Diversity initiatives and addressing inequalities in craft

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Abstract

The UK's creative industries workforce is dominated by the white and relatively privileged, and it appears the craft sector is no different. According to the Crafts Council, compared to the average profile of all occupations, craft workers are more likely to be male and white. The Crafts Council is attempting to support greater diversity in the UK craft sector through various schemes and research projects. This chapter reflects on one such project, a 2018 Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Creative Economy engagement scheme, which sought to provide social media skills training to women makers from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds in two UK cities: Birmingham and London. The workshops, facilitated by the author, investigated the specific challenges facing women makers of colour who wish to use social media for the benefit of their craft practice. These challenges centre on the volatile nature of social media platforms, where makers of colour are subject to disproportionate scrutiny. There are also concerns that social media skills gaps may block the pathway of contemporary craft micro-enterprise. The concept 'mutual aid' draws attention to the positive possibilities of social media for unblocking those pathways for makers of colour through mutual support and mobilisation.

Keywords craft, social media, race, women, inequality, cultural work.

In January 2019, US-based high-profile knitter Karen Templer wrote a blog post titled '2019: My year of color'. Within it, she describes the places she wants to explore and visit during the year, particularly India. She describes her fascination with the country and its culture:

> I've wanted to go to India for as long as I can remember. I've a lifelong obsession with the literature and history of the continent. Photos of India fill me with longing like no other place. One of my closest friends from that pink-striped tube skirt era (we originally met at JC Penney) is Indian, and her family had offered back then that if I ever wanted to go with them on one of their trips, I could. To a suburban midwestern teenager with a severe anxiety disorder, that was like being offered a seat on a flight to Mars. It was fun to think about, but are you kidding me? I was so young and dumb then that I didn't even partake of her mother's Indian cooking. (Talk about regrets!)

Templer's admission that flying to India would be akin to 'flying to Mars' sparked an online backlash from others in the knitting community and she quickly apologised in a subsequent blog post. Even so, online onlookers continued to call out Karen for her ignorance for comparing India to a different planet, and for sounding like, to use Templer's words from her apology, 'a tourist looking for an exotic location for my next selfie'. Though the incident highlighted the issue of race within the knitting community, the backlash against Templer also spawned a parallel rise in racist abuse towards any knitters of colour who engaged in the online debates.

Karen Templer probably could not foresee the impact her blog post would have, in that it sparked important conversations about the unconscious biases and outright prejudice within the knitting community online. Knitters of colour on Instagram, such as Su.krita (2019), collated people's experiences of racism in craft communities and published them as Instagram stories. The stories were from women makers of colour around the world and

included experiences of unfavourable treatment in craft stores and online abuse. The women described how they hesitated to post pictures of themselves online. These women were provided with a platform to say things they probably felt they could not say. These are crucial experiences and conversations, which bring to light the problem of inequality in craft.

Because of social media and sites such as Etsy, craft enterprise is increasingly a viable option for those who can make and who are looking for a way to turn their skills into a business. Though social media may seem accessible, the racism row in the knitting community illustrates the difficulties faced online by women makers of colour and explains why the sensibilities of white, middle class 'hipster domesticity' (Luckman, 2015) dominates online craft spaces. The seemingly hostile online environment is thus not a conducive pathway into craft enterprise for everyone. How can this be addressed? In this chapter I explore this question, drawing on my AHRC-funded research with the Crafts Council UK, which looked at how social media could potentially address inequalities in craft. For the research I interviewed 17 women makers of colour from the UK and held two social media workshops with them to explore the challenges and opportunities of social media use. The research reveals their experiences trying to make a career in craft and the challenges they face using social media.

I begin the chapter by outlining the context of inequalities in the UK craft sector and reflecting on how diversity initiatives have the potential to help or even hinder these inequalities, paradoxically closing off entry and advancement pathways. I then discuss some findings from the research that highlight the challenges the women experienced using social media. These challenges centre on three themes – person, platform and practice. Specific challenges include: the online threat of racism and the potential 'whitewashing' of online craft spaces; obtaining access to skills training and useful advice on using social media; and negotiating the slow pace of making with the seemingly fast pace of social media platforms. I

conclude by discussing how social media platforms, while problematic, could still hold positive possibilities for women makers of colour to mobilise, support each other and enhance the visibility of their work.

Inequalities in the UK craft sector

This chapter focuses primarily on the UK craft sector, as the research project in question was conducted in collaboration with Crafts Council UK, an organisation that seeks to promote craft practice in the UK and engage new audiences. The organisation runs events, exhibitions and workshops for makers, and carries out research on the UK craft sector. The report by the Crafts Council, *Who makes?* (Spilsbury, 2018), highlights the problem of inequality in craft. Drawing on data from the Labour Force Survey, the report suggests that people working in craft occupations are more likely to be male, older and white compared with those employed across all occupations. Julia Bennett (2018) of the Crafts Council notes that 'craft remains connected to materials, processes and techniques from its past' (p. 108). This is also highlighted in Glenn Adamson's *The craft reader* (2010), in which various chapters demonstrate how techniques, materials and processes originate from all around the world and inspire the makers of today. As I will show, for most of the women interviewed for the research in this chapter, such traditions have a direct positive influence on their practice through their families, upbringing and cultural background. Yet, as the *Who makes?* report demonstrates, such diversity is not reflected in the UK craft workforce because of a failure of genuine inclusivity in the sector, within which it is generally the relatively privileged who can establish and sustain a craft career.

Although the *Who makes?* report highlights inequalities in craft in comparison to employment demographics across all occupations (Spilsbury, 2018), it is important to acknowledge that such inequalities are broadly evident across the whole of the UK creative and cultural industries. Research demonstrates that these industries are 'enclaves of privilege'

(Banks, 2017, p. 85) that exclude people from the workforce on account of class (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2018), gender (Conor, Gill and Taylor, 2015) and race (Saha, 2018). Arts Council England's Creative Case for Diversity scheme aims to address the lack of diversity in the arts. Although its annual reports do demonstrate incremental improvements in workforce diversity among its funded organisations, at the admission of the chairman, Nicolas Serota, 'aspirations are not always translating into meaningful actions or significant appointments' (Arts Council England, 2018, p. 2). There has been much academic focus on the arts and media, but less has been directed towards inequalities in craft. The online debate around race in craft following Karen Templer's blog post highlights that forms of discrimination occur both online and offline, contributing to inequalities and the lack of visibility of diverse forms of craft.

Why is equality in craft and the creative industries important? Recent research on cultural labour and inequality argues that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in culture, whether it be consumption or production. In his book *Creative Justice,* Mark Banks (2017) argues for parity of participation, which Nancy Fraser (2013) defines as 'social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers' (p. 184). Banks calls for policy and industry to work towards ensuring parity of participation in culture. Anyone, regardless of background, age, ability, gender identity or sexual orientation should be able to access opportunities to be involved in culture. Hadley and Belfiore (2018) discuss how the idea of 'cultural democracy' – which roughly resonates with the idea that culture and creativity are for everyone – is increasing in traction in academic and policy circles. An example of such activity is the report *Towards cultural democracy* (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017), which highlights the potential benefits of cultural democracy for health, wellbeing and social cohesion. The authors argue that research and policy should appreciate all types of 'everyday' creativity taking place around the country. They propose

the need to foster cultural capability – the ability and opportunity for anyone to create culture. This spans music, video, writing, art and craft.

The inclusion of craft in that report is notable, as it is seldom mentioned in research and reports on diversity in the creative industries. It is not often mentioned in cultural policy, either, in reference to the creative industries. This is despite the fact that, although being connected to the techniques of the past, the craft sector contributes £746 million gross value added to the UK economy (Bennett, 2018). In the UK context this is a double-edged sword, because although the appeal of handmade craft products remains strong, as demonstrated by the Crafts Council UK figures, the policy focus remains on 'the cultural economy as either consumption-based or as a facet of the knowledge economy' (Grodach et al., 2017, p. 17). Grodach et al. suggest that increased policy focus on craft and 'material cultural production' (p. 17) could help to address wider issues of inequality in cultural production:

> Opportunities abound to pursue urban economic development strategies that build upon, rather than eschew, industrial, migrant and working-class skills and legacies […] but they may be overlooked within constrained cultural economic policy-making overly focused on the so-called knowledge and creative industries. (p. 18)

In this vein, it is important to acknowledge that, although there is a lack of diversity in the craft sector, it does not mean there is a lack of diverse craft. The problem lies in the lack of recognition for and visibility of diverse forms of craft and makers in the wider craft economy. This has important impacts on the perceived availability of pathways into a craft career for makers of colour, as they do not necessarily see themselves represented in the sector.

Diversity initiatives and this research

To address the problem of inequality in craft, the Crafts Council have a diversity policy and invest time in collaborative research projects, such as the project which is the subject of this

chapter – Supporting Diversity in Craft Practice through Digital Technology Skills Development. In a similar vein to Fraser's 'parity of participation' sentiment, the Crafts Council aims 'to enable everyone to be creative through the act of making' (Crafts Council, 2019). It aims to enhance the diversity of both the craft workforce and audience, and to develop best practice to help craft employers diversify their workforces.

Although the *Who makes?* report (Spilsbury, 2018) suggests that the craft workforce is mostly male, this applies only to full-time employment; in reality, the craft sector is dominated by freelancers and women. Therefore, it is concerning that that women do not seem to have the same access to full-time employment as men, and remain concentrated in lower-earning and more precarious positions within craft employment. This is likely to be because craft enterprise allows for flexibility and autonomy, allowing women to potentially make a living whilst fitting their work around domestic responsibilities (Luckman, 2015). As Luckman highlights, the internet seemingly makes it easier for such women to engage in craft micro-enterprise, but the reality is that while the sector *seemingly* has low barriers to entry, this in fact masks a great deal of under-employment (Luckman and Thomas, 2018).

The two social media workshops conducted for my project with the Crafts Council – one in London, and one in Birmingham – were based on a knowledge-exchange format, and involved some sharing of social media good practice and discussion of the challenges and opportunities of social media for the makers. The focus on the digital and social media is important here; the craft economy has experienced the growth it has due to websites such as Etsy, which give makers the chance to create and sell products online, and set up and run a creative business from home. However, learning how to do that takes time. Even though using online platforms has become second nature for a lot of people, for many the technology is still unfamiliar. I argue in other research that digital and self-promotional skills are becoming integral to creative practice (Patel, 2020), but there exists a digital skills gap that is

threatening to widen, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities. Other research has suggested that for female entrepreneurs from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds seeking to progress in the cultural sector, communication and social media are a challenge. The main reasons include not knowing how to use the platforms or not being sure about what to post on social media (Naudin and Chapanda, 2018, p. 23). Naudin and Chapanda's (2018) study was based on a relatively small entrepreneurial leadership programme in Birmingham, but similar stories are heard from the interviewees in this research. Social media is ubiquitous but it is also problematic, particularly for women who may not be very familiar with the technology, who now find themselves wondering if they are missing out and if they should learn how to use it. These women are trying to navigate online spaces that can be exposing and volatile, but also potentially rewarding.

In recruiting for this project and running the workshops, I encountered some challenges around which terminology to use and how research projects such as this could do things differently to other 'diversity schemes' – or would the approach (and outcome) ultimately be the same? How useful are projects that attempt to address diversity directly? In the next section I outline my approach in this research whilst considering critiques of diversity discourse and the implications for addressing inequalities.

Diversity discourses and addressing inequalities in craft

As highlighted by schemes such as the Arts Council's Creative Case for Diversity, which encourages cultural employers to work towards diversifying their workforce, diversity is seen as a common good in the creative sector – something for cultural organisations to work towards 'achieving'. 'Diversity' is the term used in Crafts Council policies and was mentioned throughout discussions about the project. However, I realised that in terms of research participant recruitment, 'diverse' was too broad a term, especially as the focus in this instance was women makers of colour, therefore, I used the acronym BAME (a widely

recognised term in the UK) to aid recruitment. This allowed people who self-define as having a black or ethnic minority background to come forward for the project.

However, there is a tension in this approach. Critiques of diversity discourses argue that terms such as ‘diversity’ and ‘BAME’ actually obscure the real problems of inequalities in the creative and cultural industries. Sara Ahmed (2012) argues that diversity discourse is an institutional speech act that becomes routine and allows cultural organisations and policy makers to pay ‘lip service’, therefore, the language of diversity is limited in its potential to destabilise dominant power structures. She highlights that diversity discourse obscures issues such as inequalities, equal opportunities and social justice. Similarly, Faruqi (2017) highlights that the use of terms such as ‘diversity’, ‘BAME’ and ‘of colour’ could reinforce patriarchy, because they define disability, class, race, gender and sexuality ‘against the supposed norm – that of the white, able-bodied, middle class, heterosexual man’ (pp. 27–28). Anamik Saha (2018) goes one step further to suggest that diversity discourse, when used in cultural policy, is a ‘technique of power, which obscures and suppresses the experience of racism’ (p. 87). For him, policy attempts to increase diversity in the creative and cultural workforce is increasingly rationalised in neoliberal terms that stress the benefits of diversity for competition and economic growth, rather than for ethical or moral reasons. Saha argues that diversity discourse is framed increasingly in terms of creativity and innovation, with less emphasis on addressing actual, lived inequalities. He states that ‘creative diversity’ initiatives collapse race, ethnicity, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation and class into one ‘politically neutral notion of diversity, preferably conceived in terms of market goals contributing to the continuing upward redistribution of resources’ (p. 107).

These critiques were at the forefront of my thinking during the project. However, in working with an industry partner such as the Crafts Council, I needed to negotiate the language of diversity used in policy and industry to achieve certain goals, whilst being very

aware of the critique and attentive to the potentially detrimental effects on equality in creative and cultural work. Indeed, by focusing on women makers of colour and not explicitly stating all groups who could be involved in the research, I could be seen to be excluding people with disabilities or those who are LGBTQ+. The decision to focus specifically on women makers of colour was informed by my previous research on how artists signal aesthetic expertise online (Patel, 2020). Signalling expertise in this context means being able to communicate one's credentials, skills and knowledge online, particularly on social media platforms. In this work I describe some of the gendered forms of online sharing and collaboration among the women artists interviewed. Such activity included sharing the work of other women creatives on social media, even those seemingly in competition; sharing aspects of personal life, including 'bonding icons' (Zappavigna, 2014) such as pets and cake in order to engage other women; and disclosing emotions or acknowledging when times were difficult, which often generated an affective response from other women. All these activities help to build mutually beneficial relationships online, fostering a sense of community among groups of women. I characterise this activity as 'mutual aid', a term originally used by de Peuter and Cohen (2015) to describe how cultural workers mobilise and work together to address poor labour conditions in the arts. I adapted the term to describe the collective activity of some women artists online, which I suggest could contribute to greater online visibility of women's art. For this project I initially wondered whether online mutual aid practices among craft makers of colour could potentially facilitate greater online visibility and representation. However, as I found in the workshops and interviews, the potential for mutual aid was hindered from the outset for some participants, because of various challenges that prevent women makers of colour from taking full advantage of the opportunities of social media. At the same time, I found that other activities occurring in light of the racism debates mentioned at the beginning

of this chapter are potential examples of mutual aid online, in response to racism and inequality in craft.

Challenges for women makers of colour

From both the workshops and interviews three themes emerged in relation to the challenges that women makers of colour face in trying to forge a pathway into craft micro-enterprise. These themes relate to person – questions of online identity and exposure; platform – the technology and function of social media platforms; and practice – the role of social media in their craft practice.

Person: online identity and the threat of racism

The debates and comments that have escalated since the publication of Karen Templer's blog post highlight the persistent assumptions and prejudices about race within parts of the craft community and are symptomatic of wider societal issues. I held the workshops before these online race debates took place but nonetheless found that many of the women were hesitant about putting themselves 'out there' online. For some, particularly the black women, it was their ethnicity that held them back. In the workshops a number of them said that they did not want to put their face on their work because they felt that their ethnicity might devalue their craft. One woman in the Birmingham workshop said: 'I never even take pictures of myself, never mind put them online. You will never see my face on the internet, I just don't feel comfortable with it'. The hesitation of some makers to put their face online is hugely concerning but not surprising, given the volatile nature of online spaces, particularly for black women. In their study, Litchfield et al. (2018) highlight the 'intersectional oppression' that tennis player Serena Williams faces online, where she is subject to a great deal more criticism and scrutiny than her male, white counterparts. Though social media has much potential, the online space can be hostile and exclusionary, particularly towards women of colour (Amnesty

International, 2018). In order to address inequality in craft, the problematic online context must be considered.

The hesitation of some women of colour to put themselves 'out there' could also be connected to the whitewashing of craft online. Saxena (2019) interviewed several knitters of colour about the online race debates sparked by Karen Templer's blog post. One of them, 'Ocean Rose' (quoted in Saxena, 2019), said:

> I just noticed the space was easier to navigate when I didn't show who I was, because then you wouldn't assume that I was a black person …When I didn't show myself, people would assume that the picture was from a white person. That's when I knew it was really whitewashed.

Saxena (2019) highlights the 'marketable aesthetics' of Instagram, where filters and the staging of knits tends to omit the person of colour from the online image 'and sometimes, when followers were reminded, they [the audience] showed their prejudice'. The whitewashing of online craft images arguably could also include the withholding of any posting at all by women of colour, simply because they do not want to deal with the potential criticism.

These concerns are also raised in Su.krita's Instagram stories, which highlight racism in the craft community. Within those, one woman posted a picture of her face with the caption: 'I have always second guessed about putting pictures of me. Always' (@burkehousecrafts, cited in @Su.krita, 2019) Other contributions include stories about women being followed around and given unfavourable treatment in craft or yarn stores, being excluded from online conversations, and experiences of outright racism in craft groups or in conversations with white makers. Such collective experiences, shared publicly online, powerfully highlight the problems with racism in the craft community, which contribute to the inequality in the sector not just in the UK, but globally. This online mobilisation of collective experience is an

example of mutual aid, which has helped to raise greater visibility of the problem of racism in the knitting community. In this sense, online spaces can be contradictory for women makers of colour. They are fraught with challenges and difficulty, and yet are potentially beneficial for fostering online community and connectivity. For the participants I interviewed, however, their participation online was also hindered by a lack of knowledge about social media.

Platform: digital and social media skills

Several participants found it difficult to connect with other women of colour in the craft community online, simply because they didn't know how to. The workshop format was useful in this sense because it brought women together to share their experiences, and offered the opportunity to connect with other BAME women in the craft community. The facilitation of a relatively 'safe' space led to some honest conversations about the challenges they face as women makers of colour and provided a platform for further connection online later on. Whereas some of the participants were very proficient at social media, others did not know what a hashtag was, so social media skills levels varied greatly among participants. The increasing centrality of social media to craft micro-enterprise means it is crucial to address potential digital skills gaps, for some of the makers the provision of free social media workshops underpinning the research and data collection was a major incentive to participate in the project. Research projects such as this can perform an important function in providing resources and skills training at no cost, whilst bringing people together to work collectively towards addressing challenges.

Another platform-related challenge identified in both the workshops and interviews was reaching audiences online. A few makers mentioned that websites such as Etsy are saturated with both individual makers and larger companies that mass-produce seemingly 'handmade' or vintage products. The makers who were more confident on social media discussed the role of algorithms in getting their work seen online. Arati, a hand-painted silk designer based in

London, discussed how Instagram and Facebook 'keep changing the algorithm. I really don't want to be paying for my posts to be seen'. She said that Etsy had also changed its algorithm in 2017, and as a result the number of views to her page fell. She discussed how she addressed the problem:

> You can't really control what an outside source does, which is why I started my website. This is something that I always tell people. A good friend of mine bought a scarf from me, via my Etsy shop – I didn't have my website then. We were all sitting at dinner together, the person next to her asked her where she got her scarf. She said, 'I got it from Etsy.' Instead of saying, 'I got it from Arati.' I'm sitting right next to her. I didn't want my brand to be Etsy, which it's not.

Arati's comment about the thought of Etsy overshadowing her own brand brings to light the centrality of Etsy as a platform in craft micro-enterprise, or as Susan Luckman terms it, 'Etsypreneurship' (Luckman, 2015). While Etsy and social media platforms allow makers to sell their work to customers around the world and signal their expertise (Patel, 2020), such platforms hold a great deal of power in controlling what is visible and not visible online (Gillespie, 2014). Algorithms and platform affordances structure the online presence of makers in many ways, making it particularly challenging for them to negotiate and be able to make money from selling online. Not everyone can have a website made for them as Arati did: lack of finance for design or hosting, or not having the skills to maintain a website for e-commerce are major inhibitors. Platforms appear accessible and might be easy to use once one has a grasp of the basic functions, but using them can present challenges, not only in terms of usability and visibility, but also in relation to the demands of social media in the daily routines of makers.

Practice: social media use in craft practice

In the interviews a recurring topic was how makers negotiate the slow pace of making with the fast, demanding pace of social media. In previous research I highlight how cultural workers feel a 'pressure to presence' with social media (Patel, 2020) – a perceived need to post regularly for fear of losing followers or missing out on potential sales. Similar sentiments were expressed by the makers in this research, but they talked about striking a balance between making and posting on social media. In many cases the making was the priority. Jules, a textile designer based in London, said that she puts a lot of effort into Instagram, but during the festive season when she gets a lot of orders, maintaining her social media presence becomes more difficult. She acknowledged that social media is a part of craft enterprise, describing how it is another activity that requires 'juggling' along with everything else. She admitted, 'I'm increasingly spending more and more time on the computer, when really I just want to be in my studio, but you've got to do all the other bits as well'. Rayvenn D'Clark is a craft artist also based in London. She talked about the slow pace of her work and how she negotiates this with social media use:

> My work takes very long to make so there are times when people are like, 'Oh, are you doing other work?' There are times I have to go on Instagram and I'll post a little snippet of what I'm doing. It'll be like, 'Guys, I am making new stuff,' but, you know, my casts take months to do. It is a hard balance to find. It's like a job in itself, but once you find your rhythm, I think it's a really useful tool.

Many other makers who used social media regularly said it took a while for them to get into a routine with social media, or a 'rhythm' as Rayvenn describes. The disparity between the slow pace of making and the demands of social media are an important consideration in contemporary accounts of craft practice. For many of the participants interviewed social media, particularly Instagram, has been mostly useful, providing opportunities to connect

with other makers, find inspiration and sell their work. Some of those interviewed, and many of the participants in the workshops, were still trying to work out how social media would benefit them. For example, Layla, who is a maker and musician based in Birmingham, described how she is 'old fashioned' and does not enjoy social media or self-promotion. She said: 'I'm 34, all the social media stuff, that's been a new thing for me. Technology has kind of passed me by'.

The idea of technology 'passing by' certain people who may not be as tech-savvy or who may be hesitant to use it means that there are sections of makers who are simply not visible online. This relates to the digital skills gaps mentioned earlier in this chapter, as well as the issues around online identity and exposure. All these challenges contribute in various ways to the inequalities within the craft sector because they can obstruct or even block pathways into craft work. As online spaces continually shape so much of what we can see, know and access, those who are unable to get online or use social media platforms effectively are increasingly disadvantaged.

Using diversity discourses in research into creative industries work

Earlier in this chapter I highlighted the criticisms of diversity discourse and terms such as BAME, which tend to be used in any research or initiatives seeking to address diversity. While such criticisms are valid, the participants in this research appeared to find the term useful, because they could identify with it and saw the opportunity to sit in a room with women they can relate to. There is an important social element to bringing people together through free training provision, and the sense of community and kinship in the room at both workshops was palpable. I asked participants in the first workshop to think of a hashtag for everyone to use on the day and the most popular suggestion was #BAMECraftUK. The term BAME has become so frequently used that potential participants will generally know what it

means, and the familiarity of the term allowed me to recruit women of colour to the workshops.

However, while using such terms can work for recruitment for projects seeking to address inequalities in the creative industries, that does not mean those terms do not continue to 'other'. This is also an issue when working with industry and attempting to inform policy. As a researcher working with an organisation such as the Crafts Council to address inequalities in cultural work, I had to negotiate between academic critique, the requirements and language of the collaborating organisation and by extension, research funding bodies and policymakers, who all adopt the problematic discourse of 'diversity'.

Another criticism of diversity initiatives is the idea that targeting groups with special schemes and skills development denotes a lack of skills or hard work, and disavows the structural barriers and institutional discrimination that permeate most industries (Faruqi, 2017). This project could be accused of doing that: it could be perceived that the provision of free social media skills training was based on an assumption that BAME women do not know how to use social media. However, to address this, the workshops were specifically framed as a knowledge-exchange format. This format enabled me to gain some insight into the existing skills and knowledge among participants. It also allowed us to work collectively towards finding a solution to challenges, whilst fostering a safe space for makers to share ideas, connect with each other and form potentially fulfilling relationships.

As I have shown, women makers of colour face several challenges. Arguably, issues around algorithms and fitting in the time to 'do' social media alongside making could apply to all makers and creatives using social media, but the hostile online environment for women makers of colour is a particular challenge that was discussed by some of my participants, and it has since gained wider recognition – both good and bad – in craft communities. The next step is to address the various challenges highlighted in this research more directly. Only then

can we begin to work towards making the craft sector more inclusive and thus more representative of the vast range of skills, techniques and inspiration from around the world.

Conclusion – opportunities to unblock pathways into craft

Social media is increasingly central to craft micro-enterprise, with websites such as Etsy and the UK-based Folksy providing shopfronts for makers, and social media platforms allowing those makers to reach audiences. However, as I have shown, social media is not a freely accessible space; it is fraught with issues that reflect wider structures in society that favour the privileged (Patel, 2020; Williamson, 2016). Craft micro-enterprise offers the promise of flexible, creative and autonomous work, which is hard to resist, but in reality it is much harder for some people, for example women of colour, to reach a level of significant exposure or presence. This is particularly crucial in a sector where the visible representation of the self as a part of the authentic, handmade product is a part of the appeal for customers (Luckman and Thomas, 2018). Yet, as suggested by Saxena (2019), online craft spaces are increasingly whitewashed. The online racism sparked by Karen Templer's blog post is further evidence that existing structures create conditions to actively discriminate against and discourage anyone who is not white and privileged from trying to enter the craft sector, or any creative sector for that matter.

Where there is hope for unblocking pathways into craft is with collective action through mutual aid activity. Whether it be actively calling out racism in the craft community or identifying, highlighting and fostering groups that are bound together by a collective love for craft and creativity, academics, organisations such as the Crafts Council and policymakers can work towards bringing to light the structural constraints in the UK and begin addressing them. At the moment, diversity is near the top of the agenda for many cultural organisations and policymakers. Although it is important to raise criticisms of diversity discourses and schemes, it is worth thinking about how we can utilise this moment to create meaningful

change; it is worth exploring possibilities for collective action to make positive changes towards parity of participation and social justice in the craft and wider cultural industries.

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