)

Items as Fingerprints

The participants believed that their handmade items conveyed meanings, memories, and thoughts as well as something unique about their creator, almost like fingerprints. The participants created special items mainly for themselves and their family members but also to decorate their homes. Handmade gifts were seen as an expression of love and care, which strengthened their relationships. The participants found pleasure in seeing clothing they had made being worn by their family members or seeing their own handicrafts in their homes.

I make home decorations to enrich my everyday life... I like to make all the presents I give people so that they are more personal. This makes me feel empowered. (N22, 36 years, 2 children)

It is nice to create something that others do not have. Something unique that cannot be bought at a store. I appreciate that I'm skilled and persistent in crafting; I get joy from it, and I can also give joy through crafted items. My daughter said she loves it when I sit and stitch in her room when she is going to sleep. She feels close to me and the sound of my sewing machine is a familiar and safe sound for her. (N23, 30 years, 3 children)

It is nice to go back and see things I made. For instance, if I see something I made for a special event, it brings back all those happy memories. (N32, 37 years, 2 children)

The participants expressed their creativity and values through the raw materials they used to make things. The material also served as their source of inspiration. They derived pleasure from seeing and handling the materials and thinking of new ways to use them. They preferred long-lasting materials and believed that there was no point in making something if the materials are not of a

good quality. The materials they used were thus a reflection of their belief in sustainability and of the legacy they would like to leave of themselves. Consequently, the materials and crafted items reflected the makers' inner feelings and values.

The main reason is the desire to do as much as possible ourselves, but another reason is to have ecologically and ethically sustainable garments. I now try to buy almost all clothing used or make it myself... In fact, the so-called DIY [Do It Yourself] culture is highly respected in our family. (N18, 34 years, 2 children)

Materials are indispensable to crafting, and thus crafting costed money. On the other hand, crafting also helped save money because many of the participants made their own clothing and accessories. Some participants described the joy and sense of success they derived from making unique clothing for their family members or from finding interesting raw materials at recycling centers or fabric-store sales when their household budgets were tight. However, unfinished or failed craft projects, tight schedules, and excess materials created more stress for some of the crafters, so they had to reduce and regulate their crafting or purchase of materials.

Unfinished crafts bring pressure, excess materials and the feeling that something has been left unfinished. If I have to get a particular crafted item done in a certain amount of time, I get stressed, my tight schedule makes me hurry, I may not be as careful as I should be, and then everything goes wrong. (N5, 23 years, 2 children)

I am also stressed at times when I would like to sew but I do not have enough time. (N18, 34, 2 children)

Crafting as a Mental Resource

Based on the data, crafting was experienced as an important mental resource, and a few respondents felt that they could not imagine life without craft. A majority of the participants considered crafting as something that gave them space and time for themselves. It also brought relaxation and legitimate joy, allowing time away from their daily duties and responsibilities. While crafting, they were able to make their own choices and slow down for a while in the midst of their hectic schedules. Household chores took up much of their time but did not provide them with much satisfaction. Crafting was perceived as a self-managed activity that offered recreation and respite from their struggle with fatigue and societal or filial expectations. Having an activity that had a beginning and an end helped them manage, calm down, and organize their thoughts. Moreover, the data revealed how even simply seeing and handling their raw materials and crafted items helped the participants feel a sense of calm.

Just seeing a finished crafted item and holding it makes me happy, and this kind of happiness begins to shine inside of me. (N29, 33 years, 1 child)

Sewing means doing something completely different from the rest of my daily routines. I can create and do things as I want. A successfully completed project brings me joy and its own rewards. Sewing is more permanent than household chores, after five minutes of cleaning the house looks like it has never been cleaned at all! My craft gives me mental strength as I'm able to do something different and get a break from everyday things. (N7, 32 years, 2 children)

Making handicrafts means calming down and getting away from everyday life. Like going inside of my head, where I don't think about things other than what I am doing.

(N3, 27 years, 3 children)

According to the narratives, crafting was a way to deal with past, present, and future worries and sorrows. While crafting, worries about a child's health, the family's finances, or pending household chores were forgotten. The participants were able to push away feelings of frustration or anxiety. The participants also said that during the most difficult phases of life, they needed some type of routine-based crafting that did not rely on their own design but allowed them to engage in some form of handiwork immediately and easily. Crafting helped achieve mental balance and gave the respondents a sense of success. As a result, crafting was perceived not only as an unhurried, leisurely activity but also as a means to help them concentrate on positive thoughts and enjoy life, taking their minds off their responsibilities.

The possibility of thinking, in peace, about things other than the child, epilepsy, developmental delay, and unfinished dishes. My time spent knitting makes me happy.

(N28, 34 years, 1 child)

I can forget about everything and all my pending work by just designing clothes I wish to make in my mind. Then, the process of making and the finished products make me feel successful; they are rewarding; I can see what I have achieved. (N5, 23 years, 2 children)

The enthusiasm and enjoyment of all that comes when I get time to craft, it is wonderfully euphoric. (N27, 34 years, 1 child)

The participants noted that even a short amount of time spent crafting, and sometimes even just thinking about or designing future projects in their minds, brought them the strength they needed to face their everyday lives. The importance of crafting was seen most clearly in situations when the mothers did not have enough time for their craft activities. At such times, they felt frustrated or stressed. In contrast, crafting in silence and peace helped the participants manage their own resources and intentions. Crafting was thus described as form of therapy and a way to prevent depression or anxiety. In addition, the data showed that crafting helped the mothers forget even their physical fatigue.

The baby's birth, as desired and awaited as it was, was a shock and, to some extent, an emotional issue for me. I was not prepared for something like that, how essential I was to the small infant. When my baby was sleeping, in spite of my fatigue, I did not dare to take naps, so I sat on the couch by the window and watched television and knitted. (N25, 35 years, 2 children)

I have noticed that on those days when I do not make handicrafts, I am more frustrated and unhappy. (N28, 34 years, 1 child)

Sewing is therapeutic. When sewing, you can think about something completely different than the rest of your daily life. I can create and do exactly what I want... (N7, 32 years, 2 children)

Personal Growth and Identity

The participants described crafting as a means of fostering personal growth and developing and expressing their personal identities. The participants wrote that they have learned to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. Their self-chosen leisure activity highlighted the importance of planning and thought, because crafting required them to organize their time and was a continuous process of designing and making. Thus, the concrete act of making and the time they got to think in peace enabled the participants to see things in a different way or set larger goals for their lives.

While crafting, I have the opportunity to think freely about all kinds of beauty in the world... My son has no one other than me... So I have planned to live in a way so that I will be able to go on. (N28, 34years, 1 child).

I am happy when I get a little bit closer to doing things that are fundamental to being a human being. People are probably happiest when they are satisfying their basic needs in a concrete way. (N 22, 36 years, 2 children)

When I make special crafts for something, my thoughts are always strongly in the future, thus handicrafts are actually mental preparation. (N1, 30 years, 2 children)

As the following quotations demonstrate, time spent crafting constituted the mother's time for herself, but the narratives also describe how crafting increased the mother's self-control and patience and helped her put her children's needs above her own.

It seems that I am able to concentrate better on everyday things while I am knitting... In cases [that] I have a good idea for making crafts but have to wait for my own time, I have learned to call for extra self-control. (N9, 22, 2 children)

I am always crafting when I have the opportunity to do so. I have noticed that it is impossible to participate in interesting craft courses, so I craft at home in the corner of our kitchen. It is a small moment of my own freedom and independence in the heat of everyday life, but still I craft according to my child's needs, in a child-oriented way. ... For example, once I noticed that I had to interrupt my knitting 12 times; that day, I knitted only 6 loops. (N28, 34, 1 child)

The narratives showed that crafting was an important part of the participants' personal identities. Crafting helped them define themselves for others and for themselves, across generations. Making textiles and clothing for family members provided them with opportunities to define and express their individual characteristics and values. Making crafts gave them the time needed to put their values into practice and concretely display their intention to take care of their families. Thus, the participants wrote about a sense of continuity and connectedness and at the same time about the sense of uniqueness in the items they made.

Without crafting, if I had nothing other than being just a housewife, I would feel trapped between the baby's changing table, the washing machine, and the sandpit, literally and figuratively. (N31, 30 years, 3 children)

Crafting maintains among other things the continuation of the bonds across generations. (N16, 31 years, 2 children)

At the moment, I have the feeling that the clothes I have made for myself have a lot of influence on what kind of person I am. It makes me also feel like a proud and accomplished mother when I see my daughter dressing in clothes made by me. (N10, 29 years, 1 child)

Sometimes, the actual activity was less important than the opportunity to showcase one's skills or personal characteristics. Participants wrote how developing one's skills and receiving praise from others gave them a better sense of self. Some participants also described how crafting had helped them re-discover their lost identities or feel a sense of competence and accomplishment. Making well-tailored, handmade garments helped increase the makers' self-awareness and self-acceptance.

When I make well-fitting clothes for myself, with just the right design and color, it improves my self-esteem and self-image. My perception of myself is better now, and I have accepted my appearance and found myself ... (N29, 33 years, 1 child)

I have noticed that my self-esteem has risen since I have been making crafts. My skills have improved, and I have learned how to do things that were difficult before. I have confirmed that I can, and I am capable. (N14, 32 years, 4 children)

Furthermore, crafting had helped the participants cope with difficult life experiences, for example, a divorce or a child's illness or disability. It seems that crafting was in fact an important aspect of coping.

I think crafting has developed my self-esteem after a difficult divorce, and has helped me cope with it. Crafting has been my therapy. At the beginning, I unloaded my anger on it. A half hour, one hour, of crafting relaxes me and makes me feel better. At such times, I just focus on my sewing and nothing else. (N10, 29 years, 1 child)

Social Relationships

According to the narratives, home-centric crafting strengthened the participants' relationships with their family members and tied the mothers to their homes in a more positive manner. Domestic burdens did pose a challenge to the mothers, but they appreciated the time they got to spend with their family and the possibility to have a leisure activity that they could do from the home itself. The analysis revealed that the participants' family members', most especially the spouses', interest and support was essential to their crafting. However, most participants mentioned the importance of social relationships outside the home as well. Some of the stay-at-home mothers, for example, attended craft-related meet-ups at knitting cafés, while some of the others felt that such meetings took time away from their family. For most of the participants, these meet-ups provided not only help with their crafting but also with sharing common experiences and conversations with others outside the home context.

Seeing other crafters and talking about crafting at the knitting cafés gives me energy, power, and the support of my peers. (N9, 33 years, 2 children)

For nearly all of the participants, craft-based relationships on social media were an integral part of their leisure activity. The stay-at-home mothers appreciated the convenience of and time-dependent access to their leisure activities via the Internet. Sharing emotions and talking to like-minded people refreshed their minds. Also, receiving peer support and getting feedback on their crafted items confirmed the meaning and significance of their leisure activities. To the participants, the feedback they received on their crafting from their family members and from other craft enthusiasts were both extremely important.

When I get praise, it raises my self-esteem and makes me feel that, yes, I'm good at something. I have photographed all my works and added them to Facebook. I have

created a profile for my hobby. I'm heartily delighted when someone likes or comments on my crafts. (N3, 27 years, 3 children)

Most of the participants stated that social media had helped improve their crafting. Virtual communities of people with similar interests had given them access to information, ideas, and support that otherwise would have been impossible. Participants who actively posted online claimed to receive a lot of advice from other crafters and inspiration for new craft projects. A sense of belonging and reciprocal relationships helped them feel recognized and respected for who they were, outside their family context. Thus, when crafting was made visible via the Internet, it enhanced the stay-at-mother's individual sense of self and collective sense of self. As a counterpart to the positive experiences of being part of a virtual community, some participants reported that despite the advice and feedback, seeing highly skilled crafters' work online sometimes made them feel inferior.

When I saw crafted items made by others on social media, my first thought was, this is never possible for me because of my poor skills... I noticed, however, that social media is full of beginners and that's why everyone can find a group of their equals and get the support they need... (N26, 30 years, 1 child)

The Intentions Behind Using Crafting to Enhance Well-being

The analysis revealed three following key intentions behind using crafting to enhance one's well-being: crafting as an escape from one's daily routine and worries, crafting as a way to enjoy one's family-centric life, and crafting as a means to enhance self-realization.

Of the three goals mentioned above, crafting was primarily seen as a means to escape one's daily routine and worries. Many participants wrote about how fatigued they got after a day spent rushing around meeting other people's demands and expectations. They all claimed to need their own space, time, and interests where they did not have any obligations to someone else. Most of the participants preferred to do their crafting alone. They almost always had a work-in-progress craft project, to which they turn said, for example, when their children fall asleep. Crafting was a legitimate form of joy that gave them a break from their roles as mothers and housekeepers. The appreciation and feedback their work received from others was significant in enhancing their self-esteem and self-confidence. Therefore, the feedback they received on Facebook was important, more so than their offline craft-based social communities. Thus, some of the participants claimed that they did not attend craft meetings but did participate in virtual communities where they shared their crafts and their experiences around making them. According to the analysis, the participants' moods improved when they completed a craft because they felt like they had accomplished something tangible amid their routine daily activities. For this reason, the participants preferred practicing crafts that could be made quickly, following written instructions. They did not always design the crafts they made themselves. Crafting in this way helped the participants calm themselves and temporarily forgot worries that were beyond their control. In some cases, the participants wrote that crafting kept them from feeling anxious and depressed. More importantly, crafting helped to remind them of the truly important things in life. This could be seen in the participants' recounts of their completed handicrafts giving them a sense of hope and optimism. The intention behind crafting was thus to enhance their own and, in turn, their family's well-being.

As a stay-at-home mother, I appreciate that my hobby can be done inside our home. Our family has no support network to take care of the children, only me and my husband, so my possibilities for having a hobby are limited. At present, my time is

totally scheduled according to the rhythm of the children. I make crafts when the children do not need me, whenever possible... Taking care of children at home is rewarding, but also boring, lonely, and frustrating. When I'm making crafts, I can have a break from everyday life and the role of mother... even when I'm making clothes for my children. While crafting, time and place disappear, and I can focus on my activity in peace... The finished concrete product brings an experience of success. Making handicrafts has given me confidence, I'm quite modest in real life, but through crafting I receive praise. I have learned to get along with minimal sleep, so if my sewing is going well, I will continue even though it is late. (N32, 37 years, 3 children)

Craft done as a means to enjoy one's family-centric life had been described as a flexible leisure activity—something they could engage in despite the interruptions of the day. Because these mothers appreciated the opportunity to teach their children some fundamental life skills, they often made their crafts in the presence of their children and together with them. These participants spent a lot of time and energy on making their house a home. The analysis revealed that crafting thus had a connection with both their personal relationships as well as the things in their home—the crafted items served as personalized reminders of their maker. Giving handmade gifts was also seen as an expression of love and care, which strengthened their relationships. They also made hand-make clothing for their family members because seeing their husbands or children wearing handmade clothing of a high quality made them feel proud. Most of the mothers stated that they did not attend craft-based meet-ups, because they felt it took time away from their families. The most important arena for crafting was the home, close to their near ones. Family-centric crafting enhanced the participants' roles as mothers and, in turn, the entire family's well-being.

During the weekdays, I focus on the children and their activities, on my domestic duties and on crafting. I don't craft on weekends—then I concentrate wholly on my family members. I craft during the daytime and in the evenings, not very late. The children are accustomed to the fact that Mother sews; they have their own crafts or they play with each other. When I start sewing, I'm excited, because sometimes I have been waiting for it for a few days... The feeling of success and seeing the concrete items, clothes or something for the home, proves that I have really accomplished something; they bring joy to my life. My crafting has changed my perception of myself. The change from 'not-a-handicrafts--person' to being a skillful crafter has also given me a new identity. I can no longer imagine a life that does not include, for example, textile design and making. I feel that I get so much positive energy and life from my crafting; it adds so much to my life that I can't stop it. (N33, 38 years, 2 children)

Crafting done as a self-chosen activity to enhance self-realization manifested through an enhanced sense of self-expression and self-development. In these cases, the participants needed more demanding stimuli to counteract their daily routines at home. Material expression, design, and skill-acquisition helped them channel their inner feelings. These participants described crafting in the context of aesthetics, flow, and personal growth. Crafting had been described alongside the construction of the experiential self-image and the expansion of the role of the mother. The participants usually had several types of handicraft projects in progress because they tried to make crafts whenever they had free time. Furthermore, they appreciated the reciprocal relationships developed through craft-related virtual communities as well as face-to-face craft-based meetings. Social support and solving problems in collaboration with others who shared their interests gave them a temporary break from their life's daily stressors. The development of their skills and their accomplishment at making, for example, aesthetic, handmade garments, enhanced their self-esteem. Therefore, supporting the mother's hobby increased the well-being of the entire family.

I would almost say that my creative hobby is now very important for my well-being. When I have concentrated on crafts for a while, I can better focus on my family's well-being... When I'm succeeding, it is a pleasure to look at my own crafted items being worn or used by my child or my husband. And, in particular, the positive comments from others are all the more inspiring... I'm always looking up craft ideas on the Internet, and I have joined some virtual communities on Facebook. The virtual communities are very inspiring and I get a lot of ideas and creative examples... I have to have my own time outside the home. Last spring, I thought taking up a sewing course was a good solution—like-minded company gives me a lot of energy. Sometimes I think it is nice to be together with other like-minded people, and the actual sewing is then less important during our discussions... My husband has noticed how important sewing is for me, so he gives me free time for it. (N26, 30, 1 child)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the meanings of and intentions behind craft-based leisure activities among stay-at-home mothers. It attempted to shed light on what craft means in relation to the participants' well-being and on their perceptions of the significance of craft to the well-being of their entire family. The findings show that stay-at-home mothers have found the personal space needed for leisure, as described by Foley (2005). Yet, as previous research has indicated, the ideologies and traditions of motherhood are deep-seated, and mothers occasionally doubt their selfishness (see Warner, 2005) despite the fact that their crafting was largely family- and home-centric. However, the participants in the present study understood the meaning of their crafting and have learned to make time for it in cooperation with their spouses and children.

Crafting was for most of the participants a mothers' own realm where she had total autonomy. Self-created items and sustainable materials as personal expressions and unique fingerprints enhanced their satisfaction with their life overall and fostered a sense of optimism (see Kleiber et al., 2002). This helped them forget their daily worries. Much like Mannell (2007), this study too showed that a pleasurable, quiet activity improved the participants' mood and helped them relax. The stay-at-home mothers who participated in this study saw crafting as an extension of intensive mothering (see Bridges et al., 2002; Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002; Soronen, 2014; Parker & Morrow, 2017). At the same time, it helped them negotiate their own needs against their external requirements and pushed away feelings of stress and fatigue (see Zimmermann, 2000). This helped them balance others' expectations of them with their own wishes and desires (see Berg, 2009). Thus, crafting has been described as therapy and coping. Crafting for the family members or with them was also a concrete reminder of the most important things in life. The narratives indicated that the mothers were generally satisfied and described their children and their role as a parent (see Barling et al., 1993; Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002), mother, or spouse in purely positive terms.

The findings demonstrate how the concrete act of making and experiential knowing-by-doing has enhanced the participants' personal growth by helping better understand their life and relationships, as seen in earlier studies (Collier, 2012; Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Mason, 2005). The mothers described how crafting has helped them be more understanding, wise, and patient. More widely, the findings indicated that crafting was a means for the participants to develop their skills. Just as Reynolds (2004) and Riley (2008) have found, this study too finds that crafting has helped enhance the participants' self-esteem. It has offered a means of self-expression. In this way, it served as a form of protection against their frustrations, psychological discomfort, and decline in self-esteem

(see Bailey & Fernando, 2012; Casey et al., 2005; Kivelä, 2012). Having something else to do alongside their role as a full-time mother helped establish their unique identity.

Like other researchers (Valtchanov et al., 2016; Kleiber et al., 2002), we too found that peer support and feedback from their near and dear ones as well from connections formed on social media were an integral part of the participants' leisure activity. New techniques, ideas, designs, and problem-solving methods discovered on the Internet helped challenge the participants' skills and knowledge, acting as a cognitive counterbalance to their other daily, repetitive tasks. Posting pictures of their handcrafted items on the Internet and getting positive feedback fostered a sense of success and connectedness with other crafters (McDaniel et al., 2012; Parry et al., 2013). Since the Internet provided them with a way to conduct conversations with people around the world right from their home, only very few of the stay-at-home mothers in our study attended craft meetings in person. According to Levenson et al. (2012) and Mannell (2007), leisure activities are associated with positive self-identity, social connections, and acceptance. The present study has made clear that crafting affords stay-at-home mothers the opportunity to express aspects of themselves and their values as individuals and members of families. Consequently, the findings show that the stay-at-home mothers' conscious intention behind crafting was to increase their own sense of well-being and that of their entire family.

As a home-centric leisure activity, crafting committed the mothers to home but also supported their intensive and successful mothering. Crafting was a concrete, tangible form of love and care and a demonstration of the ethics of mothering. Most importantly, the study results highlight how the mothers' enjoyment of crafting empowered them and helped release them from the oppressive aspects of the maternal experience. Aligning with Parker and Morrow (2017), we can conclude that a home-centric but empowering leisure activity can strengthen mothers' care impulses and desires

for connection and collectivity in ways that benefit rather than increase pressures. Thus, crafting, as a self-chosen and self-determined leisure activity, created space for the stay-at-mothers' subjectivity and agency as individuals and mothers.

Conclusions

The present study has found that crafting holds various meanings in the everyday life of the participants. The key intentions behind crafting were to help stay-at-home mothers get time for themselves to escape their daily worries, to craft as a way of enjoying their family-centric life, and to enhance self-realization, without the added stress of having to do so while negotiating their family's needs, especially those of their children. The findings revealed that although the participants' intentions were to increase their subjective sense of well-being, they also showed great concern for the well-being of their families. It is thus clear that more attention should be given to the well-being of stay-at-home mothers and the various recreational opportunities that can help reduce the potential negative experiences and outcomes of their role in the family (see Kivelä, 2012; Zimmermann, 2000; Warner, 2005).

Since previous studies have documented evidence of the relationship between creative leisure activities and well-being, future studies may bring up the impact of creative activities on people and their day-to-day lives. Further research on home-based leisure activities would investigate more widely the significance of meaningful leisure and the social support the Internet offers to individuals who may not be able to perform an activity outside the home. Finally, the research results indicate that there is a need for further research on the meanings and value of craft-based leisure activities and craft-based virtual communities.

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