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### **JAAH 13.3 Guest Editorial**

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*Well-making and making-well: craft, design, and everyday creativity for health and wellbeing*

The guest editors of this special issue of the *Journal of Applied Arts and Health* have worked together to develop the concept of ‘well-making’ through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funded projects, networks, and conferences, including the Art as Research in Learning and Teaching Conference at University of Wolverhampton convened by Ross Prior (2016), book chapters (see Rana and Hackney 2018), journal articles (see Hackney and Rana 2018) well-maker space workshops (Gant, Hackney, and Hill 2018, Hackney 2018, Community21 n.d.). Our common interest in well-making is in using making as an engagement tool to work with communities of people on co-designing social and environmental change. We are curious about how the processes and spaces of everyday making with all their attendant social, sensory, material, spatial, and skill-based associations can increase wellbeing and improve health (Gant, Hackney, and Hill 2018, Hackney 2018).

The health benefits of everyday creativity have been increasingly recognised and evidenced in recent years alongside more established fields of art, design, and craft for health (Mansfield et al. 2020; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts Health and Wellbeing 2017). Located in design and craft practice, co-production, participatory research, and community engagement, the articles here draw on extant research to consider the many ways in which creative making – well-making – contributes to wellbeing in community settings and the generation of beneficial social and environmental impact. Collectively they build a nuanced understanding of the value of engaged making: the processes, places, spaces, experiences, and communities of making, as well as the art produced.

Shaun McNiff defines art-based research as a ‘systematic use of artistic process as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researcher and the people that they involve in their studies’ (2008: 29). For the most part, the research considered here involves acts of everyday creativity and people who, while often highly skilled and extremely creative, would neither consider themselves artists nor researchers. Yet, when working with researchers using co-production methods on projects located in the spaces and places of their

lives, participants begin to think as creatives and researchers producing ‘real world’ research in studies that are integral to their concerns, and aspirations (Facer and Enright 2017). We hope that our approach to collaborative making as a research method is a useful addition to the field of art-based research.

There is an urgency to this work of engaged making as a tool for supporting community health and wellbeing in the context of increased pressures on government funding. Exposing endemic inequalities in housing, health, and social services, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic crisis have resulted in calls for fundamental structural change to shape society around the values of ‘universal care’ (The Care Manifesto 2020), something that underpins thinking about well-making here. Above all, well-making research is applied research. Its diverse *makerly* perspectives, which range from crafting with a ‘small c’ by hobbyists tinkering in the garden shed to design thinking about the built environment, are undertaken with communities in and of place, (for examples see <https://cocreatingcare.wordpress.com/the-project>). Operating on a small or large scale, as an introspective mindful activity or a practical-means to functional-ends that involves multi-skilled teams (for examples see <https://makercentric.wordpress.com>), its methods pay attention to the experiential, embodied, and affective aspects of making. As such, well-making can offer safe spaces for co-operative thinking about change for good, and build health agency through acts of reciprocity, connecting, sharing, and learning by doing in ways that involve body and mind (Bullmore 2022). The editors hope that this special issue goes some way to developing discussions about how we can and build a better understanding of the value of making as an embodied, located, and connected approach to health research.

### **Guest editorial perspectives on well-making:**

To further expand understandings of well-making and show how the concept is entangled with everyday lived experiences of health and creativity, the editors will each give a brief account from their own perspectives. This is followed by a summary of key determining factors that is by no means definitive but intended as a starting point for discussion and for *JAAH* readers to develop, extend, and amend from their own professional and personal experience. As a concept and an approach, well-making is very much a work-in-progress – fluid, responsive, flexible, and contingent – something we believe to be a strength and integral to its value.

**Mah Rana**

Mah Rana draws on her own experience of well-making as essential everyday creativity that practically and emotionally shaped the dementia care that she provided for her mother (see Rana and Hackney 2018). More recently, she has shifted her professional creative practice into lived experience research by undertaking a Ph.D. in psychology and using creative research methods to explore daughters' meaning-making of their experience of crafting with their mother who has dementia (see Rana and Smith 2020), and to make voices of lived experience more visible in health research and health policy.

For me, the distinctive feature of well-making through everyday creativity is that it helps to safeguard and stabilise mental health and wellbeing, meeting needs, creating opportunities, helping to address inequity, and providing equity of access for all. As such, well-making is both a marker of democracy and a political act. Those facilitating well-making projects and workshops must be aware of the political context in which healthcare operates in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (Marmot et al. 2020). Professional hierarchies of knowledge and authority, if not managed sensitively and empathetically, can be divisive and territorial, symbols of a silo mentality that fosters insularity whilst denying agency and independence for others. Well-making, in my view, is the antithesis of so-called expert culture and authoritative detachment. People with lived experience of health issues can offer invaluable grass-root knowledge and insight, and a nuanced understanding of what are often complex situations where many factors come into play. Well-making can harness this experiential knowledge to co-design and co-produce initiatives that are meaningful, impactful, and sustainable for those involved, to challenge health inequalities and strengthen equity of access for all.

### **Nick Gant**

Nick Gant *makes research*; this places making front and centre of projects that seek to co-produce objects, spaces and places that are *about making* as an (activist's) agent for change. The research group he founded (Community21.org) has delivered projects that materialise all kinds of community concerns and highlight making as a transformative force in health and social care settings as a medium to enact social engagement and cohesion and as *social-fabric* that supports more sustainable and just neighbourhoods. These making methods and subsequent outcomes, reports, and publications (Gant, Hackney, and Hill 2018, Hackney 2018.), consider how different places and spaces can be formulated for making (well) and indeed for researching well-making. Making as research manifests through and within non-

textual means (artefacts, objects, products, spaces) and seeks to utilise and develop *material literacy* (Gant, 2017) that better communicates and translates new knowledge within civic settings with communities that (hopefully) benefit most.

The global maker-space landscape is as diverse as the activities involved. Maker culture readily embraces community building, social engagement, and collaboration in a cultural consciousness that seeks to communally engage with and address issues of social and/or environmental justice, reuse and recycling, access, and inclusivity. Ranging from stitch-and-bitch clubs in pubs and village halls, for instance – to maker-spaces in former factories, banks or failed high street shops, and Fab-Labs in shiny new university campuses and tech-start-up-centres – all of which deliver outcomes and experience that we might consider as contributing to wellbeing, for example Fab City Network (<https://fab.city>), Precious Plastics movement (<https://preciousplastic.com>), or the Stoneham community bakery (<https://stonehambakehouse.org.uk>). But how many of these spaces explicitly promote or understand the implications for health? Can they openly promote health as a benefit or even provide a formal basis for social prescribing - or could this result in stigmatisation and deter participation? Making-well may be tacitly embodied in the act of carving a cup from found wood, embroidering a quilt from recycled blankets for hospitalised babies, or building a duelling robot from a former electric wheelchair, but can we further extract, transfer, elevate, and amplify these benefits and provide an evidence base for application? If making is ‘alive and well’ then do we even need to intervene, analyse and/or mess with it? I am left with more questions than answers.

### **Katie Hill**

Katie Hill reflects that, throughout her life, making has been integral to regulating and promoting her own wellbeing, particularly at times of crisis. Making has become a central feature of her research and social design practice, often working directly with community participants to make social and environmental changes in their lives and neighbourhoods.

Following a traumatic bereavement in my early twenties, I made a lot of practical items for myself, and sent packages of wool and knitting needles to relatives to support their wellbeing. In the first month of the COVID-19 pandemic I crocheted three blankets whilst working online on video calls – my hands busy making outside of the view of the webcam. An adult diagnosis of neurodiversity has helped make sense of my need for busy hands to

quieten my mind and relax my body. Working in academia for over 20 years with educational and third sector organisations has enabled me to employ making as a community engagement tool and research method – bringing this lifelong need to be making into my professional work (Graham et al. 2015, <https://createconnectsustain.wordpress.com/>, <https://waysofknowingresearch.wordpress.com/>). I have been motivated by a drive to develop design approaches for complex social and environmental problems that expand beyond traditional boundaries of the design industry – a field of practice known as social design (Armstrong et al. 2014, Resnick 2019). Concepts of well-making and the well-makerspace contribute to this project of re-designing design by aligning making with wellbeing and acknowledging the potential impacts of collaborative (and individual) making as a design method for social and environmental change for good.

### **Fiona Hackney**

The health benefits of everyday creativity have been increasingly recognised and evidenced in recent years (Mansfield et al. 2020). After years living with family members struggling with mental health – from disordered eating to depression and anxiety and, more recently, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the context of COVID-19 – Fiona Hackney has realised the benefits of creativity on a personal level and as a researcher on practice-based projects with collaborators and community crafts groups (<https://cocreatingcare.wordpress.com/the-project/>, <https://makercentric.wordpress.com/>). The wellbeing benefits of material making have been a constant presence and the value of making for physical and mental health is embedded in and integral to the development of the CARE method of co-creative collaborative making, the wider benefits of being maker-centric, and thinking about quiet activism (see for instance Hackney et al. 2018 and Hackney et al. 2020).

### **Principles of well-making:**

- **Material making as embodied research:** discovering and developing the affordances of self and others through making practices and processes;
- **Slow making:** appreciating new temporalities through often repetitive processes of crafting/making;

- **Lived experience and agency:** making as a political act that voices the lived experience of health inequalities;
- **Co-creation as empowerment:** the value of collective making to build supportive communities to beneficially impact society and the environment;
- **Located-making:** identities embedded in and forged through and across communities of place and space;
- **Connected making:** across diverse communities of practice, culture, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, heritage, and religious belief;
- **Making and storytelling:** paying attention to the reciprocal and responsive relationship between making, listening, and telling and hearing the ‘voice’ of making.

### **The sequence of articles:**

The articles in this special issue contribute to thinking about well-making by viewing it through a range of theoretical perspectives, but always located in the hands-on experience of making. It opens with a reflection of the wellbeing aspects of making that emerged from two participatory art projects facilitated by social design practitioner-researchers Nick Gant and Katie Hill. Gant and Hill propose that knowledge about making for wellbeing (well-making) should be explicitly designed into the generation of all social, public, and professional makerspaces, including makerspaces that operate within social design projects. This is followed by an article by Fiona Hackney and Lynne Settrington that examines the relationship between the workshop as method/methodology and the ‘work’ (knowledge) that emerges from it through two community arts textile projects. They argue that thinking about the workshop as a holding form and/or bloom space and paying attention to the stories told and artefacts (knowledge objects) made in workshops is vital to understanding their value for well-making. Lydia Lewis then reports on her ethnographic research undertaken with an older women’s adult community learning jewellery-making group. Lewis identifies two interrelated themes: creative agency and shared learning, and the social generativity of the group, which promote mental wellbeing through making as a regenerative process. Mary Loveday, in contrast, interrogates the role of nostalgia in making for wellbeing. Considering

nostalgia as a unique way of knowing within art-based research, she proposes its potential for future well-making projects. Taking a materials approach, Kirsten Scott, Jonathan Butler, Karen Spurgin, and Prabhuraj Venkatraman conclude the longer articles by demonstrating how the integration of art-based research with indigenous knowledge, and innovative antimicrobial textile fashion design and production, creates new opportunities for using endangered textile processes to improve human and environmental health and wellbeing.

The 'Notes from the Field' section invites authors to reflect on personal and professional experiences of well-making and to comment on current developments on research in practice. Mah Rana champions the value of embedding voices of lived experience in the co-creation of policy and research, and to develop local and national opportunities for well-making. Emma Collins offers insights into the fast-moving world of digital technology as a mediator for mass-participatory making, arguing that digital and analogue making/crafting communities must operate symbiotically to support meaningful personal and planetary health and wellbeing. Jayne Howard, Director of Arts Well in Cornwall, United Kingdom, offers a personal reflection on how a small arts and health organisation responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by focusing on hyper-local expertise and co-creation to build well-making into daily life. While, in a photo-essay, Joanne Mills recalls her experience of facilitating an addiction recovery group as they engaged in making, with words and clay, to produce poetry and ceramics. Mills highlights the value of risk and jeopardy in the ceramic process, proposing that it serves as a material metaphor for the risk experienced in recovery. Finally, in an interview with Fiona Hackney, the academic, artist, and educator Angela Maddock talks about her work applying textile thinking to health care. Maddock's insights about textile making as an impactful transformative act, both physically and psychologically, serves as a useful conclusion to the special issue as she defines well-making as a mode of affectual agency that is materialized through doing, contributing, building, and bringing things together to attach and connect with the self and others.

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