#quiltsforpulse: Investigating Quilting Processes to Inform Community-Based Engagement

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Abstract: The political shift in the learning sciences underscores the need to design for community engagement. Aligning craft and activism, craftivism provides a useful context to study processes of community-based engagement, with one example the creation of statement blankets within hobby groups. Through an analysis of a quilting group's involvement with the #quiltsforpulse movement, we identified five themes that present craft-specific ways to contribute to social causes with implications for design for community-based engagement.

Introduction and background

With politics taking a central role within the study of learning (Politics of Learning Writing Collective, 2017), issues of designing for community-based engagement have become vital (e.g., Jurow, Teeters, Shea, & Van Steenis, 2016). These emergent threads stand in the larger context of designing effective processes for people to participate in addressing important issues affecting their communities. A key tension in fostering such opportunities is to identify processes of how community-based engagement can contribute to address social issues without increasing administrative tasks. Understanding such instances is relevant for the learning sciences because they promise to point to how community-based engagement and learning could effectively be supported. A promising context for investigating community-based engagement processes is craftivism, which recently revived the potential of crafts to contribute to a social cause through socially disruptive actions (Bratich, 2011). For example, following the 2016 shooting at Pulse, a gay bar in Orlando, Florida, the local guild turned to quilting communities nationwide, calling for 102 Heart Quilts to be distributed to survivors and victims' loved ones (Watson, 2017). The #quiltsforpulse movement was marked by an international outpouring of empathy, quickly surpassing its goal over tenfold. Historically, quilting has acted as a vehicle for community-based engagement with larger societal issues through initiatives like the AIDS Memorial Quilt project (Watson, 2017). Yet quilting has been valued for its contribution to the domestic sphere, undermining its potential as a vehicle for advancing social causes (Bratich, 2011). Such tensions present quilting as a compelling context to examine emergent forms of community-based engagement. Thus, we asked: *How do the processes of quilting inform community-based engagement with a social cause?* Through an embedded online-offline ethnography, we immersed ourselves in the piecing of blocks and whirring of sewing machines as a group of female quilters contributed to the #quiltsforpulse movement by making and donating quilts to those affected by the shooting. This poster presents initial findings of a thematic analysis of photographs, interviews, observations, and social media posts to trace tensions between established visions of craftivism and the processes of a quilting group's engagement with #quiltsforpulse. We identified five themes that inform a new view of a craft-specific community-based engagement, with implications for the design for community-based engagement based on community preferences.

Methods

This study examines how the practices of members of a female quilting group informed community-based engagement to learn from that in the design for community-based engagement. The quilting group was located in a Midwestern college town and included 19 members with varied socioeconomic, national, political, educational, and occupational backgrounds. Quilters communicated through social media to set up biweekly gatherings at group members' homes. One author joined the group when it was formed. This study draws on social media posts by group members (60 posts per year on average) over 34 months, over 180 photographs, field notes from meetings related to #quiltsforpulse, and four interviews with group members who contributed to #quiltsforpulse. Thematic coding identified quilting practices by the group and how they informed the group's community-based engagement with a social cause in ways that diverged from current understanding of craftivism.

Findings

The group's engagement with #quiltsforpulse was characterized by social gatherings, a supportive, joyful, and production-oriented atmosphere. Table 1 presents how the group's shared engagement worked to produce a

Econtribution to the #quiltsforpulse movement. The examples seemingly contrasted to what may have been expected as social-cause centered community-based engagement.

Table 1: Emergent themes in our iterative analysis

Theme	Description	Data excerpt
Enjoying crafting	Enthusiasm for craft process and product.	*"I think that sounds like a lovely idea."*
Making friends	Quilting together to get to know each other.	*"Oh good! Glad you two can make it!"*
Organizing production	Minutiae required to keep the craft going.	*"Any thoughts on our next meeting?"*
Quilting and life	Balancing quilting and personal duties.	*"Change in plans. Won't be able to come."*
Repurposing scraps	Use of limited yet sufficient resources.	*"I wouldn't lug a bunch of stuff…"*

An example of the processes that moved crafting and community-based engagement forward is a social media post by Jackie who planned a #quiltsforpulse meeting. She wrote: "I thought maybe a few could cut, a few could sew, a few could press and trim and we'll just have fun and visit while we're at it." Where the organization of a production process and ultimate contribution to the social cause stand in the front and center, Jackie expresses enjoyment and levity in contrast to the gravity of the #quiltsforpulse cause and solidarity with the wider LGBTQ community. Yet historically quilt-making has been a social event, and thus, socializing while crafting is building on the traditional practices of the craft and is fusing them with this new context, that is shaped by a socio-political engagement. In another excerpt Jackie calls for additional fabric to help execute the hearts for #quiltsforpulse: "I have scraps, not a lot of neutrals tho. I'd say if you want to grab a handful of bright scraps and/or neutrals to bring along that would be good enough." While "scraps" can have a negative connotation as something that is left over and discarded, in the context of quilting, scraps signal thoughtful and economical use of materials. Scraps can provide an opportunity to create new objects with purpose, such as a blanket that was carefully hand-crafted to provide comfort and support to recipients. Despite the tension in the phrasing of "good enough", the use of scraps is typical for quilting practices and the common pooling of resources for a community purpose speaks to individual member's contribution to the larger cause.

Discussion and implications
The participants within the quilt group we engaged with participated in what they enjoyed doing and exactly how they would typically engage with the craft (e.g., making quilts out of scraps) while also sharing their work with the wider community related to the #quiltsforpulse movement. Such participant preferences that contribute successfully to larger social causes point to implications for community-based engagement that can contribute to social issues by building on community preferences. Thus, examining the quotidien workings of a crafting community in the context of a social movement, has implications for design work toward community-based engagement within the learning sciences.

References
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