

## #Quiltsforpulse: connected and shared socio-political activism through craftivism

Anna Keune, Nickolina Yankova & Kylie Pepler

To cite this article: Anna Keune, Nickolina Yankova & Kylie Pepler (2021): #Quiltsforpulse: connected and shared socio-political activism through craftivism, Learning, Media and Technology, DOI: [10.1080/17439884.2021.1961147](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2021.1961147)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2021.1961147>



Published online: 29 Jul 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 25



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



# #Quiltsforpulse: connected and shared socio-political activism through craftivism

Anna Keune <sup>†</sup>, Nickolina Yankova  and Kylie Pepler 

Department of Education, University of California, Irvine, CA, USA

## ABSTRACT

Aligning crafts and activism, *craftivism* provides a useful context to study the processes of collective socio-political activism. Crafts allow us to reclaim the ability to care for others as a method of activism, which stands in contrast to the vitriolic expression that pervades contemporary online-offline political discourse. Building on connected learning, this qualitative study analyzes the #quiltsforpulse movement, a response to the 2016 mass shooting at a gay bar in Orlando that distributed over 1,700 handcrafted quilts to survivors, families, and first responders. We study the craftivist connections and shared practices of #quiltsforpulse and one implementation of the movement that produced material responses to violence. Findings broaden our understanding of connected learning by introducing how materials produced multifaceted connections and shared practices in the collective expression of care and compassion. We present implications for designing connected learning opportunities toward socio-political activism.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 31 March 2020  
Accepted 19 July 2021

## KEYWORDS




#quiltsforpulse; craftivism; connected learning; socio-political activism

## Introduction

As political aspects of educational challenges take a central role within the study of learning (Politics of Learning 2017), designing opportunities for collective socio-political activism increases in importance (e.g., Jurow et al. 2016). These emergent threads stand in the context of envisioning and designing effective processes to participate in addressing important issues of public life. Connected learning presents a research agenda for capturing learning that can stretch across multiple settings, people, and materials (Ito et al. 2020). In analyzing connected learning, three intersecting spheres synergistically kindle learning: interests that continue to take shape, networked relationships that deepen, and emergent academic, career, and civic opportunities (Ito et al. 2020). Through leveraging connected learning, which includes ways to understand how internet technologies present opportunities for shaping and accelerating contributions to civic issues, we can design learning experiences that can cultivate socio-political engagement and civic action.

This paper explores craftivism as a particularly effective form of connected learning for fostering socio-political activism. Craftivism is craft-based and collective socio-political activism that centers on the production and distribution of textile-, wood-, and other craft forms. Craftivism often involves the mobilization of distributed community groups to bring awareness to prescient civic issues. However, in place of marches and petitions, craftivism involves the collective creation of public artworks and coordinated networked connections to create material responses to civic issues (i.e., the Women's March 'pussy hats' [2016], the AIDS Memorial Quilt [1987]). Even when created

---

**CONTACT** Anna Keune  anna.keune@gmail.com  Institute of Educational Research, Ruhr-Uni ver si tät Bo chum, Uni ver si täts stra ße 150, 44801 Bo chum, Germany  @akeune

<sup>†</sup>Anna Keune is now at the Institute of Educational Research, Ruhr-University Bochum.

as part of a collective action, handmade crafts foreground the technique, aesthetic, and care of their creators, imbuing an intimacy uncommon in other activist forms.

This study investigated craftivism as connected learning by studying how #quiltsforpulse—a large-scale, public craft movement that coordinated the creation of over 1,700 quilts for survivors, families of victims, and first responders of the deadly 2016 attack on Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, FL—produced material responses of compassion and care to instantaneous violence. Understanding such craftivist instances through connected learning can help inform future educational designs aimed at similar forms of collective socio-political activism. To investigate this space, this article asks:

- (1) How does craftivism produce connections that lead to collective socio-political activism?
- (2) What practices involved in the production of crafts contribute to the formation of shared socio-political purpose?

This qualitative research study observed a quilt group (19 middle-age through retirement-age female quilters across the political spectrum in a midwestern college town) contributing to the #quiltsforpulse movement. Data sources included social media posts by contributors to the #quiltsforpulse movement and observations at three in-person quilt group sessions (including photographs of artifacts and members at work). First, we coded how craftivist characteristics of #quiltsforpulse instantiated connections that shaped the pro-LGBTQ+ movement. Second, we coded how the quilting group's shared practices produced a shared purpose of the movement. Findings establish craftivism as a form of connected learning, one in which characteristics of quilting (including its connections to female, public, domestic, and spiritual socio-political aspects of life) are used in conjunction with internet technologies to form multifaceted expressions of activism. Findings also extend the connected learning framework by closely examining the active role that materials play in the shaping of collective socio-political engagement.

### **The #quiltsforpulse movement: quilting as socio-political activism**

Following the 2016 shooting at Pulse, a gay bar in Orlando, FL, the Orlando Modern Quilt Guild (OMQG) issued a call on their website and Instagram account for a Heart Quilts drive in solidarity with the events that had transpired (Watson 2017). OMQG's social media call for 102 quilts quickly gained an international following; within weeks, approximately 1,700 quilts—tenfold the original request—were distributed to survivors of the shooting, victims' loved ones, and first responders (Watson 2017). Individuals and crafting circles around the world shared their personal stories around creating or receiving the quilts with the hashtag #quiltsforpulse online through social media, especially Instagram. At the time of this writing, over 6000 posts had been created with this hashtag. The #quiltsforpulse movement drew attention to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) rights. Furthermore, following the deadly shooting in a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, the OMQG issued a similar call for a quilt drive for those affected by the shooting. The #quiltsforpulse movement had rippling effects and informed further instances of craft-based and collective engagement with a social cause.

Despite their strong associations with domesticity, crafts have long been used for activism. Women, in particular, have historically used crafting as an opportunity to express the female experience through embroidered images and messages (Parker 1984). Invariably, many of these messages have been subversive in nature (Hackney 2013). Craft has been used to protest war involvement and encourage peaceful actions for centuries, and to draw attention to environmental issues (e.g., the Crochet Coral Reef project), women's reproductive rights (e.g., Wombs on Washington), fair wages for workers (e.g., the Nike Blanket Petition), and LGBTQ+ issues (e.g., AIDS Memorial Quilt; Hawkins 1993; McGovern 2019). In the discussion of craftivism, McGovern (2019) highlighted the embroidering of feminist messages into textiles as a form of political engagement.

Quilting, in particular, connects the domestic, collective, and socio-political (King 2001). In addition to providing warmth, comfort, and socialization, quilts can commemorate significant events (King 2001) or represent collectively generated historical records, such as African American history (c.f., Women of Color Quilters Network [Rogers and Mazloomi 2021]). Furthermore, connecting fabric with socio-political activism can produce a physical instantiation of societal care (Rogers and Mazloomi 2021), contributing to one's well-being by igniting feelings of self-actualization and empowerment in the completion of a project and in contributing to community building (Pöllänen and Weissmann-Hanski 2020). All the while, quilting supports the cognitive, emotional, and social well-being of the crafter while they are being productive and forming friendships of support, affirmations, and inspiration (Burt and Atkinson 2012; Pöllänen and Weissmann-Hanski 2020).

## **Collective activism through internet tools and technologies**

As is now clear, the internet is a pervasive forum for the sharing of ideological beliefs and the collective organizing of socio-political action (e.g., Charmaraman 2013; Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik 2018). Even when these spaces are not explicitly political, online spaces can provide opportunities to engage with political discourse (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik 2018). For example, media production has been shown to support youth in expressing political views in public arenas, taking part in social action to impact change, and empowering marginalized youth to counter stereotypical representations (Charmaraman 2013). When crafting is combined with internet technologies for socio-political action, crafters draw on offline and online sources to get informed about current events, connect to others, and share techniques for the production of artifacts, in addition to finished pieces (Hackney 2013). Considering the opportunities of internet technologies for political engagement, this paper especially considers how the collective socio-political activism of #quiltsforpulse was produced through connections and shared practices (both analytical aspects of connected learning) as (quilt) materials were created and shared online and offline. Thus, #quiltsforpulse acts as an example of how internet technologies can strengthen collective socio-political craftivism.

## **Studying collective socio-political activism through connected learning**

Connected learning is anchored in an equity agenda, which honors practices across cultural backgrounds as sources for learning (Ito et al. 2020; Jenkins et al. 2016; Soep and Chávez 2011). Furthermore, it is often through internet technologies that connected learning takes shape and is accelerated (Ito et al. 2013). Connected learning takes into consideration how a rapidly changing technological and networked landscape supports interests, opportunities, and relationships toward collective and individual learning outcomes (Ito et al. 2020). The equity agenda of connected learning helps recognize technological systems of privilege and advantage (Reich and Ito 2017). Studies that investigated the promises of social media landscapes for affinity-group learning highlighted silos that rarely foster relationships beyond one's own social circle and exchanges that would broaden such engagement (Gee 2004). Where the connected learning framework has been developed within youth culture settings, in this paper connected learning supports the study of networks of adult-centered socio-political activism. We illuminate how shared, interest-driven material practices that happen online and offline led to civic opportunities in the form of the #quiltsforpulse movement. When we understand how connected learning takes place through material cultural practices across online and offline communities, we can construct design recommendations for connected learning opportunities that foster collective socio-political activism.

In addition to individual learning outcomes, learning supports, and domain connections, connected learning also considers collective outcomes as relevant learning, like socio-political activism (Roque 2016). Building on this, we study what made the collective outcome of the #quiltsforpulse craftivism possible, the slow production of material responses of compassion and care to sudden

violence. Connected learning offers four distinct lenses. First, connected learning highlights *sponsors*, which refers to interest endorsement (i.e., the midwestern quilt group and the OMQG that enabled the movement). Second, connected learning includes *shared purposes*, connecting civic and collective engagement to socio-political movements. The shared purpose of #quiltsforpulse was civic, to produce quilts for those struck by tragedy.

While the sponsors and shared purpose of #quiltsforpulse are more straightforward, we analyzed connected learning via the third and fourth connected learning lenses: *connections across settings* and *shared practices*. *Connections across settings* highlight nodes within larger intersecting and emerging learning settings that help understand how contributions are made possible. To examine the connections that drove #quiltsforpulse is to show the networked infrastructure that supported the movement. Lastly, *shared practices* refer to the production-centered activities performed across online and offline networks that can lead to far-reaching opportunities. Looking at connections and shared practices in the unique material movement of #quiltsforpulse promises to uncover nodes and material cultural practices that fostered the pro-LGBTQ+ socio-political activism and aspects that expand the connected learning framework.

## Methods

### *Researcher positionality*

All three authors have intersecting backgrounds in STEM education. Given the lopsided gender, ethnic, and racial representations within STEM and material cultural spaces, it is important to note that all three authors are white women. Anna (author 1) was brought up in central Europe and worked in several international contexts. Nikki (author 2) was brought up in eastern Europe and studied in the western United States. Kylie (author 3) was brought up in midwestern North America, where she predominantly studied and worked. Although we have backgrounds in craft, art, and design, we were outsiders to quilting and studied #quiltsforpulse as part of a United States National Science Foundation (NSF) grant awarded to the third author, which centered on the intersections of various craft traditions and mathematics (e.g., Pepler, Keune, and Thompson 2020). The data collection was conducted by the first author, who joined the midwestern quilt group and learned quilting from the group. The present study emerged as a case that we wanted to analyze further. The case was shared with the co-authors and we performed larger sense-making together. Overall, we are neither insiders nor contributors to #quiltsforpulse and were not directly influenced by the movement. This study was carried out in accordance with the recommendations and approval of University of California, Irvine's Institutional Review Board (IRB). All participants gave written informed consent in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

### *Settings and participants*

The research included two sets of settings and participants: the public profile of #quiltsforpulse that was sponsored by the OMQG, and a midwestern quilt group that contributed quilts to the larger activist movement. *The public profile of the #quiltsforpulse movement* was sponsored through the OMQG. A quilt guild is a quilting community with its own bylaws, focused on community-building, sharing resources, advice, and quilts. Founded in March 2010, OMQG serves approximately 100 quilters in Orlando and central Florida. The OMQG has members at executive positions, with a community outreach chair overseeing collective actions, such as #quiltsforpulse. Our engagement with the OMQG was limited to the public Instagram profile. We interfaced with a predominantly white quilting community, with few participants with international backgrounds and few black, indigenous, and people of color. However, we neither know the race and ethnicity of all OMQG members nor those who contributed to the collective #quiltsforpulse hashtag.

The *midwestern quilt group* formed in March 2016 as an opportunity to dedicate time to quilting. Such quilting groups are informal groups that often center around their members' interests, for example, working on a shared quilt or on individual personal projects in a co-located space. The number of group members changed over time, from 11 at the time of initiation, to 19 by the time of writing this paper. All members were middle-aged to retired women with varied quilting experiences. The group brought together people of diverse socioeconomic, national, political, educational, racial, ethnic, and occupational backgrounds. Initially bi-weekly in-person meetings in members' living rooms or craft studios extended over time to include visits to quilt shows, retreats, and festive gatherings. Friendships formed within the group. Of all members, five became actively involved with producing a contribution to #quiltsforpulse. All of the women who became active in the movement were white with divergent socioeconomic, political, educational, and occupational backgrounds. Table 1 presents the focal participants. All names are pseudonyms. We focus on these five members and their contributions to #quiltsforpulse as they intersected with the movement.

### Data sources

This study drew on three data sources: (1) #quiltsforpulse Instagram posts, (2) the quilt group's Facebook posts, and (3) observational documentation through field notes and photographs. The public #quiltsforpulse Instagram posts informed our understanding of the large-scale collective socio-political activist movement. The Facebook posts and observational documentation served to understand the midwestern quilt group, its connections to the activist movement, as well as their practices and shared purposes that informed the movement.

The study drew on close to 6000 *public #quiltsforpulse Instagram posts*, which informed the analysis of the public profile of the #quiltsforpulse movement and connections of the collective socio-political activist movement with the quilt group's contributions. The Instagram posts were tagged with the hashtags #quiltsforpulse and #orlandomqg, the hashtag of the OMQG that coordinated the #quiltsforpulse movement. Posts at the onset of the movement focused on logistics, including the call for quilts and the instructions for making and mailing them. Later posts included pictures of completed quilts and updates by the OMQG, detailing the progress made toward the goals of, first, 102 and then 885 quilts. As the number of received quilts wound down, posts focused on the photographic documentation and distribution of the received quilts. Most heartwarming of posts addressed recipient reactions to receiving a quilt. Years later, re-posts return pictures of the heart quilts; close to the event's anniversary, posts center around memorial services that feature quilts.

**Table 1.** Focal participants of the midwestern quilt group.

Name	Description
<i>Leah</i>	Leah managed the group's social media page and introduced the idea to the group to contribute to #quiltsforpulse after seeing an Instagram post. An artist by training and stay-at-home mother, Leah was also an active member of an award-winning art quilt group.
<i>Jackie</i>	Jackie was a retired accountant and experienced quilter who published books about quilting techniques. Her interactions with other members centered on generous sharing of resources and feedback. She hosted the #quiltsforpulse meetings at her home sewing studio.
<i>Josie</i>	Josie, a retired schoolteacher, got reacquainted with quilting when the group formed. She sought her friend's help (see Mimi) for machine quilting. Josie joined #quiltsforpulse to reconnect with quilting but stopped attending mid-way through the group's engagement.
<i>Mimi</i>	Mimi (unknown occupation) had some prior experiences with quilting when she joined the group. She joined the group with Josie and supported her in re-familiarizing with quilting. Mimi continued her engagement with #quiltsforpulse even after Josie stopped attending.
<i>Celia</i>	Celia (unknown occupation) actively contributed to the group's engagement with #quiltsforpulse. Her contributions to the group were marked by pragmatism and a strife for perfection.

The *quilt group's Facebook posts* were created by the group members and posted to the closed group. The data informed the analysis of the midwestern quilt group's shared practices around #quiltsforpulse and how these informed shared purposes. We downloaded all posts, comments, and photographs into a PDF. The Facebook group was still active at the time of writing the paper and some of the members had recently turned to contributing to creating masks for health-care professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. To focus our analysis on the group's contribution to #quiltsforpulse, we drew on posts from March 2016 to June 2017, from the start of the group until one year after the peak of the #quiltsforpulse movement. This included 106 posts, 88 written and 18 photographic posts. Of these posts, 11 written and 3 photographic posts directly related to #quiltsforpulse while others showed member routines, including events and shared resources.

*Observational documentation* was captured as field notes (Creswell and Poth 2016) and photographs during four in-person meetings of the quilt group. They deepened our understanding of shared practices of the quilt group and their contributions to collective socio-political activism. The first author took observation notes, which informed our understanding of the group's dynamics and quilting practices. The observational notes were reflective audio notes and were later transcribed. The notes served as reference for the member interactions during the meeting and for the quilting activities that the group engaged in. Observational documents further included 180 photographs of artifacts, tools, workspaces, and members that were taken during in-person meetings.

### Analytical techniques

Our analytical approach centered on analyzing connected learning within the craftivist #quiltsforpulse movement that consisted of the collective and the midwestern implementation we observed. First, our analysis focused on the Instagram posts to identify craftivist connections and how these connections drove the collective movement. Second, we analyzed the shared practices of the quilt group and how these contributed to the shared purpose of the movement.

The analysis of the *public #quiltsforpulse Instagram posts* centered on understanding how the public profile of the movement connected to craftivism (e.g., female, public, domestic, socio-political characteristics). Through iterative thematic analysis of the posts, we analyzed how these craftivist connections were instantiated publicly on social media (e.g., through photographs and comments) and what they meant to how the movement was characterized. To illustrate the craftivist connections, we drew on representative data excerpts.

The analysis of the *quilting group's Facebook posts* focused on posts related to #quiltsforpulse. We analyzed the posts for craftivist connections to illustrate how the midwestern instantiation of the collective activist movement resonated with the craftivist character of the collective movement as shown on Instagram. Next, we analyzed the group's shared quilting practices and how they contributed to producing material responses and shared purposes. To do so, we thematically and iteratively coded recurring practices and how these shared practices seemed to shape the shared purposes of the collective movement. Following Creswell and Poth (2016), we started with open coding to identify recurrent themes and used focused coding to merge related codes and to eliminate others. The shared practices that we identified and discuss in depth in the findings were (1) *crafting enjoyment*, (2) *crafting friendship*, and (3) *crafting care* (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Shared practices of the midwestern quilt group.

Shared practices	Description	Data excerpt
Crafting enjoyment	Enthusiasm for quilting	'(...) that sounds like a lovely idea.'
Crafting friendship	Human relationships in quilting	'Glad you two can make it!'
Crafting care	Care for self and others	'I wouldn't lug a bunch of stuff ...'

The analysis of the *observational documentation in the form of field notes and photographs* further informed the analysis of shared practices and shared purposes of the movement. We also followed thematic coding in relation to the shared practices presented in Table 2. The analysis of observations deepened our understanding of how the group's quilting engagement intersected with #quiltsforpulse. Conversations during the meetings that were captured in the field notes informed our understanding of members' relationships with one another and their approach to quilting, which particularly related to the shared practices of crafting enjoyment and crafting friendship. Photographs of members at work and quilts in progress helped identify members' technical and aesthetic quilting practices, providing a base for our analysis of the shared practice of crafting care. Ultimately, this analysis provided an in-depth understanding of the group's shared in-person practices, showing how the particularities of the group's shared quilting practices produced the group's contribution to the #quiltsforpulse movement.

## Findings

### ***Craftivist connections across a collective socio-political movement and a midwestern implementation***

The thematic analysis across the #quiltsforpulse movement and the midwestern quilt group showed how female, public, domestic, and socio-political connections contributed to the making of the movement. Observable aspects of the movement were connected to craftivism and produced a collective socio-political activism.

### ***Female connections***

#quiltsforpulse mostly consisted of women, who organized, crafted, and distributed quilts. Figure 1 presents an example excerpt that shows a collage of six photographs with what appears to be eight different women and one man working on quilts. The collage is captioned with a message that connects the predominantly female production with collective socio-political activism by referencing the movement's hashtag, #quiltsforpulse, which directly connects the craft to the LGBTQ+



**Figure 1.** An OMQG Instagram post showing eight female and one male guild member working on quilts.



nightclub location where the tragedy happened. Additionally, the caption includes another compound hashtag, #stitchedwithlove, which layers compassion and care onto the practice of crafting (i.e., sewing and stitching) and those material responses to the tragedy that are being crafted (i.e., the quilts). Uncommon to activism, linking compassion and care directly to socio-political engagement presented care for the people that were supported by the material production, namely the wider LGBTQ+ community. Civic action became an act of love.

The dominant presence of women in the collective activist movement resonated with the midwestern instantiation in #quiltsforpulse where all members of the group were women. By repeatedly meeting to create crafts, the local crafters reinforced their female connections; by creating quilts in contribution to the #quiltsforpulse movement that were eventually physically mailed to the OMGQ, the produced female connections were one node of the collective socio-political activism that was the #quiltsforpulse movement. Crafting with the shared purpose of making quilts in response to a crime directed at the LGBTQ+ community turned the craft into a socio-political act. Women thus practiced the craft to support the LGBTQ+ community in ways that may not have otherwise been available to them. Together, women decided to organize a collective response, to contribute, to craft material responses, to mail them to Florida, and to share contributions to the movement online.

### **Public connections**

The public Instagram posts tagged with #quiltsforpulse contributed to the visibility of the movement and captured its momentum as it unfolded. The digital representations of the quilted contributions produced public connections between midwestern quilt groups, the overall movement, and governmental entities.

The public profile of the movement as observed through Instagram posts honored each contribution that was produced by quilters and mailed to the OMGQ. The publicly shared posts connected the overall movement with the many self-organized chapters of quilters and quilt groups that came together to contribute to the movement. This made it possible for contributors to see the materialized compassion unfold in examples of quilts and whom they were sent to.

One example was a framed quilt displayed in the headquarters of the Orlando Police Department (OPD) (Figure 2). The OPD was among the first responders to the tragedy and, thus, played an essential role in how the aftermath was handled. The physical presence of the quilt in the OPD headquarter building introduced another layer of public connections to the #quiltsforpulse movement. This form of public connection moved beyond having something openly available in an online space and connected the movement to a wider range of people, including those without access to Instagram or the internet. This more widespread public display strengthened the civic character of the collective socio-political activist movement. Additionally, digitally sharing the display of the quilt in a physical public space on Instagram showed people who followed the movement online, including the quilters who made quilts, the impact they crafted together.

### **Domestic connections**

The posts that were tagged with the hashtag #quiltsforpulse and shared by the OMGQ Instagram account were public. Occasionally such public posts included images that showed the value and impact of the quilts in relation to personal lives. An example of how domestic connections strengthened the collective socio-political activism of the movement through public posts was an Instagram post by a recipient of a quilt that was reposted by the Quilt Guild (Figure 3). The post included a photograph taken by a sister of one of the victims of the Pulse shooting. The photograph showed the sister's newborn baby in front of the quilt that she and her family received through the movement. Including the quilt into her newborn photography paid homage to her deceased brother. The post next to the image read: 'I loved it so much, I incorporated it into my maternity and newborn pictures to have something symbolizing my brother.' The heart quilt, a material response to the



**Figure 2.** Heart quilt at the new headquarters of the Orlando Police Department.

shooting, provided the grieving sister with a physical and tactile representation of her brother that she could introduce to her child.

Similar to the instance of the quilt displayed in the OPD's headquarters, the baby quilt stands in place of many other quilts that were received but not shared online. In contrast to the OPD quilt, the baby quilt connected the movement to people's private lives and helped foster domestic intergenerational connections. It was another way for quilters and people who followed the movement to see the impact of the carefully crafted material responses to the tragedy.



**Figure 3.** An image of a new family member in front of a donated quilt.

### *Spiritual socio-political connections*

The intent #quiltsforpulse was to provide care and compassion to survivors, victims' families, and LGBTQ+ community members. To contribute to healing the instantaneous violence that hit families and affected the safety of the LGBTQ+ community and society at large, quilters produced many handcrafted contributions as material and production-centered messages of hope and high spirits, communicating to grieving families and on-the-ground supporters that strangers stood with them in solidarity. Rather than taking a stance against a status quo, the spiritual socio-political connections and hopeful purpose of #quiltsforpulse played out an alternative way forward, in which grief was normalized, recognized, and met with compassion.

The movement further produced spiritual socio-political connections when quilts were donated to a church (Figure 4). Forty-nine quilts were hung over each pew, the long benches, to honor each victim. The church in which the quilts were displayed was part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which has been outspoken about creating legislation to welcome members of the LGBTQ+ community into the church (Human Rights Campaign n.d.). The physical and digital display created a spiritual socio-political connection to the movement, which fostered a space for commemoration, reflection, and healing of the extended community that came together through the quilts. The post signaled that acts of violence are not isolated instances but have rippling effects across society, which require introspective and humanitarian responses that could lead to personal and communal growth, thereby sending a message of care and kindness.

In the midwestern quilt group, socio-political aspects of the movement were not discussed directly. During the group's first meeting, one member suggested: 'Let's not talk about politics', perhaps as a precaution against conflict as group members shared opposing political perspectives in a landscape of political division in the United States at the time of the observations. Yet, the participation in #quiltsforpulse through the production of heart quilts created a unique opportunity for socio-political engagement in which people of divergent political perspectives could productively



**Figure 4.** Quilts from the #quiltsforpulse movement displayed in a church.

contribute to collective activism. Quilting and the movement, thus, became spaces for such socio-political and spiritual connections, characterized by unity in times of divergence.

While we observed and presented the four craftivist connections independently from one another, there were intersections among them in the data. For instance, the female connections across instantiations of the movement and the public profile of the movement drove women to become politically active participants from their domestic spaces where the quilts were produced. Additionally, where the quilts were created at home but shared publicly online and in public offices (e.g., the OPD), domestic and public connections intersected. Beyond bringing women together in homes to produce socio-political material activism, domestic connections were also intergenerational (e.g., the baby quilt). Furthermore, the public sharing of domestically produced quilts bridged divides of spiritual and socio-political nature.

### ***Shared quilting practices that produced material responses of #quiltsforpulse***

The thematic analysis of shared crafting practices examined how the instantiation of the #quiltsforpulse movement we observed created quilts that could be mailed to the OMQG and later shared with recipients. The midwestern quilt group crafted material responses of care and compassion to the #quiltsforpulse call for action through the shared practices of crafting enjoyment, friendship, and care.

#### ***Crafting enjoyment***

The group members' enjoyment of the craft was part of the group's shared practices, mirrored in the group's engagement with #quiltsforpulse. Enjoyment lay in the aesthetic value of creating something beautiful, the quilting process, the challenge of a project or the use of tools, or the mere reprieve from responsibilities and obligations the craft provided.

For example, prior to their first meeting dedicated to #quiltsforpulse, Leah posted to the Facebook group: 'I'll bring my blocks that I've made so far.:-) I have been using the posted instructions and they turn out pretty cute.' Other crafters spoke of contributing to #quiltsforpulse as producing enjoyment. For instance, Jackie posted a logistical comment to the Facebook group: 'I wouldn't lug a bunch of stuff – you'll just make this into a job then. We need to have some fun!' The participation in the movement, according to Jackie, should be enjoyable as opposed to laborious. In contrast to imperative commitments associated with employment, the joy of quilting was lightweight and elective.

Together, the data excerpts highlighted crafting as the production of something enjoyable as well as an enjoyable practice. The shared practice of crafting enjoyment the crafters communicated through their posts was the joy of crafting and the joy produced when recipients held the quilt, as if the joy the quilter experienced got translated into the quilt and passed on to its recipient, communicating care for a stranger and acknowledging their experienced loss. Crafting enjoyment thus produced joy as a shared purpose of the movement.

#### ***Crafting friendship***

Through repeated engagement with the productions of quilts for the #quiltsforpulse movement, the quilt group members crafted friendships over time, which became an important shared practice that contributed to the collective socio-political activism. For example, during the first #quiltsforpulse meeting at Jackie's home sewing studio, we observed how Jackie offered participants to take home garden vegetables she had harvested prior to the meeting. Several group members took home vegetables with plans to prepare family meals. Care for other aspects of life outside of quilting, like eating home cooked meals, contributed to establishing friendly relationships among the quilt group members (Figure 5).

Two weeks and three meetings later, the group was preparing to complete their quilts for donation to #quiltsforpulse, dividing the remaining tasks among each other (Figure 6). Mimi posted



**Figure 5.** Mimi, Josie, and Celia crafting around a table at the first #quiltsforpulse meeting (top) and Leah quilting with a sewing machine (bottom).

a picture of a quilt she finished on Facebook, which garnered a warm response from her fellow crafters, speaking to the quilt providing comfort. Josie wrote: ‘Oh [Mimi], this quilt just seems like a visible hug.’ Her comment suggests the power of the material response to provide body warmth in the form of a hug and, thus, support to those who will receive the quilt. Additionally, Josie’s comment works toward reinforcing a growing friendship with Mimi by supporting Mimi’s production.

The group’s participation in the #quiltsforpulse movement made it possible for friendships to form as quilters produced physical and digital markers of their friendship that could be passed on to strangers as a way to contribute to mending experienced violence. Making a quilt is a substantial time investment across a range of practices (e.g., selecting, cutting, and piecing fabric). Working together made it possible for friendships to be crafted over time while creating material



**Figure 6.** Pieces of a heart quilt laid out, ready to be sewn together (left) and a completed quilt (right).

contributions to the #quiltsforpulse movement. The compassion and care the midwestern quilt group members had for each other translated into the quilts and through the quilts to the strangers who received them. #quiltsforpulse opportunities for crafting friendship, thus, fostered care and compassion locally and across the collective socio-political activist movement.

### *Crafting care*

In the quilt group, crafting was connected to a deep sense of care and recognition of one's own abilities and limits. Many quilters stored fabric for future projects. For example, Leah said: 'This was my aunt Joanne, who was a quilter and she made costumes. When she passed away, my cousins gave me quite a bit of her fabric, so that's a lot. I have some in my stash of stuff.' Scraps and leftover pieces of fabric constituted most of the materials used to make the quilts for #quiltsforpulse. Before their first meeting, Jackie requested additional fabric: 'I have scraps, not a lot of neutrals tho. I'd say if you want to grab a handful of bright scraps and/or neutrals to bring along that would be good enough.' It was common for quilters to use scraps to create new objects. Scraps could be mended together toward a shared purpose, such as a blanket that was carefully hand-crafted to provide comfort and support to recipients. The scraps that materialized this purpose could be heirlooms that were passed on across family members and generations. The post ensured that quilt group members felt comfortable to follow shared quilting practices and to bring scraps rather than precious fabrics. Piecing together scraps was a form of care for seemingly discarded materials. This care resonated with the message that the quilts communicated to their recipients, namely that the recipients and their loved ones mattered and were cared for.

Group members limited the time they planned to spend on #quiltsforpulse, confident in their abilities to swiftly complete the quilts. In a Facebook post prior to the first #quiltsforpulse meeting, Jackie wrote: 'I think we will surprise ourselves [with] what we can do in a couple of hours.' The post communicates an effort toward efficient collaborative work. It is also a hopeful post that suggests that the experienced quilters can produce a contribution to the movement without their efforts becoming a burden on their time. Limiting their time spent on the movement is an act of self-care, guarding one's time and that of others in the group.

To complete the quilts in a limited time, the quilters employed effective practices. For instance, the observational notes of the second #quiltsforpulse meeting documented how Mimi identified a new way for herself to be more productive with the sewing machine. Rather than sewing together heart blocks one after the next, cutting the thread after each block was completed, she started stringing them and cutting the blocks apart after all were sewn (Figure 7).

The time-limited involvement did not work for all members. For example, Josie, who had recently found her way back to the craft, decided not to be involved with #quiltsforpulse after the first meeting. She said:



**Figure 7.** Mimi sewing multiple heart blocks together.

Well, I started and then I thought there's no way I can get it cut and get it made. So, I thought well I'll just have to wait. (...) One of these days I will be balanced enough so that when the need comes, I can get it cut and put together in a timely manner.

Josie's comment resonates with the shared practice of self-care. In choosing not to participate at this time, Josie created space for herself to grow in the interim, modeling *crafting care*, by showing compassion for herself.

These contributions were created through crafting of care that spanned across the scraps used, ensuring that quilters could provide the materials they could spare and rework them into new objects with a shared purpose. Crafting care also spanned across time, ensuring that the production of contributions respected other life commitments and made it possible to bow out of the contribution process. Crafting care was the shared practice of giving as much as one could. Through their shared practice of crafting care, the quilt group members cared for themselves as well as for others. Care materialized through the group's material contributions to the #quiltsforpulse movement.

## Discussion

The analysis of connections and shared practices showed how connected learning functioned in the #quiltsforpulse movement and how connected learning could be expanded. Our work highlighted materials in producing multifaceted connections and that material practices can shape the purposes of collective socio-political movements.

### ***Materials produced multifaceted connections***

Materials played a role in how people connected and what the networked infrastructure looked like. Physical quilts were shared via the material infrastructure of the mail system and quilt members' distribution. Online sharing further amplified connections. Where networks in connected learning typically include nodes with a few degrees of separation apart, for instance, within one city, #quiltsforpulse advanced global connections. Quilt groups and individual quilters from across the world

created and shared quilts, thereby producing an extensive network of contributors to a shared localized purpose.

Additionally, materials made it possible to generate nodes outside of the networked crafting community. Quilts placed in public offices (e.g., OPD) produced public connections to people who would not be connected to the movement. Intergenerational connections were attempted, such as posing a baby in front of the quilt that represented the child's deceased uncle.

Materials brought about a response to the tragedy that facilitated a particular quality of connections that shaped civic activism. For example, the quilts introduced connections that reached across traditionally challenging relationships, including those between religious spaces and the LGBTQ+ community. The presentation of the quilts in the church expressed sympathies to the people lost in the tragedy and underscored that the LGBTQ+ community was part of the community around the spiritual space. The midwestern quilt group included members of opposing political perspectives. At the time of the observations, chasms that divided people across party lines started to deepen in the advent of the Trump administration. Contributions for #quiltsforpuls created a space where people could come together to create meaningful and productive contributions to a social cause.

Materials made it possible to produce multidimensional connections and advanced connected learning beyond individuals and institutions. It was the physical production and distribution of the quilts in combination with the online publication that allowed for the multifaceted connections to flourish. Quilting brought people together around lines of communalities. Although the production and shared practices were not verbally framed as activist support toward the LGBTQ+ community, they were anchored in a shared understanding that when members of the LGBTQ+ community are violated, this violation translates to society at large.

### ***Material shared practices shaped the purpose of the collective socio-political activism***

Within the connected learning model, shared practices are related to collective activities that align with ongoing cultural practices. Shared practices can lead to future opportunities. Our analysis expands this by presenting that shared material practices played a role in how the shared purpose of the #quiltsforpuls movement developed and physically manifested. Shared quilting practices that are common for quilters without being directly related to socio-political action made it possible to craft material responses of care and compassion for the LGBTQ+ community.

Enjoying the craft was part of the shared practice of quilting and produced enjoyment by those who received the quilts. The care the women in the quilt group developed for one another translated into the quilts that were distributed to people whom the women never met. The physical quilts made it possible to feel relationships between distant people.

The enjoyment, friendship, and care that quilters practiced shaped the movement's shared purpose of compassion and care for people who never met each other. Future opportunities were not related only to the individuals who engaged with the craft and those who were supported. Opportunities lay also in how the movement presented an example that could be repeated in response to further violence against the LGBTQ+ community and a form of activism that was collective, hopeful, and compassionate.

### **Implications**

This study established craftivism as a form of connected learning. Craftivism as connected learning contributes to quilting as activism by attending to the impact of internet technologies. Craftivism as connected learning further recognizes that learning continues into adulthood although connected learning typically measures learning for youth. Craftivism is an example of connected learning that shows how a community across a range of socio-economic, political, and geographic backgrounds can connect productively across lines of contrast. From here, implications emerge for educational settings that are aimed at fostering collective socio-political engagement for adult settings.



First, our study showed that intersecting crafting with internet technologies and leveraging these technologies to bring together production-centered products across environments can foster movements that are larger than individual projects. #quiltsforpulse leveraged internet technologies to share digital representations of physical projects and where they found a new home (e.g., the baby quilt). Existing social media tools that crafters typically use to share projects and get inspiration (i.e., Facebook, Instagram) were used to accomplish a civic result. Sharing of how quilts were distributed (e.g., the church) bolstered the possibilities for spreading hope, care, and compassion beyond the physical distribution.

Second, building on participant preferences when designing connected learning opportunities can have powerful implications on what can be achieved. For example, the participants of the quilt group quilted for #quiltsforpulse in a similar way as they would at any other time. They enjoyed the crafting process, they formed relationships, and they cared. What we saw on this small group level translated into the overall movement. For example, the enjoyment of the production-centered process by the quilt group was shared through the quilts with their recipients. Making it possible to engage with practices (i.e., quilting) in similar ways regardless of the purpose of the quilts made it possible to contribute to a social cause and to participate in pro-LGBTQ+ activism. Voluntary participation combined with personal aesthetic preferences as part of activist contributions may sustain participation.

Third, craftivism can broaden understanding of how contributions to a civic purpose may look. The shared practices of the quilt group's engagement with the movement prioritized care as part of socio-political activism. Craftivism as connected learning points to balancing matters in one's personal life with socio-political activism as a core aspect of compassionate engagement with a social cause. Craftivism highlights practices outside of the direct scope of political engagement as part of connected learning. Additionally, craftivism as connected learning shows that practices of a range of demographic groups, including productions for public institutions, gifts for domestic settings, and spiritual responses can be links that together shape activism and what it can achieve. Designing connected learning opportunities with craftivism in mind may foster socio-cultural activism of care and compassion.

## Acknowledgements

We thank the participants of the study without whom this study would not have been possible. We also thank the contributors of the #quiltsforpulse movement.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This work was supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant #1420303.

## ORCID

Anna Keune  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1985-2313>

Nickolina Yankova  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7552-527X>

Kylie Pepler  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5472-4974>

## References

Burt, Emily L., and Jacqueline Atkinson. 2012. "The Relationship Between Quilting and Wellbeing." *Journal of Public Health* 34 (1): 54–59.

- Charmaraman, Linda. 2013. "Congregating to Create for Social Change: Urban Youth Media Production and Sense of Community." *Learning, Media and Technology* 38 (1): 102–115.
- Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. 2016. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gee, J. P. 2004. "Affinity Spaces." In *Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling*, 77–83. London, UK: Routledge.
- Hackney, Fiona. 2013. "Quiet Activism and the New Amateur: The Power of Home and Hobby Crafts." *Design and Culture* 5 (2): 169–193.
- Hawkins, Peter S. 1993. "Naming Names: The Art of Memory and the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt." *Critical Inquiry* 19 (4): 752–779.
- Human Rights Campaign. n.d. "Stances of Faiths on LGBTQ Issues: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." Accessed January 26, 2021. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-evangelical-lutheran-church-in-america>.
- Ito, Mizuko, Richard Arum, Dalton Conley, Kris Gutiérrez, Ben Kirshner, Sonia Livingstone, Vera Michalchik, et al. 2020. *The Connected Learning Research Network: Reflections on a Decade of Engaged Scholarship*. Irvine, CA: Connected Learning Alliance.
- Ito, Mizuko, Kris Gutiérrez, Sonia Livingstone, Bill Penuel, Jean Rhodes, Katie Salen, Juliet Schor, Julian Sefton-Green, and S. Craig Watkins. 2013. *Connected Learning: An Agenda for Research and Design*. Irvine, CA: Digital Media and Learning Research Hub.
- Jenkins, H., S. Shresthova, L. Gamber-Thompson, N. Kligler-Vilenchik, and A. Zimmerman. 2016. *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
- Jurow, A. Susan, Leah Teeters, Molly Shea, and Erica Van Steenis. 2016. "Extending the Consequentiality of 'Invisible Work' in the Food Justice Movement." *Cognition and Instruction* 34 (3): 210–221.
- King, Faye Lynn. 2001. "Social Dynamics of Quilting." *World Leisure Journal* 43 (2): 26–29.
- Literat, Ioana, and Neta Kligler-Vilenchik. 2018. "Youth Online Political Expression in Non-Political Spaces: Implications for Civic Education." *Learning, Media and Technology* 43 (4): 400–417.
- McGovern, Alyce. 2019. "Unravelling the Threads: Contemporary Craftivism and Its Origins." In *Craftivism and Yarn Bombing*, 11–57. London: Palgrave Pivot.
- Parker, Rozsika. 1984. *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*. Toronto: Women's Press.
- Peppler, Kylie, Anna Keune, and Naomi Thompson. 2020. "Reclaiming Traditionally Feminine Practices and Materials for STEM Learning Through the Modern Maker Movement." In *Designing Constructionist Futures: The Art, Theory, and Practice of Learning Design*, edited by Nathan Holbert, Matthew Berland, Yasmin B. Kafai, 127–139. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Politics of Learning Writing Collective. 2017. "The Learning Sciences in a New Era of US Nationalism." *Cognition and Instruction* 35 (2): 91–102.
- Pöllänen, Sinikka Hannele, and Marja Katriina Weissmann-Hanski. 2020. "Hand-made Well-Being: Textile Crafts as a Source of Eudaimonic Well-Being." *Journal of Leisure Research* 51 (3): 348–365.
- Reich, Justin, and Mizuko Ito. 2017. *From Good Intentions to Real Outcomes: Equity by Design in Learning Technologies*. Irvine, CA: Digital Media and Learning Research Hub.
- Rogers, Emily Buhrow, and Carolyn Mazloomi. 2021. "Stories to Tell: Carolyn Mazloomi and the Women of Color Quilters Network in 2020." Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, January 15. <https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/crisis-carolyn-mazloomi-women-of-color-quilters-network-2020>.
- Roque, Ricarose. 2016. "Family Creative Learning." In *Makeology: Makerspaces as Learning Environments 1*, edited by Kylie Peppler, Erica Rosenfeld Halverson, and Yasmin B. Kafai, 47–63. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Soep, Elisabeth, and Vivian Chávez. 2011. "Drop That Knowledge: Youth Radio Stories." *Harvard Educational Review* 81 (4): 774.
- Watson, Keri. 2017. "SVAD Presents: Resilience Remembering Pulse."