ABSTRACT

BREEDING, EMILY HAYES. Crafting Resistance: The Maker Movement in the Triangle Area of North Carolina. (Under the direction of Dr. Tim Wallace.)

The spirit of do-it-yourself is not a new phenomenon in American culture. Historic narratives of fortitude, ingenuity, and entrepreneurship place self-reliance and creativity deep in the socio-historic landscape of American consciousness. However, the current environment of neo-liberalism and a globalized, service-based economy privileges consumption over creation. Running counter to this paradigm and drawing upon ingenuity and self-reliance, a social movement has grown in the last decade in the United States that seeks to privilege the handmade over the mass-produced: the maker movement. Also called the “handmade revolution,” the maker movement challenges and offers alternatives to rapid consumption. This research investigates the social drivers of the maker movement, and it locates handmaking within anthropological literature on DIY (do-it-yourself) culture, identity construction, and consumption. Ethnographic data was collected with makers in the Triangle Area of North Carolina from April 2011 to December 2011. Participants were sampled from one type of handmaking, “indie craft,” characterized by original design and utilization of recycled materials. The researcher conducted participant observation at handmade markets, crafting circles, and the Maker Fair: NC. Eighteen crafters participated in semi-structured interviews. Through these interactions, makers shared their methods and the personal or social significance of their crafts. The interpretation of these data is that the practice of handmaking helps to create and iterate an identity of self-reliance, conscientious
consumption, and creativity. One key research participant stated, “The maker movement is a huge rebellion” against corporate globalism. It is also characterized by innovative design, environmentally sustainable practices, and personal and community empowerment.
Crafting Resistance: The Maker Movement in the Triangle Area of North Carolina

by

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DEDICATION

To the crafters who lent their time and vision to this research.
BIOGRAPHY

Emily Breeding is daughter to Cecilia Farr and David Breeding. Her love of anthropology began with summer outings with her father to recently turned farm land near his home in Kentucky, where they “hunted” for arrowheads and wondered aloud about the lives and habits of those who had made them. Many years and travels later, Emily earned a Bachelor of Arts in general anthropology from the University of Louisville. Her current research interests are United States culture, social movements, and identity studies. She will graduate in 2012 with a Master of Arts in Cultural Anthropology from North Carolina State University.
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INTRODUCTION

Marissa and I neared the end of our lunch meeting on a sunlit patio of a café in Raleigh. She had kindly agreed to meet with me to talk about her methods and motivations for her hobby of handmaking jewelry and toys. I asked if there was anything she would like to add that wasn’t addressed in the interview questions. She dropped her arm to the table, leaned up in her seat and regarded me with sincerity, as if she had been waiting for this opportunity for the last hour and a half. She said, “Actually, I think crafting is a big rebellion.”

I blinked at her, somewhat surprised with her forthrightness, and said, “Interesting, please continue.” I watched her take a moment to think and marveled internally that this very youthful looking woman, with meticulous makeup, long black hair that hinted at her Philippina heritage, a white crocheted dress and high heels, could possibly be old enough to have three children. She continued, “I’m not just going to buckle and buy whatever I see in the store. I’m going to go home and try to make it first. And I think if more people did that, it would take control away from [corporations] and people would have more control. Yeah, for me the maker movement is a huge rebellion. I don’t think people really see that yet, but look at everything we’ve talked about [in this interview]. It’s revolutionary.”

Words like “renegade,” “revolution,” “urban” and “chic” dominate the physical and digital spheres of modern handmaking. At the beginning of this research, I became curious about the attachment of rhetoric associated with change and social action to behavior typically associated with traditional ways, such as hand stitching home décor, jarring fruit, or
metalworking jewelry. What is revolutionary or renegade about handmade? Is it revolutionary because it contrasts with the modus operandi of rapid consumption of mass produced goods in America? Is it renegade because a celebration of the handmade is not what one would expect to find in a post-industrialized culture in which most processes are mechanized? These early questions were merely the spark for formal research; they were not posed in my interviews with research participants. Imagine my surprise, then, when Marissa addressed them of her own accord after patiently answering my formal questions.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of my study is to identify the social drivers of the maker movement, as expressed in the Triangle Area of North Carolina. This research addresses the following questions: What are the shared values or commonly experienced social drivers that influence the behavior of handmaking? Is there an identity evolving in the specific practices of handmaking, and what does it contest or reflect about wider social norms?

The larger questions of this study relate to the construction of identity and agency. Situated within United States cultural identity, does the maker movement resist the mass consumption that often characterizes the U.S. worldwide (Berger 2005, Wilk 2002)? Does it reflect an historical national identity of self-reliance associated with pioneering and homesteading? My research investigates the ways in which DIY crafters interact with these somewhat dichotomous aspects of American identity: the consumer and the self-reliant

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1 Identity is a broad term. This research examines intimate identity and collective identity.
maker. Further, I attempt to elucidate how handmaking shapes the identity and agency of makers.2

Research Site

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork with makers in The Triangle Area of North Carolina. This tri-city region in the southeastern United States is influenced by a history of agricultural production as well as a currently thriving industry of research and scientific innovation. The Triangle encompasses Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill/Carrboro, and it is touted as “the creative hub of the South” (www.sparkcon.com). This specific site was selected because it is a nexus for maker activity and the culture of consumption. Raleigh was the fastest-growing city in the United States in 2009 according to population growth and economic development (Sherman 2009). In such a context, capitalistic consumption is palpable; corporate chains and local companies alike compete to sell homes, cars, home furnishings, baby accoutrement, and convenience services to the area’s growing and newly relocated families.

My research revealed that The Triangle is also a choice destination for makers. The cost of living is significantly lower than the two cities my contacts refer to as hubs of creative activity, San Francisco and Brooklyn.3 Further, the region’s history of agricultural production and continued success of farmers’ markets has fostered an interest in knowing the

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2 The word “maker” is an emic term used by handcrafters and inventors of all sorts. All of the participants in this research self-identify as “makers,” yet few could place the origin of the phrase. Make Magazine helps perpetuate the word in its publications and sponsorship of “Maker Fairs” worldwide.

3 From Sam at the Maker Faire: “Raleigh’s is the 3rd Maker Faire in the U.S. Started in San Francisco, then NYC, now here. It’s 40% larger than last year. The Triangle has a combination of tech industry and artists/creative types” (June 18, 2011).
source of food and goods amongst consumers. Makers who sell their crafts find a customer base that enjoys speaking directly with producers, and sellers and non-sellers alike find a supportive maker community that eagerly engages in conversation about techniques, materials, and creative designs. The triangle seemed a choice location to observe the ways in which the subculture of makers interacts with the larger culture of consumption and to examine the various identities expressed within that negotiation.

Do It Yourself

The maker movement is characterized first and foremost by a spirit of DIY – Do It Yourself. DIY extends to a wide array of projects, from home repair to handmade clothing to energy production. In the popular book *Handmade Nation*, crafter Andrew Wagner asks “Aren’t the words ‘craft’ and ‘DIY’ interchangeable? Aren’t all makers, to some extent, doing it themselves?” (Levine 2008, 1). The rhetorical attachment of “DIY” indicates an alignment of modern handmaking with a global social movement called DIY, which in its most basic form is a call for self-directed action. Watson and Shove define DIY culture as “a self-proclaimed cultural movement challenging the symbolic codes of mainstream culture” (2008, 647).

“There is a tremendous emphasis in DIY culture laid on actually doing something,” observes McKay in *DIY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain* (1998, 4). During the 1990’s in Britain, the spirit of DIY spurred collective action on a wide array of social issues. The central theme of these collective actions appears to be subversion of corporatization by means of creative, local action. For example, squatters disrupted land purchases that would
have turned fertile lands to private hands, and musicians excised corporate producers and created “indie” record labels (Halfacree 1999, McKay 1998, Stoller 1999). Watson and Shove studied three examples in Britain: organic food box schemes, music festivals, and local exchange trading systems. They argue that “rather than direct confrontation with the state, all [three] engage in cultural innovation, challenging dominant symbolic codes” (2008, 647).

In “Music, Marxism, and the hype about DIY,” Stoller describes DIY as a ‘grassroots’ movement that emerged alongside punk-rock in the 1970s. She writes, “As a political stance, DIY represented non-profit co-operation between music halls and bands, eliminating retailers from distribution, publicizing shows by flyers instead of advertising media and, in general, reducing the commercial barriers between audience and musician, themselves interchangeable, as much as possible” (1997, 1). This theme of reducing commercial barriers appeared in my interviews with makers. So too did the association of DIY with punk rock; one interviewee stated that in her opinion, “DIY sprang from punk rock.”

Since the 1970’s, DIY has become an international phenomenon associated with a wide range of activities. Today, Make Magazine hosts “maker fairs” in over 21 countries representing all continents, described as “a two-day, family-friendly festival of invention, creativity and resourcefulness, and a celebration of the maker movement” (www.makerfaire.com). In Germany, DIY activities are currently estimated to account for 17% of GDP (Buehn, Karmann, and Schneider 2008). Amy Spencer’s DIY: The Rise of Lo-
Fi Culture explains the appeal and applicability of DIY: “The DIY movement is about using anything you can get your hands on to shape your own cultural entity: your own version of whatever you think is missing in mainstream culture. You can produce your own zine, record an album, publish your own book — the enduring appeal of this movement is that anyone can be an artist or creator. The point is to get involved” (2005, 11).

As the movement grew to America, it also grew to the web. Thousands of U.S.-based web sites sprung up dedicated to DIY and hand-making. They incorporate disparate activities and interests, such as home repair, music production, energy alternatives, robotics engineering, sewing, canning, home schooling, and handmade home décor and jewelry – just to name a few – under the umbrella of the empowerment and creativity encapsulated in the phrase “do it yourself.” Etsy.com greatly accelerated the appreciation and awareness for handmade goods in the United States. Etsy is an online marketplace that started in 2005 and as of 2012 has over 14 million members. Etsy’s mission is “to empower people to change the way the global economy works… we are bringing heart to commerce and making the world more fair, more sustainable, and more fun” (www.etsy.com/about). This is just one example of many web sites dedicated to DIY that have allowed the maker movement to spread quickly and to develop certain rhetorical clues of group unity, such as the words “empower,” “fair,” and “sustainable” from this mission statement.

Existing literature places DIY culture squarely within the realm of “new social movements” (Halfacree 1999). Briefly described, new social movements are post-modern,

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4 A zine is an underground magazine written and printed without sponsorship.
5 [http://www.etsy.com/press/?ref=ft_press](http://www.etsy.com/press/?ref=ft_press) April 11, 2012. This number is not to be confused for the number of members of the DIY or maker movement, however, which at this point is inestimable.
diffuse, lacking central leadership, and sharing global imaginings and local enactment (Bauman 1992, Castells 2009, Escobar 2007). In his article, “Anarchy doesn’t work unless you think about it: Intellectual interpretation and DIY culture,” Halfacree describes DIY culture as a “non-organization,” which means it has “a flexible, dynamic, non-dogmatic and voluntary character.” He continues, “While one can challenge the novelty of DIY culture, it can be regarded as uniquely post-modern in its mediation and highly symbolic character.” (209-218). This particular quote confirmed my observations that the artistic expressions and modes of non-coordinated, non-codified resistance found in the U.S. version of DIY culture appear to be a reworking of conventional notions of self-expression and social action. Further, it reminded me, as many clues in this research did, that DIY is not new.

Efforts to privilege the handmade over the mass-produced have captured the U.S. imagination before. The Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th Century mirrors the maker movement in several ways. The Arts and Crafts movement began in Europe during the late Victorian era and spread to America. Kaplan observes in *The Art that is Life: The arts and crafts movement in America 1875-1920* that the surge in interest in crafts and the handmade was an international response to industrialization and the rise of mass production. Craftspeople and artisans banded together to promote the handmade as superior in quality and in social value. The movement was partly informed by a desire for craftspeople to protect their own livelihoods, and partly in accordance with the philosophies of William Morris (1834-1896) and John Ruskin (1819-1900), who believed that quality is characterized by simplicity, good design, and craft work. No particular style was promoted, but the movement
“instigated a critique of industrial labor; as modern machines replaced workers, Arts and Crafts proponents called for an end to the division of labor and advanced the designer as craftsman” (Obinski 2000).

The self-reliance called upon in the do-it-yourself aspect of the Arts and Crafts movement resounded with U.S. Americans’ national identity of a fiercely independent people. However, by the 1920’s, “machine-age modernity had captured the attentions of designers and consumers and brought an end to the handcrafted nature of the movement” (Obinski 2000).

Seventy years later in the 1990’s, new handmade markets in major cities such as the renegade craft fairs in Chicago and Austin began making legible another handmade movement. In 2007, Faith Levine’s book and documentary *Handmade Nation* elucidated the phenomenon of handmade markets and made nascent makers aware of their growing presence, alongside the rise of DIY and hand-making web sites. In 2012, the movement is recognized as activism. For example, a recent book titled *Craft Activism: People, ideas and projects from the new community of handmade and how you can join in* reads on its cover, “Join the Handmade movement! We make to give, we make to share, we make to connect with others. Crafters all over the world are using their hands and their hearts to make a statement, change the world, and build community” (Tapper 2011). As this quote indicates, the social and technological phenomena to which the maker movement responds are less clear than the Arts and Crafts Movement’s opposition to mass-production. The purpose of
my research is to, first, identify these social drivers and, second, describe how handmaking shapes the identity and agency of my research participants.

To help conceptualize some of the key terms presented thus far, imagine a reverse pyramid (see Figure 1). “DIY culture” is a broad descriptor referring to social activities of the last 40 years that are both self-directed (“do it yourself”) and collective (“culture”). “The maker movement” draws from DIY culture’s general emphasis on action into a specific goal to privilege the handmade over the mass produced. One set of handmaking practices that help express and facilitate that goal is called “indie craft” or “DIY craft.” DIY crafting is the specific practice upon which my fieldwork in The Triangle focused.

Figure 1: Relationship of terms
DIY Crafting

My research focuses on type of handmaking called DIY crafting or indie craft. DIY crafting is differentiated from “traditional” crafting primarily through its emphasis on ingenuity of design and the creation of new modes of expression, even while borrowing from traditional materials (Johnson 2009, Levine 2008). Jo Waterhouse, author of Indie Craft, describes it as “produced by artists and makers using traditional craft techniques but with a completely modern, alternative and subversive style, context and subject matter” (2010, 8). Traditional crafting has a set of expected aesthetics, such as country-style quilts or embroidered “Home Sweet Home.” However, in DIY craft, as Waterhouse says, “There aren’t any country cottages or cutesy animals here, unless with a twist or heavy dose of irony” (8).

DIY crafting gained speed through annual handmade markets such as the “Renegade Craft Fair,” which began in Chicago in 2003 and has spread to eight other major U.S. cities and London, and networks of craft circles such as “Stitch N Bitch” and “Craft Mafia” which are organized online but meet in person in cities all across the U.S. The incredible growth of the web site Etsy mentioned earlier also contributed to the momentum of DIY crafting. Other major online nodes are Craftster.org and LifeHacker.com. The online presence of DIY crafting continues to grow at the time of this writing; the latest social media craze to connect through Facebook is Pintrest. It allows users to “pin” favorite web articles to a digital corkboard. New users are suggested five possible categories of interest, and “Craft and DIY” is one of them. The digital sphere and the physical sphere of DIY are mutually reinforcing.

Blogs and online forums help to share ideas with makers working on similar projects all over the world, as well as to connect anyone interested in handmade – creating it or buying it – to handmade markets in their local economies.

Craft blogs refer to DIY crafting events as “not your grandma’s craft fair” (Glor 2011). At a DIY or “indie” craft fair, one finds a myriad of handmade goods that wink at conventional forms but are themselves unique, expressive, or subversive products, often made with recycled or “repurposed” materials (Johnson 2009). A sampling of Etsy products would include handmade screen-printed cards, belt buckles made with bicycle chains, necklaces of jewels harvested from vintage brooches, a collage of bottle caps depicting a cityscape, or felted creatures.

A common aesthetic in DIY crafting is an assemblage style that utilizes recycled materials (Tapper 2011). Crafting web sites and do-it-yourself guides refer to this process as “upcycling” or “repurposing” materials. Upcycling refers to using one or more elements of a vintage item that has lost its luster over time, for old film reels or a rusty skeleton key found in a grandmother’s desk drawer, and integrating that piece into a new design. Upcycling blends old styles with new to create something that is at once unique, modern and historic. This practice reveals an appreciation for the antique, the used, and the personal. (See Figure 2 for an example.)
Repurposing items allows one to use “found” items instead of purchasing new materials, which is beneficial to those facing economic constraints or who simply choose not to invest in crafting. For example, rather than purchasing jewels, one can find jewels in the form of vintage jewelry at a more attainable price point in antique stores, thrift stores, rummage sales, the attics of friends or family, or trading spaces such as the Scrap Exchange of Durham, North Carolina. Maker blogs commonly feature a “free craft” section which boasts pride of creating “new” pieces entirely from found materials. It would seem that repurposing allows makers to maintain creative expression despite economic constraints.

The practice of repurposing items reflects an existing and perhaps broader valuation of recycling and sustainability that is also found in environmentalism. As the research below will show, sustainability was cited as a primary concern by each of the twenty makers interviewed for this study. Efforts to craft using sustainable practices seem to echo a larger effort to live sustainably. To this end, many makers describe DIY as “a way of life.”

Figure 2: Earrings made of film
Space is devoted in these pages to illustrating the style of goods being produced in the maker movement. The aesthetics, materials and functions of the goods makers produce are relevant to a study of the maker movement in several ways. First, the materials and final aesthetic are the key distinguishing factors between the crafts of the maker movement and the crafts of hobbyists with no involvement with the movement. Second, tangible objects play a significant role in identity and identity formation, even for social movement identity, and thus it is appropriate to devote space to descriptions or illustrations of these tangible objects. Third, the maker community is not bound by geography or demography; it is an imagined community held together by shared practices, values and future imaginings. The products produced by DIY crafting reflect these shared practices and values, such as crafts featuring subversive content or made from ethically-sourced materials.

DIY crafting does not have a central hub in the United States. It is scattered across the minds and hands of makers everywhere. However, there are common grounds of activity where one may find crafters gathered to exchange ideas and to display their work. In our post-modern and digital world, social networks often lack the charismatic leaders and planned space of historical social movements (Castells 2010, Juris 2005, Escobar 2007). Arturo Escobar observes that, “It is already commonplace assert that social movements of today operate under different rules” (2007, 278). Manuel Castells (2010) provides a framework for analyzing social networks that are somewhat decentralized. In his book The Rise of the Network Society, he defines a network as “a set of interconnected nodes.” Jeff Juris applies Catells’ approach in his ethnography of “anti-corporate globalization
movements,” in which he identifies online and physical nodes of social activity (Juris 2005). DIY crafting has distinct nodes, both physical and digital. The nodes appear to be: maker fairs, web-based craft magazines and blogs, and local supplies stores.

Waterhouse writes in *Indie Craft*, “Community is a big part of the Indie Craft scene, expressed in online communities, local/regional events, and groups and collectives” (2010, 10). The site of my ethnographic research, The Triangle Area of North Carolina, has numerous and active nodes of maker activity. In Raleigh and Durham, there are four annual (and semi-annual) maker fairs, as compared to a rough average of one to three in other metropolitan areas. One of these fairs, the Handmade Market, has a well-known reputation online for quality and consistency of innovative design (www.craftzine.com, www.modish.com, www.indiefixx.com). Additionally, the Triangle hosts three broader conventions, the National Reuse Conference, Spark Con, and “Maker Faire: NC,” which feature DIY crafters selected for their innovative designs and commitment to using recycling materials. The Triangle Area also has several meeting places to swap or purchase materials, learn crafting tips, and share ideas, such as the Scrap Exchange in Durham and NC State’s Craft Center in Raleigh. In my fieldwork, I conducted participant observation at many of these local points of convergence, with particular attention to the Handmade Market, the Scrap Exchange, and the Maker Faire. As indicated earlier, the Triangle Area serves as a choice locale for studying the curious phenomena of the rise of handmade within a culture of consumerism, for here one may observe the specific behaviors and values of DIY crafters within a city experiencing growth and the rapid consumption that accompanies growth.
METHODS

The process of narration features prominently in literature on identity formation. Holland and Peacock (1993) posit that identities are constructed and expressed through self-narrative. Their model suggests that social identity is constructed by the personal stories of individuals and the social processes reflected and informed by those stories; thus, my research methods were aimed at capturing handmaking in process and in dialogue.

As I selected research methods, I kept the following assertion in mind: the “self becomes discourse,” part of a process of narration which reflects the individual and their social structure (Peacock and Holland 1993, Bauman 2004). From this, I honed in on discourse and narration, and what that discourse reflects about the self and social structures. Data collection emphasized in-depth interviews using a post-modern interviewing style aimed at eliciting a dialogue that revealed insights into the individuals who participated in my research and which social structures they might be interacting with via handmaking. Other methods employed were participant observation, social network mapping and analysis, self-documentation journals, collaborative ethnography, and grounded theory practice. A brief description of each method follows.

Post-modern interviewing refers to the view that ethnographic interviewing after the post-modern turn in anthropology is “a matter of conversations between persons” (Kvale and Brinkman 2008, 53). Creating a conversation between the researcher and the research participants is encouraged. Further, “active interviewing” includes a specific effort to find meaning in self-identification phrases, such as “as a mother” or “as a potter” (Holstein and
Gubrium 1995). Keeping with these suggestions, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews that followed a list of specific questions but allowed for an exchange between myself and the interviewee, and I paid particular attention to the ways in which my contacts self-identified. Eighteen makers were interviewed.

M.Q. Patton (1990) outlines six types of interview questions. My research utilized four of them: background/demographic, experience/behavior, opinion/values, and knowledge questions. Many of the questions related to the practice of crafting, for example, “What types of crafts do you make? What materials do you use, and did you choose those for any specific reason? Do you craft alone or with family or friends?” One of the opinion/values questions was, “Is there a community of crafters, either physical or digital?” These questions elicited stories of how my interviewees became involved in DIY practices and how they feel more self-fulfilled because of them.

The interview guide contained only one complex question, and it too was in the opinion/values category. I asked for the interviewees’ opinions about what little research there has been into the rise and popularity of DIY. This question was placed at the end of the interview, to avoid introducing certain phrases too early that respondents might have produced themselves. For example, I asked if they thought that DIY had anything to do with “voluntary simplicity or sustainability,” as several publications in the literature indicated (Binkley 2008, Purdue et al. 1997, Watson and Shove 2008). About half of my interviewees were already familiar with the phrase voluntary simplicity, and the other half quickly recognized it after a brief explanation. My closest research participants said that they enjoyed
this final section of the interview and found it most interesting; they appreciated knowing what researchers were hypothesizing about their lifeways.

This study also included participant observation. I concentrated on local nodes of maker activity and participated as a volunteer, a fellow crafter, or a shopper. Two of these experiences are described in the chapter entitled “The Community.” The participant observation sites included craft markets such as the Handmade Market in Raleigh and the Rock N Shop in Durham, the Scrap Exchange in Durham (where crafters can find surplus items of various sorts and crafting circles convene), Bull City Craft in Durham, Ornamentea in Raleigh (a craft supply stores also with craft circle events), craft booths at farmers’ markets in Carrboro/Chapel Hill, public events at art studios throughout the triangle, and finally the annual “Maker Faire:NC” in Raleigh. I will briefly note that in all of the settings for participant observation I was transparent about my intentions as a researcher. Through these experiences, I gathered visual ethnographic data using photography and film.

As I visited these nodes of activity and made contacts for my research, I gathered business cards and matched them to the visual data I collected. Additionally, I created a social network map that featured the nodes in the center, and the contacts I made at each branched off. Each branch included makers’ contact information, details about what type of craft they made, which city they live in, whether they seemed interested in being interviewed, and links to their web sites or craft blogs (if applicable). The map does not appear in this report, for it contains information for which I did not seek permission to publish. However, it aided my research organization and my understanding of the crafting community.
Another method included in this research is self-documentation. I designed “craft journals” with instructions for makers to use the pages as a design journal or personal journal to share their thoughts about crafting and their handmaking process. Unfortunately, research participants were given a choice of an in-depth interview or a self-documentation journal, or both, and only one chose the self-documentation journal. One was not enough to make comparisons or draw out common themes, so I excluded the data from this report.

The last two methods to include here would be more aptly described as approaches: collaborative ethnography and grounded theory. Collaborative ethnography can be briefly summarized as community-based ethnography in which the researcher seeks the council and collaboration of the members of the community she is researching (Lassiter 2005). My research is not entirely collaborative in that I designed the research questions prior to meeting my research participants. However, I sought the feedback and participation of my contacts during the drafting of my interview guide, the naming of key themes, and for verification of my conclusions. The identification of themes further employed one particular grounded theory practice called in-vivo coding. Charmaz writes in her guide to grounded theory practice, “Some in vivo codes simultaneously reflect condensed meanings of a general term and reveal an individual’s fresh perspective” (2006, 56). When coding ethnographic data, I used words and phrases used by my contacts used as codes and themes. To summarize, this suite of methods was employed with the goal of eliciting data about handmaking in practice and in dialogue.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Identity

Jo Waterhouse suggests, “Indie/DIY craft can be viewed as a response to the homogenous mass production and mass consumption that is synonymous with the modern world” (2010, 9). What is the nature of this response, and what are its primary drivers? The maker movement has a great deal of heterogeneity, in terms of the people involved, their geographic locations speckled all over the globe, and the types of goods they produce. What, then, unites DIY crafters?

I draw on Polletta’s conception of collective identity to begin to answer that: Collective identity is “an individual’s cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form a part of personal identity” (2001, 285). Polletta’s attention to the intersection of collective identity, practices, and material culture make his thoughts particularly useful to this study. He continues, “Collective identities are expressed in cultural materials -- names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on” (285). In the case of the maker movement, the cultural materials in question are perhaps more literal for other groups, centering upon tangible handcrafted goods. However, narratives and rituals play significant roles too. Polletta argues that group membership is a rational choice of shared interest, and, “unlike ideology, collective identity carries with it positive feelings for other members of the group” (285).
Thus, the identity discussed in these pages refers primarily to collective identity – specifically the ways in which the individuals interviewed have a “cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community” or practice. The material culture produced by DIY crafters is understood in this research as an expression of collective identity. The actual practice of crafting is both an indicator of group membership and a conduit for the formation of this collective identity and individuals’ connections to it.

To more fully understand this relationship between the practice of crafting and the identities it helps to create, I apply a social practice theory framework to my research. In simple terms, this framework emphasizes the agency of the actor, and it looks to practice – literally the activities and practices of individuals and groups – to understand cultural norms and certain behaviors that either reinforce those norms or are alternative to them. This framework begins with Pierre Bourdieu’s “third mode of knowledge.” In the 1970’s, Bourdieu proposed a shift away from the previously dominant framework of structuralism, which looked to social structures to understand behavior. He identified two modes of knowledge upon which anthropologists had primarily focused: phenomenological and objectivist (Bourdieu 1977a). He offered a third mode. His “third order” integrates the truth of practical experience with learned knowledge and introduces the theory of the actor. Bourdieu substituted strategy for fixed social rules, arguing that even in highly ritualized practices the agent can strategize. Thus, practice theory accounts for choice where structuralism had neglected it. Bourdieu also emphasized language and further argued that language is an instrument of action and urged anthropologists to look to language as a site of
possibility (Bourdieu 1977b). A school of thought which focuses on dialogism, agency, and negotiation followed.

Holland et al (1998) use practice theory as a foundation for their investigations into identity construction. They view identity as a process that is “formed dialectically and dialogically” and situated within fields of power (49). They pull from Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Bourdieu to consider identity as “the central means by which selves, and the sets of actions they organize, form and re-form over personal lifetimes and in the histories of social collectivities” (270). To understand this point more fully, I spoke with Dr. Holland, and she explained that “Identities are a way to organize yourself so that you can keep a consistent point of view. If you can voluntarily organize yourself, you have a consistent standpoint from which to create agency.”

Delving deeper into this notion of practices and activities as the forces which shape and create identity and agency, Holland and Lave (2001) argue that activity –literally the activities people engage in – is the link between identity and behavior. They expanded practice theory to include the argument that individuals are created and create themselves in historically and culturally specific practices and lived activities. Further, the activities that link identity and behavior are most visible in local spaces of practice (Holland et al 1998, Holland and Lave 2001). It is within local spaces of practice that one can observe the formation and expression of both personal and collective identity (Holland and Lave 2001, iii). To this end, my fieldwork focused first on the practices associated with crafting, and second on the dialogues of makers, as mentioned earlier.
Acknowledging that shared practices and activities is one aspect of what helps forge collective identity, there is also an equally important component of cognitive association. I argue that the maker movement is an imagined community. Anderson defines the imagined community as “collectivities distinguished by the way they are imagined” (Rouse 1995, 359). The notion of the imagined community has become almost as widely cited and liberally defined as “identity,” so I take caution here in using it. In social movement studies, the imagined community and its collection of hopes for the future is commonly understood as the source from which practice and possibility emerge. Agrawal (2005) complicates this picture, however. He positions the realities of power structures as a significant force that presses upon practice and possibility as equally as imagination. In the case of the maker movement, the imagined community works collectively to privilege the handmade over the mass-produced – not in an effort to cause a radical paradigm shift which would eradicate the capitalist structure, but rather to create practices and possibilities for alternatives which operate within it, thereby creating a realistic space for makers to live in accordance with values they share, such as living simply, making instead of buying, and supporting local economies.

The practice of selling crafts raises an obvious complication or confliction within the maker movement. As many makers choose to sell their goods, they are operating squarely within a capitalistic model, yet the movement seeks to reduce capitalistic consumption. In my observations, crafting circles often became a place to “talk shop,” such as discussing marketing techniques, the success or failure of selling online or in local shops, or how to
manage overhead costs. While the option of purchasing a handmade item from a local artisan certainly widens the field of possibility within capitalistic consumption as we know it currently in the U.S., this option creates an alternative avenue that is still unmistakably bound by the social and mental structures of capitalism. Escobar (2007) sheds light on how lingering and seemingly unshakable these structures can be. He argues that modernity is a ubiquitous and deeply ingrained state of mind, a mental structure associated with power and dominance. Further, the constructs of modernity (which I understand to be individualism, competition, materialism, and privileging rational and profitable above feeling and communal) are not just mental structures but are lived out in practice (Escobar 2007). I interpret the practice of handmaking and selling locally as small stands against a social structure makers disagree with, within the only bounds available to them, those of the very structure they contest.

**Conscientious Consumption and Voluntary Simplicity**

Two key themes that recurred in my research with makers were conscientious consumption and voluntary simplicity. Conscientious consumption is an emic term; the etic term in anthropology and consumer studies is ethical consumption, and it refers to choosing what products to fill our lives with based on ethical standards of whether that product was produced by environmentally and socially just means (Harrison, Newholm and Shaw 2005). Richard Wilk (2002) posits that consumption is necessarily an ethical matter, for rapid consumption has world-reaching ripple effects on environmental, economic, and social scales.
The study of consumer culture provides a wide body of theoretical knowledge that connects consumption to social values and identity. Much attention is paid to the motivations for conspicuous consumption (Belk and Sherry 2007, Berger 2005, Jacob and Brinkerhoff 1997). But, significantly less is given to the motives and methods of not consuming by means of making. For example, Sam Binkley’s (2008) article “Liquid Consumption” draws from Zygmunt Bauman’s decades of work on identity and consumption to examine voluntary simplicity and the Slow Food movement. He proposes that these activities are “projects of the self;” however, he does not address the importance of making material culture instead of purchasing it. Even feminist perspectives on consumption do not adequately address modes of resistance to consumer culture that involve creating for one’s self the satisfaction that theories of consumption accredit to purchasing (Scanlon 2000). My research not only considers those who make instead of buy, it investigates how that departure contributes to their construction of identity.

The maker movement seems to be informed by ethics similar to those of voluntary simplicity. Mary Huneke writes, “Voluntary simplicity means choosing to limit material consumption in order to free one’s resources, primarily money and time,” and personal satisfaction (2005, 528). The DIY movement encourages several key behaviors which resemble voluntary simplicity and set it apart from mainstream American model of rapid consumption of mass-produced goods (Wilk 2006, Berger 2007, Sassatelli 2007). First, instead of shopping for finished products, make your own clothes, accoutrement, art,

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7 Voluntary simplicity is an emic and an etic term. Some of my research participants referred to it by name, while others identified with some of its principles but did not name it.
household goods and office supplies. Second, recycle old or scrap materials into a new creation. Third, support your local economy and keep dollars circulating there (Glor 2011, Johnson 2009, Levine 2008).

Duane Elgin (2006) describes voluntary simplicity as consciously reducing the clutter in our inner and outer selves. The goal is to improve social and environmental health by simplifying our lives, including reducing consumption. Purdue et al (2008) find similar goals in DIY culture. Their study of DIY groups in the UK finds activism through personal lifeways which avoid corporate-dependent, consumptive cultural norms. My interviews with makers in the Triangle echo these goals. Additionally, they indicate that, for many, the handmade movement is informed by an interest in environmental and economic sustainability.

Another key theme that occurred in my research is that of alienation. This is an etic term, borrowed from Marx, Veblen, Morris and Campbell. My contacts described the process and feelings associated with alienation but did not attach a specific term to them. In the article, “Product, Competence, Project and Practice: DIY and the dynamics of craft,” Watson and Shove propose that what makes DIY rewarding is “the process itself,” the exercise of competence, the challenge of learning new skills, and the satisfaction of tangible results (2005, 74). In our era of service-based employment dominating half an adult’s waking life, it seems plausible that the agency afforded by creating something with one’s own hands is a primary component of handmaking.
These questions and theories informed my thoughts throughout primary data collection. However, I regarded them as only some of the possible ways to interpret what my contacts shared with me. The overriding framework throughout my fieldwork was the simultaneous emphasis on dialogue and practice that has emerged from identity studies based on practice theory. The chapters which follow summarize the practices and conversations shared with me by my research participants.
THE COMMUNITY

The Handmade Market, Raleigh, NC

In hand-drawn script of black and blue letters, the banner read, “The Handmade Market… Because MALL is a four letter word.” Downtown shoppers and passersby milled around Raleigh’s Moore Square, a small one-block city park. The flow of pedestrians converged upon the City Market. The banner hung above large windows reflecting the cobblestone side street that funneled shoppers into the market (See Figure 3). City Market is a U-shaped collection of galleries and eateries featuring the renovated Cobblestone Hall as its centerpiece.

Figure 3: Handmade Market exterior
On April 23, 2011 the hall was home to the Handmade Market, an event held twice per year featuring handmade items by over 50 vendors of housewares, paper products, fine art, plush animals, jewelry, apparel and accessories.⁸ A group of female crafters in Raleigh called “the handmaidens” organize the event. One of the handmaidens and two volunteers greeted visitors as they entered the market. They offered tan reusable shopping bags made of recycled materials with “Eco-bag” printed on them.

The mood inside the market was friendly and vibrant. From the rear corner of the building, a DJ spun a mixture of modern indie pop and vintage vinyl. Vendor tables lined the walls of the sunlit space, and tables were arranged vertically to form three wide walkways between them. The market had a large turnout of visitors, yet the room did not feel overcrowded. I slowly wound my way through the booths, collecting business cards from the vendors and chatting with those available to talk.

I came upon a booth with delicate scarves and jewelry made of fine felt (see Figure 4). I asked permission to film the items, and the woman behind the table replied that she should ask the designer. She returned a moment later with her daughter Elena, a woman in her mid-twenties with carefully styled strawberry blonde hair and a smiling, open demeanor. Elena kindly obliged the filming and asked if I was a journalist covering the market. I replied that I am an anthropology student studying crafting and the maker movement. She was delighted.

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⁸ http://www.savorncmagazine.com/blog/a-handmade-saturday/
I complimented Elena’s work and asked what type of materials she used. She explained that she uses ethically produced or recycled fibers in a type of rolled felting method. She said she chooses these materials because, “Like most of the people here, it’s important to me to use sustainable materials.” She continued, “I’m glad you’re studying this. I think sustainability is a big part of handmade.” She commented that using recycling materials to make new and unique designs is something most of the vendors here have in common. Her process is entirely handmade, including rolling the fibers herself, and this she says leaves no environmental footprint. Elena said she enjoys participating in the Handmade Market because she can meet and share with likeminded people.
The Handmade Market showcases a wide variety of products and vendors, approximately 80% of whom are based in Raleigh or Durham, North Carolina. Several visiting artists from Richmond, Virginia were present as well. Compared to craft fairs in other cities experienced by this researcher, the distinguishing factors of The Handmade Market is the uniqueness of design, materials, and methods in the work exhibited there. One popular theme is images from nature, such as pea pods, deer, vines, and aquatic life (see Figure 5). Another is the juxtaposition of rustic and industrial materials (see Figure 6). A third is repurposing found items into new products, such as vinyl records turned into journal covers.

Figure 5: Shark bowl by Tanya

Figure 6: Cow over moon necklace by Sonya
Maker Faire: NC

I saw Elena again several months later at the “Maker Faire: NC” in Raleigh. I volunteered to help with ticketing and cleanup to get an insider’s perspective of the event. Maker Faire: NC is sponsored by Make Magazine. The Make web site describes the fairs as “a two-day family-friendly festival of invention, creativity, and resourcefulness, and a celebration of the Maker Movement.” The event attracts do-it-yourself activities of all sorts, from alternative energy sources to handcrafted guitars. Maker Faires appear all over the world; some are organized by Make Magazine while others are community-based. The North Carolina fair is at the state fairgrounds in the Governor W. Kerr Scott building, a two-story square cement structure with a ticketing booth in the front, offices above, and a large open space suited for two to three thousand visitors (See Figure 7). In 2011, the fair took place on June 18, 2011.

My assignment as a volunteer was to greet visitors, assist vendors on the floor, and help clean up after the event closed. These tasks afforded mobility through the main floor and the private areas on the second floor where organizers and volunteers coordinated their efforts. The overall mood was excited; makers and visitors alike were actively engaging with one another and sharing ideas and questions. The event had many families in attendance. Visitors circulated through the vast space, stopping at booths and smiling at the creative endeavors they displayed.
Some of the makers had white tents as one might see at an outdoor fair, but most had a simple table. In contrast to the Handmade Market, the makers did not stand behind their tables but instead moved around the space, interacting with fellow makers and visitors. Participants were given name badges on bright blue lanyards with name badges that read, “Hello! I am a maker.” A wide selection of inventions and crafts were represented, for example wooden handcrafted guitars, fabric printing, home energy systems, yarn weavers, iron workers, bread makers, remote-control battleship models, and, much to the delight of the children present, robots that battled in a “robot wars” arena in the rear corner. It is important to note that I did not witness any sales, only exchanges of business cards and samples. The
event is designed as a showcase for the maker community to gather and share ideas with one another and with the public.

Elena sat next to a small display of her finished work. She was hand-rolling felt and explaining her process to visitors (see Figure 8). We chatted casually, and she mentioned that she’d been thinking of my research since I saw her last. We had talked briefly about why handmaking is important and why its popularity is growing. These questions had been marinating in her thoughts, and she clarified them now. In Elena’s view, the maker movement is important because a) it is grounded in design as she herself is, having recently graduated from NC State’s design program, b) it encourages environmentally friendly choices, c) it allows people to “avoid big boxes” (referencing corporate chain stores), and d) it affords an opportunity for “income for women.”

Some of these themes were broached by other makers with whom I spoke at a reception for volunteers held the night before the fair. The reception was offered by the
organizers to thank their volunteers. It was held at Tech Shop RDU in Research Triangle Park (see Figure 9). There I met one of my interviewees, Marissa, as well as several event organizers, volunteers and makers. Tech Shop is one of many maker spaces all over the country, where makers and tinkerers pool their resources to have a space for projects and to share large or expensive equipment, such as a laser cutters and three-dimensional printers. Over 130 tech shops have been started in the last three years in the U.S., and because they foster all kinds of making, including computer engineering, they are also called hacker spaces or hack shops (Phelan 2011). The founder of a similar tech shop called LVL1 explained to me that “Tech shops are a third space for makers,” a place for innovation that is separate from work-space or home-space (Christopher Cprek, October 31, 2011).

Figure 9: Tech Shop signage at Maker Faire: NC
At the reception, makers and volunteers who had not met before seemed shy around one another initially. The tension was quickly cut when people began touring the equipment and studios at Tech Shop; their interest and shared excitement for invention and handmaking overrode any initial social awkwardness among strangers. Their quickness to accept one another and “talk shop” mirrored the openness that makers graciously shared with me when my research turned to in-depth interviews.
THE MAKERS

I interviewed 18 makers through the course of this research. I was fortunate to find a healthy cross-section of crafts, crafting methods, personal histories and perspectives on the maker movement in the resulting data. A brief summary of the interviewees’ demographic information follows. All of them are female.\(^9\) Ages ranged from 26 to 39, and almost half are in their mid-twenties (see Figure 10).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart}
\caption{Interviewees’ Ages}
\end{figure}

\(^9\) I met several male makers; however they did not fit into the parameters of my study because they made things other than crafts, such as wood furniture, artisan chocolates, and machines.
Almost half of them cited jewelry as their primary craft. The jewelers’ methods were evenly divided between metal working (crafted from scratch) and assemblage (assembling jewelry from pre-existing pieces). Four of the total eighteen make paper products such as cards, stationery and calendars. The remaining crafts represented are accessories such as scarves and necklaces, clothing, and home décor such as ceramics (see Figure 11).

![Figure 11: Interviewees’ Crafts](image)

The majority of participants live in Raleigh. Two live in Carrboro, one lives in the Research Triangle Park area between Raleigh and Durham, and one lives in Durham. Eight of the eighteen are from North Carolina, and ten are from other states, including six from California. The majority of them are self-employed. Those who are not hold “day jobs” that
seem to involve artistry of some kind, for example make-up artist, web designer, and graphic
designer. Interestingly, seventeen of the eighteen are in long-term relationships, including ten
marriages. Only two of them have children. The vast majority of interviewees are college
educated; seventeen have at least a bachelor’s degree. Twelve of those degrees are in art of
various forms, ranging from art history to photography to metal design. Fifteen of the
eighteen participants are white, two are African-American, and one is Philippine. Only one
interviewee mentioned coming from a financially well-off family. The remaining seventeen
identified themselves as having low income or middle income.

If one had to paint a synthetic portrait of a person representing the majorities from
these numbers, it would be of a white woman in her twenties who is college educated. She
would live in Raleigh, having moved there from another state in the U.S., with a household
income in the low- to middle-range. She would be married with no children and self-
employed as a crafter, most likely of jewelry. This summary is not intended to deny the
heterogeneity of the crafting community, but rather to offer the reader a mental picture that
combines the statistically significant demographic factors found among these research
participants.

The stories of three makers were selected to appear in this report. They were selected
to represent different craft types, age groups, and themes. Thematically, their interviews
overlap in significant ways, but they each shed light on different dimensions of the moral
economy of modern handmaking. Linda, age 26, lives in Carrboro and makes print products.
In our interview, she spoke of the importance of recycling materials, living and crafting
sustainably, and the self-actualizing transition from being an employee to a self-employed maker. Oami, age 37, lives in Raleigh and makes women’s apparel using organic fibers. Her story emphasizes the idea of DIY as a way of life, as well as the appeal of knowing and controlling the source of one’s products. Sonya, age 33, lives in Raleigh and makes metal jewelry. Her interview highlights the crafting community in the Triangle and the empowering effects of crafting.

Linda
I met Linda at Bull City Craft in Durham. Bull City Craft opened within the last year and offers crafting supplies, classes and community events, such as the Etsy party where I met Linda and several other interviewees. The Etsy party featured local crafters who have fairly successful online shops through Etsy.com, and the community was invited to come explore the new store, meet the crafters, and share in food and live music. It was an intimate event, for the shop is quite small. A duo of musicians stood in a window alcove near the front entrance. There were about forty-five people in attendance, one-third of which were young children. The crowd stood in a semi-circle as the band played, and the children danced in the center. The interior is pleasantly and simply decorated; large, handmade paper chandeliers hang against a backdrop of baby blue walls, and several tidy rows of white shelves organized the space. A craft room is in the rear of the building, where a small sign suggests, “Come in and make something!” I began talking with Linda as the music ended. As with all of my research participants, I briefly summarized my research and asked if she would be interested
in talking with me some time about her crafts. She agreed to an interview and generously invited me to her home in Carrboro, North Carolina.

Carrboro is a small urban area that adjoins Chapel Hill. There, bicyclists and pedestrians outnumber cars on the roads. A strong network of locally-owned shops keeps big box store openings to a minimum, and the farmers’ market has sustained great success. Linda lives in a one-story house one block from Carrboro’s central thoroughfare. Her home office is elegantly adorned with unique handcrafted items including a wall hanging made from the cardboard of toilet paper cores, a paper lamp hung from indoor tree branches which arch over her desk, and an oversized calendar with a clean design mounted on corkboard that is her best-seller on Etsy. From this

Figure 12: Ship card by Linda

Figure 13: Modern calendar by Linda
office, she works as a freelance graphic designer and makes print products (see Figures 12 and 13).

One of my interview questions aims to elicit demographic information and self-identifications. Linda described herself in the following terms, in the order in which they appear here. She rents her home. She is twenty-six years old and has two college degrees. She is white and of Polish descent. She and her partner “don’t make a lot but don’t need a lot,” and her household income is around $40,000 per year. She has no health insurance. She shares her house with her partner. She is self-employed. She likes to travel and has a dog.

Through our interview she made further self-identifications. She connected her handmaking practices to her food habits, explaining that they both hinge upon sustainable and self-directed choices. She cited the Slow Food Movement\(^\text{10}\) and said, “I’m a rule breaker also, I meant to tell you.” Her full description follows.

I do identify with the slow movement. I eat locally, shop at farmers’ markets, only buy local meats – for environmental reasons, for health reasons. I think everything [else] follows suit. You can take the principles applied there [and apply them elsewhere] – the local, the sustainable, the doing what makes you happy – that’s really good, versus what other people tell you what you should be doing. I’m a rule breaker also, I meant to tell you. I don’t like rules… I don’t want to do what I’m supposed to do or what other people think I’m supposed to do. So it’s kind of about trying to find what makes me happy. And it is this local, sustainable, healthy way of living.

Linda offered another brief description that touched on several important self-identifications. I asked, “How and why did you start crafting or do-it-yourself projects?” She replied, “I guess you could say I’m an artist at heart. So I feel like I’m never going to have a

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\(^{10}\) Slow Food is “an idea, a way of living and a way of eating. It is part of a global, grassroots movement with thousands of members in over 150 countries, which links the pleasure of food with a commitment to community and the environment” (www.slowfoodusa.org).
lot of money. So that’s part of it, is trying to work with the resources I have. Another part of it is not buying into consumer culture. I avoid Wal-Mart and Target like the plague.” In this moment of our conversation, she offered three critical identity markers that echo the other makers involved in this research: she is an artist; she is not wealthy (but works with what is available to her); and she resists consumer culture.

Another self-identification emerged toward the end of our interview. She told me of her enjoyment of her work, both as a freelance graphic artist and as a maker of print products, and she noted as an afterthought, “I love being a maker.” I asked, “When did you first hear that word, maker?” She couldn’t place it exactly and said, “I feel like I’ve always made things but didn’t hear it as a descriptor, but somehow it’s this trendy word [now].” As mentioned earlier, the label of “maker” was ubiquitous in my research, yet few of my contacts could place it exactly.11

Linda grew up in Pennsylvania and went to Elon University in North Carolina for graduate school, where she earned a master’s degree in interactive media. She confessed that she did not enjoy graduate school and “hated” the jobs it led to. Then she found Etsy. She explained, “I found Etsy when I was there [at a real estate company], because most of my job was sitting there and pretending to be busy. So I surfed the internet all day and thought, “I’m going to open an Etsy store.”” Linda described her introduction to Etsy:

It didn’t take off [at first] – I was trying to do it part time. I’d go to work all day and come home and think about this Etsy shop… And then I made a birthday present for a friend and thought, ‘Maybe I’ll post these on Etsy.’ And

11 Make Magazine uses the word “maker,” and it is possible that Make helped popularize it through their print magazine, maker fairs, and widely read blogs.
then I sold twenty of them in two months. This is great! This is so fun! I was growing as a graphic designer at that point, so it kind of transitioned into being just paper products. And keeping the more ‘handmade’ stuff for myself or giving it to people.

Even though the majority of Linda’s sales occur online, she does participate in a few small, local craft fairs as well, such as the Bull City Craft exhibit where we met. She said she prefers Etsy because it produces no excess inventory. She prints materials as they are ordered, whereas craft fairs require an inventory large enough to fill the booth.

As indicated above, Linda’s choice of medium, materials and personal style are evolving. Two consistent strands run through her work, however. First, she borrows themes and aesthetics from history. Second, she uses recycled or repurposed materials. I posit that these choices of subject matter and materials reflect her personal preferences and values. To illustrate, when asked about the kinds of materials she uses and why she chooses them, she shared the following:

*I like old things.* We have a PTA thrift store about two blocks that way, and if I could go every day I would. I love to go and find old things and things that people maybe don’t think have a purpose anymore and find a reason to use them… *I don’t like to throw things away – we compost, and we recycle – and I try to carry that through into my crafts…* For my notecards, it’s hard to find a really great paper that’s 100% recycled, but all the envelopes and packaging materials are… I didn’t grow up with a lot. *My parents weren’t wasteful people…* It’s reusing things, it’s not making trash, and it is concern for the environment. *It’s my way of trying to control the little bit of emphasis [impact] that I have on the world.* I guess I feel like I can’t make a huge difference, but at least I can control what I use and what I give to others. (Emphasis added.)
Linda mentioned control at other points in our conversation as well, in terms of exercising control over the quality of food she consumes, her environmental impact, and having a livelihood that she enjoys.

Oami

At the Handmade Market in April 2011, I admired a simple display of handmade clothing that stood along the back wall between a booth of hand-stitched bags and the DJ station. The seamstress was not present, but a single stack of cards reading “Judah-Ross” led me to Oami. I emailed her later and invited her to participate in my research. Despite not having met me in person, she invited me to her home for an interview.

Oami greeted me at the front door of her home in East Raleigh, with her jubilant but gentle pitbull-mix dog a few paces behind her. Her home is a ranch-style house built approximately in the early 1960’s. She led me through her living room, which is uncluttered and has wood floors and vintage-inspired décor, to her sewing room. Inside is a large sewing table, a smaller desk, a vintage seamstress mannequin, tidy storage containers, and a closet for finished clothing. Oami has very short blond hair, brown eyes and a medium build, and she wore a black cotton sleeveless dress. She seems to me to be intelligent and articulate, a thoughtful person who spoke with a low tone and relaxed cadence. She did not appear nervous about the interview or having me in her home. I spent about an hour and forty-five minutes there in the late morning of a July weekday. She knew little about me or my research when I arrived, but within a half-hour we were bantering like old friends.
Oami is in her late 30’s, is married, and has no children. She and her husband own their home in the east end of Raleigh. She designs and produces limited-edition women’s apparel under the seller name Judah-Ross (See Figure 14). Oami moved to North Carolina from California a year and a half ago. She attended high school in New Zealand (but has an American accent) then moved to California and attended college, majoring in art history. She spoke little of her family, except to say that she is a twin, and her mother taught her to sew at age six.

She referred to herself and her husband as “ex-indie-punk kids” and later drew parallels between the independent (indie) music/punk rock culture and the current rise of DIY culture. Throughout our conversation, Oami consistently expressed interest in talking about the meaning of DIY crafting and its connections to other social phenomenon. She had many insights on abstract topics, such as the history, meaning, and social relevance of handmaking, and she spoke of these more than of her own daily practices (which proved fortunate for my research). She did however share a brief history of her own
life and the path to her current position of a self-employed designer and seamstress. Prior to the interview, I casually asked Oami how she began handmaking. She said, “I have a sort of art DIY background. It’s sort of the way I’ve always lived.” She followed by musing that, “It’s kind of interesting to see like half a generation younger than I am getting into it now. It’s exciting, and I hope it keeps going. And I love that people – culturally people are getting more excited about buying directly from artisans, instead of shopping at big box stores.”

Oami spoke about finding a warm reception for her work when she moved to Raleigh from San Francisco. She explained that in North Carolina where farmers markets and a buy-local ethos are gaining popularity, “People are already aware of sustainability, in the customer base, so they’re already getting excited about buying directly.”

It is important to note here that “sustainability” means different things to different people. For this research, I did not presume to know how those with whom I spoke define it. Based on my conversations with Oami, I surmise her conception of “sustainability” to include, 1) practices which avoid harm to the environment and unnecessary waste, 2) using materials made by socially and environmentally ethical means, and 3) supporting a buy-local or buy-direct economic model.

When I asked about her choice of materials, she explained that “Almost all of the textiles that I use are natural fibers. Before I moved here I worked for a couple of years for a sustainable fabric importer.” I asked a follow-up question, “Is using sustainable fabric important to you?” She replied, “Yes, it’s always been important to me… I remember having a conversation with my [former] business partner about textiles and how they’re produced.
And it really bothered me.” She explained that she researched the issue of fabric production and found disturbing stories of human exploitation and environmental damage. These realizations led to her current practices of “sourcing natural fabrics – organic hemp, organic cotton… utilizing leftover fabric.” She also dies and prints some of her own fabrics and said, “When I do that I use fiber-reactive dies, which are the least harmful environmentally.”

Continuing our conversational thread about sustainable practices, we discussed voluntary simplicity. She was familiar with the phrase and identified strongly with it. She said that simplicity is a model for her business and her home, and that its importance to her increases as she ages. She said a lack of clutter gives her “peace of mind.” She followed this by saying, “It’s something the First World can do to even disparity,” referring to global inequity of wealth and quality of life. “We can pare down and not be so acquisitive.” She paused for a moment and offered a caveat, “There is conspicuous consumption in handmade too though.” Oami’s clothing sells for boutique prices, for example up to $215 for one blouse. Given that her customers can afford clothes at such a price point, she has encountered customers who value handmade items but who also engage in conspicuous consumption of them.

As mentioned earlier, Oami offered perspectives on DIY crafting as a social phenomenon. She suggested, “DIY is a backlash against what we’ve become – alienated from our physical selves.” She believes that “the depression and anxiety in our society is directly related to not working or making with our own hands,” and that “people are hardwired to be a certain way,” meaning inventive and inclined to fashion tactile objects with
our own hands. Oami followed these statements with a thoughtful turn: “Not all making is fun. Now that we don’t have to have a factory job, we can find making enjoyable – now that we’re not exhausted from horrible hard work.” This was one of many times that Oami reminded me of the complexity of the history of handmaking in America.

I asked Oami if do-it-yourself practices are present in other areas of her life. She replied with an emphatic “yes.” She said that being able to do more things themselves, such as growing a food garden, “maybe raising some chickens” and fixing up a house were part of her and her husband’s decision to move to North Carolina. She led me to the back of her house, where she and her husband had renovated and retiled their sunroom. From there we went to her back yard where she pointed out plots they’ve chosen for gardening. She mentioned that her father was a house painter and “handy,” so she’s “drawn to home DIY.”

At the end of our interview, she offered more detail on what DIY means to her. I asked if she wanted to add anything to the research that we hadn’t covered already, and she replied no but that her “takeaway” from our conversation is that DIY can mean many different things: “a vocation – a way to make money,” or the work of “an artisan who makes useful goods,” and “the other side – purely hobby.” She hinted that DIY offers a form of freedom. She said she wouldn’t enjoy a “regular” full-time job, for she appreciates the freedom of expression in her vocation too much to do anything else. She drew a distinction between practices of art and practices of vocation; “For me, it [Judah-Ross] is not my art. It’s more vocational.” She self-identified as a clothing maker “at the journeyman level.”
Of all my contacts, I saw Oami the most frequently during my research. We had several conversations throughout the summer, and I saw her again at the Handmade Market in September 2011 and at the Rock N Shop in Durham in December 2011. By December, I had completed interviews and moved on to data analysis. I asked for her feedback on my preliminary findings. She generously agreed, and we discussed the prevalent themes presented in these pages, as well as some others. For example, she encouraged me to omit a discussion of feminism in the maker movement, which was mentioned by only a few of my participants. She said, “I don’t think of myself as a feminist,” then laughed and said, “although clearly I am.” I explained that it had been suggested to me that handcrafted items are sometimes perceived as not valuable because handicraft has been historically considered “women’s work.” Oami said, “There is still a perception that handmade should be cheap.” However, in her opinion, this is because “The standard of living has dropped; dollars are stretched. Also, we’ve been conditioned by mass production to devalue goods.” This last statement of was helpful, for it succinctly pinpointed an issue that my other contacts hinted at. Exchanges like this with Oami, and with Marissa and Elena, contributed to the participatory aspects of this research, and I am most grateful to them.

Sonya

During fieldwork in Raleigh, I had noticed a brand of whimsical metal jewelry displayed in various locations such as Stitch (a small downtown shop featuring modern leather handbags by designer Holly Aiken) and Design Box (a collective of local designers). A card reading “Metamorphosis” accompanied the pieces. I met the woman behind the label
in Durham at Bull City Craft’s Etsy party. Sonya sat on a stool behind the table displaying her work, her head down as she focused on the pliers and clamp she held in her hands and the delicate chain and jump-ring pinched between them. When she finished, she looked up at the band, and I approached to introduce myself. Of the forty to fifty makers I met during this research, Sonya was probably the shiest.

After a few conversations, Sonya invited me to her studio in Art Studios, which is a collective of artists’ studios in the Glenwood South district of Raleigh near downtown. It was a relatively cool summer day, and the windows to her first-floor studio were open and a fan blew. It is a small space, approximately twelve by twelve feet. She had fashioned the wall facing the door into a display of finished jewelry. The other three walls comprised her work space, lined with a high table, a low table, and tools of a metal worker: soldering torch, tiny metal saws, clamps, and files. The seven-year old son of the woman in the studio next to Sonya’s was thrilled at the presence of a new person and interrupted our interview frequently to show me things he’d made.

Sonya is 33 years old, married, and has no children. She is tall and thin with curly brown hair and light skin. Sonya moved to Raleigh six years ago. She was educated in art at Eastern Carolina University with a concentration in metal design. Before carving out a career as a jewelry maker, she worked in retail management in a shopping mall. She told me she hated working retail because it felt like “a piece of you was dying from work.” During that time, making jewelry helped her have an outlet to cope with her professional dissatisfaction.
She said, “Etsy helped.” Networking and selling her designs on Etsy.com gave her the courage to expand to shows and boutiques.

Sonya makes jewelry fashioned entirely from metals like copper and silver, as well as assemblage pieces that combine hand-crafted metal with found objects (see Figures 15 and 16 for examples). When asked about her choice of materials, Sonya replied, “I use a lot of found objects. I’ve always like antiques and old things – the sense of history, I guess, that they have. They already have a life of their own, so I feel like I add something extra through my work. I go to the flea market and antique stores a lot.” She said her work does not have a “traditional look,” but it draws upon the traditional methods of metal working.
I asked if she crafts alone or with friends or family members, and her reply was indicative of most crafters with whom I spoke. Crafting is largely a solitary activity. She said, “Sometimes I have ‘craft night’ with friends, but it’s mostly just talking.” I asked if she thought Raleigh has a community of crafters, and she again offered a reply that echoed many of my other contacts. She said, “Raleigh is alright. It’s a good place for craft, though. The crafters are a close-knit community. Most are sellers – for income or to support their hobby.” She also noted that there is “lots of jewelry” in the area, and jewelry making classes are easy to find for people who want to learn or get involved in crafting, for example at Ornamentea and Pullen Park Arts Center. Incidentally, Sonya’s mention here of Ornamentea led me to another interviewee, Cynthia, who owns the craft store.

Sonya then contrasted the community of crafters with her experience of working in a shopping mall. She said, “I get two different dynamics of people. At the mall, they have completely different interests. People I meet at [handmade] shows, they’re generally focused on quality or looking for local or a small company. They tend to be more environmentally friendly also – eating fresh foods and all that kind of stuff.” I asked her how mall shoppers differed from what she’d just described. She said, “[Mall shoppers are] probably less thoughtful, I guess.” Sonya also observed that handmade shoppers “like meeting the source,” which later she reiterated by saying, “People like to meet the maker.” When Art Studios opens for public tours during Raleigh’s First Friday gallery walk, she receives many “questions about the making process.”
Sonya seemed to be slightly nervous about being interviewed. She delivered her answers in a soft voice, but the content of her answers was quite strong. She shared that she has a great sense of empowerment and control, largely gained through handcrafting. Her motivation for participating in the maker movement is, “Enjoy what you’re doing.” She said her “first inclination is DIY. It’s a challenge. I would rather make it than buy it. It’s an accomplishment.” She followed this theme of control by noting, “The economy is scary. Being able to do for yourself is reassuring. It helps the fear of an unknown system breaking.” The unknown system to which she referred is a global economy that most of us do not fully understand nor have any real control over. For Sonya, being able to make something from scratch alleviates that uncertainty somewhat.
IDENTITY AND AGENCY

Themes

The phrase “DIY ethos” recurs in literature on crafting and DIY culture. It appears in popular media books, magazine articles, blogs, DIY guides/tutorials online. But what is the DIY ethos exactly? I look to the themes that arose from interview data to provide an answer.

A rough sketch of the themes that recurred consistently throughout my participant observation and interviews includes the following: sustainability, the joy of making, local and digital communities of crafters, a connection with slow food, ethical consumption (such as avoiding goods or materials made through exploitative labor practices), creativity (including educational backgrounds in art and design), and a desire for a strong local economy and sense of community. The organizing thread for these is, in my estimation, the desire for control.

I asserted earlier that the maker movement is characterized primarily by do-it-yourself. The idea of DIY and the practices which accompany it reveal human agency. The emic phrase I heard consistently throughout my interviews was “control.” I am not suggesting that “control” and “agency” are necessarily interchangeable, but rather that when my contacts described the processes, feelings, and actions associated with agency in anthropological literature, they used the word control.

Five key themes emerged during my fieldwork. They can be organized in terms of social phenomena over which my contacts seek greater control via handmaking. The first is illustrated in Linda’s and Sonya’s stories; adopting the practices, livelihood and title of a
“maker” empowered them to leave alienating, unfulfilling jobs and pursue their crafts as a means of self-employment. Their sentiments were echoed by the majority of my interviewees. Before becoming self-employed makers, some of my contacts were teachers, real estate agents, advertising agents, graphic designers, and retail workers, just to name a few. A silversmith, Sam, told me, “I literally cannot sit in an office. I will preach to anyone about empowerment through self-employment.” A consistent narrative unfolded amongst the makers whom I interviewed; they began controlling their own livelihoods by doing what they enjoy.

The second and third themes relate to the material culture produced by my research participants. Makers are exercising control over the source of the input of goods in their own lives and the output of goods in the wider market. Not all, but most, seek to control the source of their goods by choosing materials that are environmentally friendly and not produced with exploitative labor. Thus, they are controlling the input of their goods. One interviewee put it pointedly, “It’s just like food. You have to control the source.” Perhaps even more significantly, they are seeking a sense of control over the global capitalistic market by creating an alternative output of goods. Offering handmade items for sale as an alternative to mass-produced goods also empowers those who purchase their goods and who may share their ethical concerns by offering the possibility of an alternative choice to the spectrum of consumption. A print-maker, Corina, told me directly, “Making is a response to mass-production. Handmade culture means that I get to control it [the product] and make it environmentally friendly. It’s empowering. And it’s freeing for customers too.”
Resisting and offering alternatives to “mediocre products” from “mainstream” sources seems to be one of the primary tenets of the DIY ethos. In *DIY: The rise of low-fi culture*, Amy Spencer predicts that “the potential of this alternative culture is far reaching” (2005). She explains that “the passionate and rebellious vision of independent culture – spreading the word to anyone who has had enough of being fed mediocre products via the mainstream media” fuels the practice of “producing something more exciting for yourself” (2005). The makers who participated in my research indicated the same belief outlined by Spencer; they would rather demarcate their identity by producing something themselves, instead of by participating fully in the “mainstream” cultural practices of stocking our lives with purchases from corporatized sources. Corina hinted at this issue when she said she is “dissatisfied with the corporate world. It’s especially dissatisfying for designers or creative thinkers.”

However, an anti-corporate ideal is not always achievable. Hand-crafting alternatives to mainstream consumption requires time, money and effort. As Linda said, “Sometimes you just have to go to Wal-Mart.” I replied, “Like for tires,” and she exclaimed, “Yes! Exactly – I just did that.” While each of my eighteen interviewees referenced having distaste for globalized, corporatized modes of consumption, many of them also noted that, because we live in a consumer culture, it is sometimes difficult to avoid.

The fourth area of agency relates to the uncertainty of our global economy that Sonya hinted at. Some makers find agency amidst the uncertainty of a declining global economy by supporting local businesses and by fostering an internal sense of self-reliance at the personal
and community levels. I asked participants, “Is there a crafting community, either here in the triangle or online?” This question elicited descriptions of how makers were well-received when they either moved here from other cities or when they began crafting. Sam replied, “Yes. We cherish each other and find each other.” Several interviewees spoke at length about the local community outside of crafting and their appreciation for community-based events and projects, such as community gardens in Carrboro, the Spark Con held in Raleigh (a weekend festival held downtown that celebrates ingenuity in all arenas of life and work), and monthly art walks in Durham and Raleigh that attract non-artists and artists alike to explore downtown, meet with friends, and meet artists.

Many of my contacts shared that they believe that handmaking is important to having a healthy local economy, and, more importantly, that a local economy is crucial for having a healthy community. Realizing this emphasis on community helped me to understand the disdain or at least leeriness for consumer culture that I heard and observed amongst makers. Berger defines “consumer culture” as “characterized by wide-spread personal consumption rather than socially conscious and useful investment in the public sphere… this leads to privatism, self-centeredness” (2007, 186). I draw a connection here between the uncertain global economy that is fueled by consumer culture and makers’ contrasting interest in community building and local economies. By opting out of that consumer culture via making goods for themselves and, further, offering an alternative to the rapid consumption of mass-produced goods by producing handmade goods available to a worldwide market, makers are practicing resistance in modest but measured ways.
A final theme related to personal agency is what I think of as the Frank Sinatra twist on DIY: I did it my way. One hundred percent of my interviewees referenced doing things their own way – not just in crafting but in terms of lifeways. Many of them self-described as “rebellious.” As indicated earlier, the term “maker” was also used widely as a self-descriptor. These descriptors are telling not only of the undercurrents of empowerment felt in the maker movement but also of a set of identity markers associated with the culture of DIY and the practice of handmaking.

The moniker “maker” is self-assigned. It was used ubiquitously at the Maker Faire: NC. It also appeared in conversations, interviews, blogs and literature. To understand the significance of this label, I relate the self-assigned name of “maker” and the practice of selling crafts as livelihood to Foucault’s notion of self-production and performativity (Foucault 1990). Hall describes Foucault’s notions of experience and production of the self as “a deliberate stylization of daily life; and its technologies are most effectively demonstrated in the practices of self-production, in specific modes of conduct, in what we have come from later work to recognize as a kind of performativity” (Hall 1996, 13). The production of the self through handmaking creates a sense of agency and self-actualization within the intimate identities of my interviewees. Two of my contacts, jewelers named Sam and Sonya, made the same analogy between themselves and their work; the process and practice of making a new, self-designed object has helped them to make new selves. They likened their journey to becoming self-employed artisans to the process of crafting a new
design from the scraps of their surroundings. Their lovely metaphor reveals the intersection of identity and agency in the maker movement.

**Material Culture**

Several of the themes outlined above relate to the production and significance of material goods. The creation of material culture is a critically important aspect of the practice of handmaking. Vygotsky theorized that tangible objects play a significant role in identity formation. Holland, Fox and Daro point out that “cultural artifacts – the tangible objects of cultural production – evoke a sense of the collective, including sentiments and memories attached to it” (2008, 118). Current DIY crafters utilize traditional methods to create a new and unique aesthetic that represents their generation; they create cultural artifacts that convey and create a sense of the collective. Oami called it “a sort of visual language, our own style and vision of what is beautiful.” Another contact, Corina, hand-prints original designs on paper products. For her, handmaking is a way to exert control in what can be an environmentally damaging industry like paper products. The process of creating material culture which speaks to their own senses of style and ethics allows makers to form, reform and express their intimate identities. Further, these pieces help form the collective identity of makers by contributing to a collective yet dynamic aesthetic which vocalizes shared social values through art.

I asked Corina what is special about handmade objects. She explained that we are surrounded by objects, and “makers bring youth, quality, aesthetic, design, and function” to that realm of material culture. She continued, “We’re making for this to become a norm. We
want buying local and handmade to become norms,” and they’re attempting to do so by creating objects which stand out as having a finer talent, quality, and uniqueness than mass-produced goods. Within these words, Corina positions herself as an author not only of aesthetic trends but of cultural production and social change. This social movement is somewhat unique in that its actions and practices are not to rally or lobby but rather to create tangible objects that vocalize and spread the positive social effects they imagine will result from privileging handmade. Corina’s sentiments resonate with Vygotsky’s view that tangible objects are “made collectively into artifacts by the attribution of meaning, as tools that people use to affect their own and others’ thinking, feeling and behavior” (Holland et al 1999, 50).

Vygotsky proposed another perspective which has been helpful for exploring the identities expressed in the maker movement. His “possibility of becoming” can be understood as how “people take form, building understandings of themselves as agents and instruments, within figured worlds” (Holland et al 1998, 64). Holland, Fox and Daro define the collective identity of a social movement as “participants’ shared sense of the movement as a collective actor -- as a dynamic force for change -- that they identify with and are inspired to support in their own actions.” (2008, 97). The collective identity of the maker movement represents a collectively imagined future in which the “handmade revolution” brings about a shift in the American consciousness to privilege localized, ethical consumption over rapid consumption. The collective imagining also includes a desire for other potential makers to realize their innate ability to produce something unique and offer it to the world in a meaningful way.
CONCLUSION

I will close with an insight from one of my contacts, Cynthia. She owns a craft supply store in Raleigh. After a lengthy interview, she confided that one of the greatest pleasures of her job is the collective pride that crafters in her store feel when a new person enters their space and discovers for the first time, often later in life, that they too are a maker. The act of crafting an object by hand can be simple in practice but significant in person; it can affect one’s image of the self and one’s interaction with social processes.

The makers who participated in this research shared stories of how their practice of handmaking increased self-fulfillment and community engagement. Their stories reveal the cultivation of personal and local agency and a distinct maker identity. The data presented here indicate that the practice of DIY crafting contributes to an identity of self-reliance, conscientious consumption, and creativity. Informing and mirroring this identity, the social drivers of the social movement appear to be sustainability, controlling consumption, and the joy of making.


