Spinning Yarns: Textile crafting and emerging dialogue supporting the wellbeing of vulnerable men

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Abstract: This paper discusses an ongoing, practice-based PhD project that seeks to examine the therapeutic use of textile craft processes for vulnerable men’s wellbeing. The paper specifically reflects on the main method of research, the community-based textile craft group, ManCraft. The workshops draw on five evidence based categories: Connectedness, Hope, Identity, Meaning, and Empowerment (CHIME), used as a framework by participants during a mind-mapping exercise to explore their individual understandings of wellbeing. The main theme reflected on in this paper is the significance of dialogue to the therapeutic process, explored further through analysis of an observational journal that recounts participants making and sharing stories with one another. The practice is ongoing so this paper discusses preliminary findings and identifies areas that will be pursued further in the continuing research.

Keywords: Textile crafts; Men’s wellbeing; Collaboration; Dialogue; Facilitation

Introduction
This paper presents preliminary findings of a continuing practice-based PhD project, which seeks to examine the therapeutic use of textile craft processes for vulnerable men’s wellbeing. Motivated by the high mortality rate amongst men in the UK, this research focuses on the vulnerabilities of men over a generalised concern for men, in order to discover whether textile craft processes can provide a tool to self-manage individual wellbeing. Several empirical studies have evidenced the therapeutic benefits of crafting to the health and wellbeing of individuals (Corkhill 2014, Dickie 2011, Reynolds 2000, 2004, and Riley et al 2008) but these studies have largely focused on women, leaving men at continued risk from poor wellbeing. This research uses practice as its principle method of research, which consists mainly of the long-term community-based textile craft group, ManCraft, situated at Charnwood Arts in Loughborough, Tuesdays 4-6pm. The practice is positioned under the banner of ‘craftivism’, a specific aspect of ‘quiet activism’ which is concerned with the empowerment of communities and individuals through small embodied acts of ‘doing’. Therefore, the identified significance of the vulnerabilities of men in this research, contributes a specific concern to further inform understandings of ‘craftivism’ and advocate individuals as the experiential experts of their own wellbeing (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000). Discussions in this paper centre around individual participant’s responses to activities, and the dialogical narratives that were triggered by embodied, physical engagement in textile craft processes. The verbalised accounts (i.e. the extract below from 11th October 2016), are drawn from an observational journal and depict the repeat encounters and interactions between participants, materials, processes and the researcher’s facilitation methods. In the extracts, all participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities. A key finding of the research reveals the significance of emerging narratives to potentially support therapeutic benefits for vulnerable men’s wellbeing.

11th October 2016
I methodically check and re-check the sewing machine, set up in a DIY fashion for free-machine embroidery. I examine the scrap of acetate that I’ve placed over the ‘dogs’ (material feeders), checking for catches and making sure the needle passes smoothly through the small hole to pick up the thread from underneath. I’m running one last check when Kenny bowls into the workshop room. He dives straight into position, grabbing fabric on his way. The machine starts up and away he goes, drawing with a sewing machine, demonstrating all he’s learnt the week before.
Eric arrives next with a new gadget, a Bluetooth speaker. As the sounds lift upstairs, Stan and Kyle are called from the rafters to join in the evenings activities. I weave in and out of the bodies to thread up needles, fetch fabric and check the sewing machine, chatting as I go. Then, without warning, the music explodes into the room and a party suddenly ensues. My colleagues arrive in the doorway, faces flushed with concern. Jemma’s hands wet from dishes, James brandishing a tea towel. They are greeted with the full force of the lad’s rendition of Queens’ Bohemian Rhapsody. All I notice in that moment is the sewing,
as it continues flamboyantly in tune with the music. I glance at my colleagues apologetically, feeling sheepish and confused. This was not the usual calm relaxing atmosphere I was used to in textile craft workshops. I was also slightly thrilled by the response.

Men’s health and wellbeing
Wellbeing, in the context of this research, is conceived as a complex multifaceted concept that is difficult to define (Pollard and Lee 2003, Thomas 2009, Dodge 2012). Therefore, focus is placed on investigating the complexities of wellbeing through practice, utilising wellbeing indicators identified by psychiatrists and health specialists Leamy, Bird, Boutillier, Williams, and Slade, in their paper Conceptual framework for personal recovery in mental health (2011). Wellbeing indicators are specific aspects of life that impact on wellbeing, often used for measuring purposes in psychology, sociology and public policy (Stewart-Brown 2013, Ryff and Keyes 1995, and Aked, Marks et al 2008). Leamy and colleagues synthesize published descriptions and models of personal mental health recovery into an empirically based conceptual framework, which identifies five categories significant to the recovery process: Connectedness, Hope, Identity, Meaning and Empowerment, giving the acronym CHIME. These categories for recovery orientation, have a distinct overlap with wellbeing research (Leamy et al 2011: 450, Aked, Marks et al 2008) and have been utilised as a basis for discursive exploration of wellbeing in the community-based practice element of this research.

Men’s vulnerability to poor wellbeing and suicidal ideation (MHF 2016) has resulted in 4,630 men taking their own lives in 2014 compared with 1,492 women (Office for National Statistics 2016). Causes for the high suicide rate among men are attributed largely to men presenting different symptoms of mental health problems to women (Whittle et al 2015, Spendelow 2015), with specific relation to depressive symptoms (Emslie 2006). Some psychologists suggest that men’s inability or reluctance to communicate exacerbates depressive symptoms (Kilmartin 1994, and Martin, Neighbors and Griffith 2013, Moller-Leimkuhler 2001), developing what psychotherapist Horrocks defines as a state of ‘male autism’ which causes men to become ‘cut off from natural feelings and expressiveness and contact with others’ (Horrocks 1994: 107). Since identified issues in men’s health relate to an inability to connect with others and difficulties in personal expression, I suggest that Connectedness is of specific importance to men’s wellbeing. This notion is supported by the collaborative discourse with participants of ManCraft, explored later.

My initial decision to work with men stemmed from the findings of a previous research project that I conducted with a mixed gender textile craft group. From participants feedback I identified certain issues that prevented men from engaging with the textile craft processes:

• The topic of conversation between men and women differed greatly, making finding common ground and points of connection difficult and sometimes led to feelings of exclusion.
• Men’s lack of engagement stemmed from concerns relating to lack of skill and fear of making mistakes, leading to anxiety,
• Men found it difficult to ask for help within a group of mixed abilities.

These findings indicate that men struggle to engage in a mixed-gender group, informing my decision to work with vulnerable men for the purposes of the PhD. What is proving useful to the process and focus on dialogue in this research is the significance that the craft processes are largely un-practiced by men (McBrinn 2015) and therefore often carry no preconceptions or associations. The participants unfamiliarity with domestic crafts facilitates concentration in the acquisition of skills which leads to an uninhibited dialogue. The practice has further demonstrated that crafting alone might not be beneficial to vulnerable men’s wellbeing, despite previous research showing the wellbeing benefits of solitary crafting for women (Mayne 2016, Dickie 2011).

Methods of practice
The main method of practice consists of the long-term community-based textile craft group, ManCraft. Prior to establishing the main group in June 2016, I ran several pilot workshops at pre-existing creative arts groups in Leicester and Loughborough. These workshops provided the opportunity to trial the chosen methods, textile craft processes and the facilitation of dialogue. It was found that participants responded
well to the dialogical approach as it gave them opportunities to discuss the workshops in an open and trusting environment where they felt listened to and unhindered by direct questioning and/or questionnaires. The project is structured in five phases. 1. Satellite workshops at pre-existing groups, 2. Pilot of weekly workshops at Charnwood Arts, 3. ManCraft is established as part of Charnwood Arts wellbeing programme, 4. Exhibition, 5. Future planning and Autonomy. The project is currently in the final phase, ‘future planning and autonomy’, since an exhibition of participant’s textile works is currently being held at Bradgate Mental Health Unit, Leicester (Figure 1).

Figure 1. CHIME Exhibition
Source: Artists own photograph

I initially intended on being fully embedded in the practice as a participant-observer (Robson 1993), learning participant’s social conventions through shared experience. However, participants consequent lack of experience required me to adopt a more dominant role as a teacher and so shifted power relations within the group. To counter this, I adopted a dialogical approach to the workshops that enabled me to develop my relationship with participants dialogically as opposed to through participation. The dialogical approach is also significant to this specific group of individuals as three participants identify as having Asperger Syndrome, ‘a life-long developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others’ (The National Autistic Society 2017). Developing a space where dialogue and interaction is encouraged, provides participants with the opportunity to explore forms of communication beyond accepted social conventions.

Table 1 introduces a breakdown of the methods adopted during the ManCraft project.
Table 1. Basic breakdown of methods and approach adopted during ManCraft project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Elements of Textile Crafting</th>
<th>Approach to facilitation</th>
<th>Impact on wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction of basic sewing skills</td>
<td>High assistance with physical sewing and intervention during points of crisis.</td>
<td>Frustration is overcome with assistance and skills start to become intuitive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Familiarisation with skills</td>
<td>Introduction of small scale projects with visible outcomes – Textile hearts to support Glenfield Children’s Heart Hospital. Phone cases, and gifts for others.</td>
<td>Familiarisation with skills and abilities. An increase of confidence in personal skill and recognition of the potentials of materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Conceptualisation</td>
<td>Introduction of wellbeing theory through mind-mapping exercises and discussion.</td>
<td>Increased understanding of individual wellbeing. Discussion leads to initial ideas for artworks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Experimentation and Inspiration</td>
<td>More advanced skills are introduced such as embroidery, free machine embroidery and printing etc. Introduction to contemporary and historical examples of textile art for inspiration – group Pinterest board created to share and save ideas.</td>
<td>Excitement and ingenuity leads the creative processes. Storytelling and personal narratives begin to proliferate workshops, fostering social bonds. Discussion of each other’s creative processes, and further development of ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Creation of artworks</td>
<td>One-to-one dialogical approach – assisting with problem solving and decision-making processes. Facilitation of group dialogue.</td>
<td>Making meaning, development of personal expression, storytelling strengthens social connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Exhibition and Reflection</td>
<td>Curating exhibition, further discussion over outcomes – what worked well and next ideas for artworks.</td>
<td>Final artworks are completed and exhibited. Increased confidence in self and textile skills. Increased desire to create new works and greater ambition for future works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Future planning and autonomy</td>
<td>Reduced contact.</td>
<td>Autonomy increases as group aims to become user-led.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The adopted dialogical approach to the practice is supported through the keeping of an observational journal, written after each workshop, which captures the events and narratives within the practice. In the latter stages of the project, re-reading and reflecting on the applied methods and approach during workshop events and discussions, will enable me to reflexively evaluate the practice, questioning previous assumptions and identifying areas where participants are responsive to potential change (Barrett and Bolt 2007). Application and initial analysis of facilitation methods are discussed further below.

**Facilitation and collaboration**

I have recently identified that the intervention of facilitators can transform individual moments of crisis during the crafting process. Negative experiences are rarely explored in other textile oriented studies (Desmarais 2016), as focus is usually placed on the relaxing and cathartic effects. However, frustration has been a significant aspect to ManCraft participant’s experiences of crafting, due to their unfamiliarity with the processes.

*Stan started to get frustrated, making little short movements and exasperated noises. He had sewn till he had a centimetre of thread left and no room for manoeuvring the needle. Having noticed this, myself and Jemma responded by explaining the problem. He instantly realised and cut the thread. (2nd May 2017)*

Frustration would usually be associated with negative ‘affect’ in Bradburn’s framework for psychological wellbeing which relies on two independent variables, positive and negative affect. Bradburn states that one’s score on the negative affect scale will not impact one’s score on the positive affect scale and vice
versa (Bradburn 1969). But experiences of frustration in the ManCraft group have caused positive effects such as increased confidence and willingness to try new things, contrary to Bradburn’s assertion that negative emotions and experiences can only influence wellbeing negatively. The extract also evidences the facilitators intervention in this situation and might suggest that their presence and intervention is key to the transformation of the negative experience into positive ‘affect’, as well as the development of life skills such as learning how to deal with feelings of frustration in a less aggressive manner.

The extract below, 4th April 2017, describes a change in roles between myself and participants, as Kyle begins to take on a more directive role, explaining the patterning process to me (Figure 2).

_We were getting confused with drawing on the back of the fabric and flipping it – it would be the wrong way round._

_Kyle must have explained it to me at least three times, he became the teacher, helping me to understand how we could make it work._

_Kyle realised when I was trying to draw the second one, and making a right pigs ear out of it, that we could flip the first shape and use it as a template to draw around._

(4th April 2017)

This extract exemplifies the fluidity of the roles and relationships between researcher and researched, whereby participants are able to gain autonomy and ownership of the group by leading the workshop, demonstrating the importance for facilitators to recognise when to withdraw assistance and allow participants to take control. Working fluidly in this way allows the research to be a collaborative and cooperative process, whereby participants become co-researchers. In some instances, however, this approach has caused participants to become less independent, relying on the facilitator to do more of the physical sewing despite their demonstrated ability in previous workshops. This resulted in an altered approach, the removal of myself physically from the room at specific times in the workshops. This was a difficult act to take as I was no longer able to respond to participant needs or to observe interactions. But by removing myself from the scenario, I removed the temptation to fall back on assistance, allowing the individual to become less reliant on the facilitator and more confident in their own ability to see the process of stitching through to completion. Music was also a point of contention early on in the workshops, as tastes were contested. To prevent further disruption to the group a word association game was introduced, where each individual chooses a song that relates to the previous song, creating a collaborative process where participants choose songs they all appreciate. Music has now become a significant aspect for all participants, and Kenny explains how singing stops him focusing on negative thoughts. ‘Concentrating on the lyrics and getting in tune focuses my mind on something positive.’ (Kenny 7th Feb 2017).
A cursory analysis of the methods of facilitation within this research indicates that:

• Intervention during periods of frustration during the learning process, or in instances of conflict can transform negative experiences into positive experiences that develop coping skills for the future.
• Facilitation of dialogue can help participants develop alternative modes of communication that are empowering as they aid individual expression, and increase understanding of others.
• Facilitation methods are constantly in flux, requiring an awareness of situations and constant re-appraisal and adaptation within the practice.

Further reflection on the facilitators significance to the wellbeing of participants and the potential ethical concerns regarding trust and safety is still required.

**CHIME: mind-mapping and collaborative discourse**

This section of the paper expands specifically on the use of CHIME as a framework for participants to explore their individual understandings of wellbeing. Participants were introduced to the five wellbeing indicators, *Connectedness, Hope, Identity, Meaning* and *Empowerment* (CHIME), on the 10th and 17th January 2017. Introducing this abstract concept within a group scenario initially led to too many conversations taking place simultaneously. This process would have benefitted from a one-to-one approach initially before coming together to discuss individual ideas as a group. Participants from Charnwood Arts RawArt group, a creative group for adults with long term and enduring mental health illness, were also involved in the discourse. Differences in response between the two groups will be discussed below. The groups used mind maps to capture ideas and responses as to how these categories might improve wellbeing (Figures 3 & 4) and were asked to consider activities/actions they engage in that link to the categories.
Figure 3. ManCraft Participants – CHIME Mind Map
Source: Artists own photograph

Figure 4. Kyle – CHIME Mind Map
Source: Artists own photograph

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Overall Connectedness emerged as a strong wellbeing indicator for both ManCraft and RawArt participants, as they decided that each heading included some form of ‘connecting with others’. Meaning (in life) elicited ‘relate to other people’ as a way of feeling less isolated, and opportunities to ‘contribute to others lives and happiness’. Participants from both ManCraft and RawArt identified other aspects that they considered important to wellbeing in addition to those given by Leamy et al, however, these aspects differed between the two groups. RawArt participants favoured creative activities to boost their wellbeing whereas responses from ManCraft suggest that connecting with others, communicating, and forming social bonds are most significant to their positive wellbeing. This is counter to previous notions surrounding men’s health and wellbeing, where connecting and communicating are seen as problematic for men (Horrocks 1994, Kilmartin 1994). ManCraft responses to CHIME suggest that men find connectedness with others as purposeful and beneficial to wellbeing.

ManCraft participants articulated that Purpose and Control/Autonomy should be considered separate headings, also identified by Ryff who states that aspects of positive functioning in wellbeing include 6 core dimensions, Self-Acceptance, Positive relations with others, Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Purpose in life, and Personal growth (Ryff 1989: 1071). Purpose was highlighted as particularly important by Stan during a conversation about the heading Empowerment. Stan identified that actions such as ‘reaching out to people’ and ‘helping people’ made him feel empowered but also gave him purpose and a reason to stay connected (Figure 3). Kyle and Eric on the other hand, made literal interpretations of the headings, beginning with Connectedness. Kyle’s first addition to this heading was WiFi, the main tool that helps him connect with others, later adding ‘ManCraft’ and ‘apple music’ (Figure 4).

The use of humour as a collaborative tool for connecting and communicating is an additional theme that seems to be emerging. A misreading of Meaning on the mind map led to jokes surrounding ‘Lemon Meringue Pie’ which continued throughout the workshop, as all the participants picked up the joke and collaborated with each other to maintain it. Consequent workshops have elicited a certain amount of word manipulation, puns and altering the lyrics of songs.

Kenny changed the words to Katie Tunstall, reflecting what was happening to the music... ‘Buff-er-ing, these fucking buffering times, buffering times, buffering times.’ It filled the gap in sound but was also comical and put everyone in a good mood, helping them forget their feelings of frustration as the music faltered.

(21st February 2017)

According to Crawford and Caltabiano (2011) humour can have a significant effect on an individual’s wellbeing as ‘an individual who actively brings into play a sense of humour is more likely to be able to ‘reframe’ adverse, or distressing events.’ (2011: 237). Humour is distinct from other positive emotions in that it can be controlled, an individual has control over the frequency and intensity of the experience of humour and thus positive emotions. I suggest participants are using humour as a collaborative communication tool, as one pun or humorous observation is picked up by all participants and progressed till finally lost or exhausted, forming a collective identity and social bond. But Crawford and Caltabiano would also suggest participants are using humour as a way of controlling their experience of positive emotions.

Working collaboratively on the CHIME mind maps with ManCraft participants has expanded my understanding of wellbeing and its complexities. Responses highlight that conceptual frameworks such as CHIME are difficult to apply in practice as the categorise represent abstract notions that can be difficult to interpret, thus difficult to implement. However, the activity gave participants the chance to investigate and explore their own understanding of wellbeing, providing the opportunity to gain agency over their own wellbeing, as well as identify aspects and activities in their own lives that improve their individual wellbeing. Of particular note was Connectedness to others, leading to Purpose and a reason to keep connecting. Humour has also become a prominent aspect of the workshops and perhaps has some inference on participants’ wellbeing.
The CHIME project has also transformed how participants are thinking about and interpreting textile craft processes. For example, Kyle and Eric have sewn with wire as an alternative to thread (Figure 5 & 6). Stan has been using scraps of fabric to collage together images, using the shapes of the scraps to define the work (Figure 7). ‘I just look at the spaces here and think what would work and let it lead me.’ (14th February 2017)

Whilst Kenny is experimenting with layering fabric to create tactility (Figure 8).

Figure 5. Kyle – Sewing with wire
Source: Artists own photograph

Figure 6. Eric – Sewing with wire
Source: Artists own photograph
Textile crafting and emergent narratives
The most prominent notion emerging from the practice to date is how intrinsically linked textile craft processes are with dialogical narratives. The active engagement of participants with textile processes, such as stitching, mending and ironing has often triggered memories leading to story-telling, an exchange of dialogue that also contains an exchange of knowledge, of knowing one another as the stories are recalled, told and re-told, creating what Richard Sennett would refer to as ‘dialogic cooperation’ (2013), a form of discourse that attempts to find greater comprehension by becoming aware of one’s own views and expanding understanding of one another. Firstly, I will explore the therapeutic benefits of textile craft processes as several empirical studies evidence the therapeutic benefits of textile craft processes to health and wellbeing (Riley, Corkhill, and Morris 2013; Reynolds 2000, 2004; Corkhill 2014; Hackney 2013; Riley, Hemmings, Maddock and Corkhill 2014; and Dickie 2003, 2011). The term therapeutic in the context of this paper is being used to describe the positive effect that a specific activity can have on an individual and is not in reference to its more clinical applications in the context of art therapy.
A myriad of factors specific to textile crafts have been identified as having significant positive effects on individual wellbeing (Corkhill 2014, Dickie 2011, Reynolds 2000 and 2004, Hackney 2013 and Mayne 2016). The most cited benefit refers to the repetitive actions of textile craft processes (Fine Cell Work 2016, Riley et al 2013, Riley 2008), where the actions involved are repeated over and over, thusly becoming automatic movements that are executed without awareness, like walking and breathing.

Kyle - It’s like playing mind craft. Your body switches off and you can let your mind wander. Only your hands are doing something instead of just pressing buttons on a control. Your body switches off and your brain just goes nuts, let loose your imagination!
He then picked up his work and showed me with a gleaming smile, ‘I finished it whilst we were talking’. (31st January 2017)
Kyle - I don’t think about what I’m doing when I’m gaming and it’s like that now (sewing in the session), I just zone out. As soon as I start thinking about it, I stab myself with the needle.
(25th April 2017)

Kyle here pertains to a correlation between what he feels happens when he is gaming and when he is sewing and suggests that participants are benefitting from the repetitive actions of sewing. This repetition leads to theories relating to ‘flow’, also termed ‘zoning out’, described as a meditative-like state ‘in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter’ (Csikszentmihalyi 2002: 4). Flow is considered a desirable state because it allows the mind time to ‘reboot’ and allows for a deep sense of calm. In the extracts above Kyle suggests that this ‘zoning out’ can release more creative aspects of the imagination, allowing artworks to develop within the textile craft process.

Corkhill suggests that ‘zoning out’ can also lead to a freedom of dialogue (Corkhill 2005), as the repetitive actions take up greater brain capacity thus switching off what is termed ‘self-monitoring’, which allows speech to become freer and often more in depth (Corkhill 2014: 34). Since participants struggle with social expectations within conversation, often resulting in multiple conversations at once, the group process has proved to be beneficial in helping them develop storytelling skills that allow everyone to be heard and understood (Burt and Atkinson 2011).

Kyle - ‘When you were showing me that crochet thing and it was hard and then I wasn’t thinking but then you were like where did all that come from. And I’d been doing it whilst I wasn’t thinking.’
Like riding a bike, or swimming offered Jemma.
(10th January 2017)

The process of crochet in this workshop triggered a further narrative about being a daredevil, running across the tarpaulin that covers a swimming pool before school swimming lessons began. This led to sharing knowledge about emotions and feelings relating to achievement. Kyle related the feeling he gets from realising he can sew and crochet to the thrill he got from the rebellious act of running across the swimming pool tarpaulin.

The felt pieces Kyle wanted to work with were a little crumpled, I spotted him trying to smooth them out on the radiator – ‘you need to iron those’ I said.
‘Get me an iron then and I will. I know how to iron. My grandma taught me.’ So I did. And he did. But as he did, he told me a story...
(31st January 2017)

The act of ironing in this workshop instigated a memory for Kyle about his time as a cadet, a mischievous tale of ingenuity and ironing. These excerpts from the journal evidence how strong the link between textile crafting processes and story-telling can be, as participants relate emotions from previous experiences to emotions they experience as a result of crafting. By telling stories participants are better able to articulate how the crafting processes are affecting them.

These narratives also provide an alternative means of communication, expression and knowledge exchange beyond socially accepted forms of conversational exchange. The narratives emerging through the ManCraft practice provide context and a way of explaining ideas through experiences that others can understand and relate to, this understanding can also be transferred across generations as explored by Hackney (2013). Prain states, ‘it is rare that textile works are simply the end product’ (Prain 2014: 9), this is especially pertinent in the ManCraft group as the textile works are saturated with narratives and stories, as participants use the textiles to communicate with each other, to express themselves, be understood and to learn about each other. This suggests that the therapeutic outcomes of the project include ephemeral stories as well as textile artefacts.
Conclusions
The community-based practice is ongoing but is already providing exciting data regarding the significance of storytelling to the therapeutic process. The practice indicates that the active engagement of participants with textile craft processes, such as stitching, mending and ironing triggers memories that lead to the sharing of personal narratives through storytelling, providing participants with an alternative means of expressing themselves in a way that facilitates understanding of one another and increases the opportunity to develop strong social connections. Participants have engaged effectively with the complexities of wellbeing theory, adding their own understandings to its continued development. Connectedness to others, leading to an increased sense of purpose and feelings of empowerment have been clearly identified as important to men’s wellbeing, despite theories surrounding men’s ‘reluctance’ to communicate. Other findings from the practice include:
• Humour is a key aspect of interaction that contributes to social bonds and increased wellbeing.
• Crafting alone might not be beneficial to vulnerable men’s wellbeing, despite previous research showing the wellbeing benefits of solitary crafting for women.
• The facilitator’s interventions can be used to rehabilitate a person’s personal crisis in the moment, turning potentially negative experiences such as frustration into positive experiences of learning.
In order to refine the contributions to knowledge, it is necessary for certain aspects of the research to be clarified, including examining how dialogue occurs through the practice. How does the nature of the dialogue promote wellbeing? What is the qualitative value in the dialogue? Evidence of how the facilitator’s interventions can be used to rehabilitate a person’s personal crisis in the moment, indicates the need to further understand the affecting role of the facilitator on the relationship with the participant in craft-based activities, along with the potential complications. Developing a reflexive relationship with the observational journal will assist me with these enquiries.

The ManCraft group will continue for another 3 months, where I will attempt to withdraw my presence gradually to encourage the participants to begin gaining greater advocacy. Already I have noted in the journal that participants are showing signs of becoming self-regulating.

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