

Contextual Practices: Research In Practice

Elinor Jones, 1901906

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Module Tutor: Julia Lockhart

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In this proposal for my independent inquiry, I will be focusing on 3 keywords that are in my interest within my own creative practice. I will be researching *Feminism*, *Generosity*, and

Relationships in the world of a female handmade business owner. Through the research and exploration of these words, I will be looking at how females use online selling platforms, particularly Etsy to promote and sell their crafts and how and why females are better-suited as creative handmade business owners than males. I personally make handmade items, sell handmade items and I try my best to exclusively buy handmade items where possible. Since I am a female handmade business owner myself, this is something I am both passionate and eager to research and write about.

The first keyword I am going to write about is *Feminism*. *Feminism* is the “Advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). ‘Femin’ was taken from Latin root word ‘Femina’, meaning woman. ‘-ism’ is a suffix derived from the Greek ‘ismos’ implying a belief or worldview. In 1851, *feminism* meant ‘the state of being a woman’. French philosopher Charles Fourier then devised the word ‘féminisme’ to mean ‘advocacy of women’s rights’. He was the founder of the feminist idea within French socialism. When writing ‘Charles Fourier and the Nature of Women’, author Sue Grogan raises the fact that because of Fourier’s movement, “women would live, love and work with the same independence as men. These ideas had a major impact on Fourier’s contemporaries and successors, although few accepted his proposals unequivocally” (Grogan, 1992, p. 20). Through voicing his controversial opinions and ideas regarding women’s rights, he challenged patriarchal society and changed the way women were treated differently to men.

Needless to say, there are conspicuous reasons as to why females are not as well-suited to some specific jobs as the typical male. One major reason being the divide in physical strength between the two sexes: “It is already known that males’ upper bodies, on average, have 75% more muscle mass and 90% more strength than females” (Gabrielson, 2020). On average, a female is not as physically as strong as a male. In terms of sexual dimorphism, males’ bodies have naturally been constructed on a larger scale and are “stronger than women due to overall increased muscle mass. With strength training, men usually gain more muscle hypertrophy than women because of the effect of testosterone” (The Baltimore Sun, 2021). For these reasons, females are not typically employed in fields of physical and manual labour. In this physical and biological sense, a large number of females are employed in other professions that do not require as much body strength which is perhaps better suited for them in most situations.

On average, women are more creative than men in the arts. In their recent study, Michael Mauskopf of Columbia Business School, Noah Askin of INSEAD, Sharon Koppman of UC Irvine, and Brian Uzzi of Northwestern have recently found that “females are engaged in creative fields like art, music, and literature at higher rates than men - and are generally more creative than men” (Hissong, 2020). Mauskopf, Askin, Koppman, and Uzzi’s initial set of data from 250 thousand tracks produced and released between 1955 and 2000 showed next to no difference between males and females in the context of the output of their creative work. However, when the gender differences in the composition of genres and the overall size of an artist’s network of collaborators were taken into consideration, the scholars established that female artists in fact tend to “create more novel songs, which are pieces that are more musically fresh and unusual, than male artists” (Hissong, 2020).



Figure 1: Johnson, F. B. *Teaching girls hand-sewing and hemming* (1899).

The female gender has always been the sole gender that crafts from a young age. In the Edwardian era, young females were generally taught sewing and needlework at school. Also, while men went to war in World War II, General Dwight Eisenhower, Military Governor of the U.S. Occupation Zone in Germany

“felt that he could not win the war without the aid of the women”. Women “repaired airplanes, worked as laboratory technicians, rigged parachutes, served as radio operators, analyzed photographs, flew military aircraft across the country, test-flew newly repaired planes” (The National WW2 Museum, 2020).

A large number of women were employed in dangerous jobs in munitions factories making bombs and missiles, too. Women were putting their health and lives at risk as well as the men who went to war and also had the responsibilities of raising their children, cooking, cleaning, and housekeeping concurrently to working a difficult job. Along with the mental detriment of worrying about their partners fighting at the war of course. Despite women’s success in industries in World War I,

“Similar stereotypes about women’s capacity and ability to engage in ‘men’s work’ were circulated by the employers and the government. Trade unions again expressed concerns about men’s pay being pushed down and sought assurances that women’s wartime work would only be temporary” (Striking Women, Women and Work, 2019)

However, wartime saw women being employed to engage in ‘men’s work’ once again, proving women are worthy of equal rights and pay. Figures from the government display that “women’s employment increased during the Second World War from about 5.1 million in 1939 to just over 7.3 million in 1943” (Striking Women, Women and Work, 2019).



Figure 2: National World War II Museum, *History At a Glance: WWII* (2019)

More recently, women are more creative in terms of making and selling art rather than making war tools due to the obvious decline in demand. Perhaps this is a large proportion of female occupations now because even in this day and age, women are still expected to be the sole carer for their families; both their children and partners. “According to the company’s second annual seller report, 86% of Etsy sellers are female” (Zarya, 2015). Women usually have children to care for, so might not have time to work a full-time job where they have to leave home five full days a week. If they were to leave home for five full days a week, they would usually need to pay a significant sum for childcare which only high salaries could afford. Having an online shop where mothers can sell their creative work that can be run from home allows women to earn money whilst stimulating their brains, being creative and looking after their child/children. Etsy.com is well-known for being a global online marketplace “where people come together to make, sell, buy and collect unique items” (Etsy, 2021).

This then leads me onto the second keyword I chose to research; *Generosity*, because it clearly links to females’ usual and stereotypical caring nature in both ‘normal’ life and entrepreneur life. According to the English Oxford Dictionary, ‘generosity’ is “the quality of being kind and generous” (English Oxford Dictionary, 2021).

Behavioral research has proved that “women are more selfless, empathetic, and generous than men” (Andreoni and Vesterland, 2001). The Department of Economics’ neuroscientists (Debra J. Mesch, Melissa S. Brown, Zachary I. Moore, and Amir Daniel Hayat) were eager to explain how and why this could be. In new research, they looked into the various parts of the brain that are currently active when decisions about generosity and sharing are made. Their hypothesis included some possible explanations for differences in donor motivations for giving to charity between genders:

“(1) differences in gender roles and the ways in which women have been socialized as the caregivers of their families (Gilligan, 1982); (2) women view philanthropy as a way to show their caring and express their moral beliefs (Newman, 1995)— whereas, men give because of social roles such as status and social expectations (Eagly & Steffen, 1984) (Skoe et al., 2002); (3) women experience emotions more strongly than men (Harshman

and Paivio, 1987); and (4) women are more egalitarian and engage in reciprocal behavior whereas men are more competitive (Croson & Gneezy, 2009)”.

The results of the team’s research was a clear and rigid suggestion that women were in fact averagely more generous and willing to give to charity than men:

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Gender differences in charitable giving

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics of respondents by gender

	General Social Survey, 2002 and 2010 >24 and working			2 and 2004 Restricted to age >24 and working			Knowledge networks (weights : applied)			Knowledge networks (weights applied)		
	# of Rs	All	Male	Male	Female	# of Rs	All	Male		All	Male	Female
N =	1405	1405	727	727	678	4414	4414	2382		4414	2382	2032
Gender			52%	52%	48%			54%			54%	46%
Gave to charity	1165	83%	80%	80%	86%	3354	76%	71%		76%	71%	82%
Amount given							\$762.98 (\$3704.31)	\$826.90 (\$2395.68)		\$762.98 (\$3704.31)	\$826.90 (\$2395.68)	\$688.07 (\$4803.47)
Married	753	54%	58%	58%	49%	2450	56%	60%		56%	60%	50%
# of child in household		0.64 (1.10)	0.54 (1.01)	0.54 (1.01)	0.74 (1.18)		0.46 (0.88)	0.45 (0.86)		0.46 (0.88)	0.45 (0.86)	0.48 (0.92)
White	1062	76%	77%	77%	74%	3136	71%	75%		71%	75%	67%
Black	178	13%	9%	9%	16%	464	11%	8%		11%	8%	14%
Hispanic	109	8%	9%	9%	7%	528	12%	10%		12%	10%	14%
Other	56	4%	4%	4%	4%	286	6%	7%		6%	7%	6%
High school or less	827	59%	60%	60%	58%	1594	36%	37%		36%	37%	36%
Some college	126	9%	9%	9%	9%	1244	28%	26%		28%	26%	31%
BA or higher	452	32%	32%	32%	32%	1576	36%	38%		36%	38%	33%
Region = Northeast	248	18%	19%	19%	16%	844	19%	20%		19%	20%	19%
Region = Midwest	353	25%	23%	23%	27%	1062	24%	24%		24%	24%	24%
Region = South	512	36%	38%	38%	35%	1603	36%	36%		36%	36%	37%
Region = West	292	21%	20%	20%	21%	905	21%	21%		21%	20%	20%
MSA = Metro	494	35%	33%	33%	37%	3723	84%	84%		84%	84%	85%
Catholic	337	24%	25%	25%	23%	1228	28%	29%		28%	29%	26%
Other Christian	789	56%	52%	52%	60%	2847	65%	63%		65%	63%	66%
Jewish	21	1%	2%	2%	1%	98	2%	2%		2%	2%	2%
Religion — Other	258	18%	21%	21%	15%	241	5%	6%		5%	6%	5%
High religious attender	329	23%	20%	20%	27%	1462	33%	30%		33%	30%	36%
Moderate religious attender	354	24%	20%	20%	27%	571	13%	11%		13%	11%	16%
Low religious attender	513	37%	41%	41%	32%	1762	40%	42%		40%	42%	38%
Never attend	229	16%	19%	19%	14%	618	14%	17%		14%	17%	10%
Less than \$35 000	462	33%	28%	28%	39%	720	16%	13%		16%	13%	21%
\$35 000–\$75 000	539	38%	40%	40%	37%	2188	50%	50%		50%	50%	49%
More than \$75 000	404	29%	33%	33%	25%	1506	34%	38%		34%	38%	30%
Republican	416	30%	32%	32%	27%	1953	44%	48%		44%	48%	40%
Democrat	478	34%	29%	29%	39%	2305	52%	48%		52%	48%	57%
Other political party	511	36%	39%	39%	33%	156	4%	4%		4%	4%	3%

Figure 3: *Descriptive statistics of respondents by gender.* Int. J. Nonprofit Volunt. Sect. Mark, (November 2011)

Another study suggests that “women are more likely to be giving because their brains find it more rewarding” (Dogson, L. 2018). A part of the brain named the ‘striatum’ is active when a particular decision is made. In one of the experiments, “the striatum was more strongly activated in female brains when they shared rather than when they were selfish. The opposite was true for men” (Dogson, L. 2018). This implies that females tended to feel more of a rewarding feeling when sharing whilst males were feeling better while being more selfish. Women have been proven to “have a caring gene that is more visible than in the male species” (Haigh, J. 2008, p. 57), which supports the idea that females feel more rewarded when being kind and caring to others. Evidently, there are lots of generous men in the world but “by and large, women are the homemakers and carers” (Haigh, J. 2008, p. 57).

Through my own experience selling on Instagram and Etsy, I personally find that small independent businesses seem to care about their impact on the environment much more than larger, more established brands seem to do. The reason for this is not clear because larger businesses plainly have the funds to make significant environmental differences but are not seen doing so often. Even though small businesses do not tend to have a large amount of funding to spend on making their brands sustainable and making sure their carbon footprint is low, small business owners seem to have more motivation to care for the planet. This is

because small businesses who sell through online platforms such as Etsy are more often than not selling their creations that have stemmed from their hobbies, so are crafting things they love. I decided to interview a fellow small business owner and Etsy seller, Charlotte Nash, to ask her for her thoughts on small businesses and sustainability. I made sure I did not voice any of my own opinions or research before asking her the question to make sure I did not influence her answer in any way. When asked 'Do you think small businesses are more sustainable than brands on a larger scale?', she responded:

"Most larger businesses seem to care less, perhaps this is because of the scale of their businesses and amount of orders they receive so they don't take as much time with their packaging. I think most small business owners genuinely care about the environment and want to make a change, no matter how small. Perhaps their businesses aren't solely for profit, they're for fun and to make and encourage changes." (This was disputed by Charlotte Nash, 2021).

Small business owners use their platforms to post about encourage other people and other small business owners to make those changes too. A serial entrepreneur, Mike Kappel writes that small business owners are "making the biggest impact in reducing the carbon footprint of business" and that they are "the solution to global warming" (Kappel, 2017) because of the fact that they are usually naturally more sustainable than bigger brands. They tend to produce less waste than larger companies as they often can not afford to manufacture goods in large batches in the worry that they could potentially result in waste. For example, fast fashion brand PrettyLittleThing "can launch as many as 200 product lines in a week, it's a danger the company's buying and merchandising teams are well aware of" (Edited, 2021), yet the company is still thriving in terms of profits. A study on corporate social responses in 2017 researched how customers tend to respond to companies who support and act upon environmental issues.

Here are the study results;

- 68% of millennials bought a product with a social or environmental benefit in the past 12 months.

- 87% of consumers will have a more positive image of a company that supports social or environmental issues.

- 88% will be more loyal to a company that supports social or environmental issues.

- 87% would buy a product with a social and environmental benefit if given the opportunity.

- 92% will be more likely to trust a company that supports social or environmental issues." (Butler, 2018).

The study clearly showed that most customers do in fact respond more positively when a brand supports and engages in solving environmental issues. This suggests that small business

owners can certainly personally benefit from their business' sustainability too. Not only do they know they are supporting the many environmental issues earth is facing, but they are also driving more follows in social media and even sales from other people who care for the environment and want to make a change. A small business might use its sustainability and eco-friendly attitude as a unique selling point and a marketing tool. They could target customers that are passionate about being more environmentally friendly.

Lastly, this leads me to write about my third and final keyword, '*relationships*'. A '*relationship*' is "the way in which two or more people or things are connected, or the state of being connected" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). I chose to write about this keyword next because I feel that the previous keyword '*generosity*' has a strong connection to '*relationships*' because a positive relationship often includes elements of care and generosity. I am going to be focusing on how small business owners build networks and *relationships* through online selling platforms and social media.

Keeping communication present between a small business and a customer throughout each stage of the purchase process is essential. From the moment a potential customer views a brand's advertisement or Instagram post they have a connection to it. This is why making positive, welcoming social media content is so important for a small business as more often than not it is the initial image or phrase potential customers view. It needs to feel inviting and is a necessity to make the viewer eager to see more. If the viewer then migrates to the brand's social media pages, this needs to make the viewer continue to feel invited and welcomed in order for the viewer to click a website link in the business' biography, ending in a potential sale. With an online presence, customers do not have the chance to interact with a small business owner directly and face-to-face, so are not able to speak with them "but people will never forget how you made them feel" (Maya Angelou, 2015) as a brand. "There are many "tangible" brand moments that are under direct control of a brand" (Lloyd, 2015). By researching and curating unique 'brand moments', Etsy sellers can target their viewers and customers to make their experience with the brand a positive one. Women are known to be finer communicators than men. An anthropologist at Rutgers University, Helen Fisher has found that "five qualities make women unique and can prove very important to their success" (Fisher, H. 1999). The five qualities that Helen mentions women tend to have are communication skills, people skills, the use of web thinking, consensus building, and the ability to build and nurture good relations. Women tend to be "very effective at reading emotions in the faces of others" and "as a result, they are able to interact well with others" (Kuratko, K. and Hodgetts, R. 2004).

TABLE 20.1 WOMEN OWNERS AND/OR SENIOR-LEVEL MANAGERS OF LARGE U.S. FIRMS

Company	Owner/Title	Annual Revenues (in thousands)	Type of Business
Fidelity Investments	Abigail Johnson Senior Vice President, Equities	\$5,195,000	Financial services
Raley's	Joyce Raley Teel Co-chair	2,193,000	Supermarket and drug chain
Little Caesar Enterprises	Marian Ilitch Secretary-Treasurer	2,110,000	Pizza restaurant chain
84 Lumber	Maggie Hardy Magerko Chief Operating Officer, President	1,600,000	Lumberyard, building supplies
J. Crew	Emily Woods Chair	825,000	Retail apparel

Source: Adapted from *Working Woman* (June 1999): 62–63.

Figure 4: Women owners and/or senior-level managers of large U.S. firms. *Entrepreneurship: Theory, Practice, and Process* (2004).

Being able to maintain long-term relationships with customers or clients in business “often requires the development of friendships and the use of effective networking. Successful female entrepreneurs tend to be very good at these things. This ability helps explain why some of the largest businesses in the country are owned and/or managed by women” (Fisher, H. 1999). Figure 4, a table showing women owners and managers of large firms proves the fact that a lot of the large businesses in the United States of America are managed and owned by women and that they have been successful due to their unique abilities that men don’t particularly acquire.

Once a customer has successfully purchased an item from a small business through Etsy, sellers can set up an automated message that will be sent to anyone who orders with a ‘Thank You’ and perhaps an update to reassure the customer that they are working on their order. Further personalised emails or messages about the customer’s order updates provide positive customer service and also creates a foundation for both parties to potentially build *relationships* on. In my experience, small businesses tend to put a lot of thought, time, and effort into their packaging and tend to include hand-written notes, stickers, free items, and padding materials to protect products in transit.

When interviewing a fellow Etsy shop owner about how she has thoroughly thought through her ‘brand moments’ for her products, she said:

“as a small business owner, I try to think about how I would feel opening a parcel from a small business. I really want to make my customers experience just that: an experience! I want them to feel valued and appreciated. Because they’re choosing to spend that extra bit of money to buy from me and not from a larger potentially corporate business!” (Disputed by Charlotte Nash, 2021).

Because Etsy shops are relatively small, this allows independent sellers to reach their customers at a “more personal level than big businesses, which turns into stronger relationships with customers” (Kappel, 2017). By curating their packaging to perform positively, Etsy shop owners create value and show their customers appreciation with ‘thank-you’ cards. “The building of relationships with customers starts from the very first time they come across a brand through to them receiving an item” (Disputed by Charlotte Nash, 2021) so every single stage of the purchase process is extremely important for building good relationships and trust with the small business’ followers and customers. Etsy shop owners can send emails or messages after products are sent to customers “to make sure the customer's needs are met” and can “show they are listening” (Kappel, 2017) by inviting customer feedback whether positive or negative.

With the ability to interlink social media accounts and pages with Etsy shops through announcements, listing descriptions, and about sections, sellers can communicate and create connections with followers/customers further on both platforms. Sellers can drive sales, shop, and product views from social media websites such as Instagram. There, sellers can be more casual and friendly, can write and talk less about sales, and can inform their followers more about their work, life, and inspirations. Again, “it's extremely important to entertain followers and keep them engaged”, (Billany, 2020). Sellers can use Instagram to perform market research in engaging and exciting ways such as using polls and question boxes on their page’s Instagram Stories. Sellers can even ask their followers questions in feed post captions and they can answer in the comments. As a small business owner myself, I find myself performing these tasks a lot of the time because I feel the need to make sure people and customers are interested. When I virtually interviewed a social media expert, she mentioned that “people are more likely to engage with content if they know the person behind the brand, like them and trust them” (Disputed by Ashley Kay, 2021). Showing a small business owner’s own personality creates clear trust within customers.

Concluding my dissertation proposal I have thoroughly researched and explained how female business owners use the online selling platform ‘Etsy’ to build relationships through their naturally generous ways. Through my proposal, I have learned that the majority of Etsy sellers are women and that women are in fact much better suited as crafting small business owners than men. During the process of interviewing a fellow Etsy seller, Charlotte Nash, and a social media expert, Ashley Kay, I have come to the conclusion that small business owners and Etsy sellers are naturally more kind and generous to their customers, colleagues, and everyone else that comes into contact with their brands. Furthermore, due to their natural construct, females are able to build better relationships with people and customers. While writing my dissertation proposal I have pondered upon the question of ‘How is the female gender using independent entrepreneurship as a powerful utensil to fuel their attempt to succeed in a ‘man’s world’?’.

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Figures:

Figure 1: 'See inside old school classrooms from more than 100 years ago'

Johnston, F. B. Taken in Washington D.C. (1899). Online:
<https://clickamericana.com/topics/culture-and-lifestyle/school-education/peek-inside-school-classrooms-1899> Accessed: 6th May 2021.

Figure 2: '*History At a Glance: WWII*', National World War II Museum (2019) Online:
<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/women-wwii> Accessed: 6th May 2021.

Figure 3: Wiley online library (*Int. J. Nonprofit Volunt. Sect. Mark*) November 2011.
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Figure 4: Image of the table taken from *Entrepreneurship: Theory, Practice and Process* (2004)
Adapted from *Working Woman* (1999) pg. 62 - 63.