

**Under pressure:
Psychological perspectives on letterpress, craft, and wellbeing**

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This collaborative research investigates the value of enabling students to immerse themselves in the craft of letterpress, and questions the effects of this immersion on the practitioner and their well-being.

Research position paper: *Craft Research (journal), Special Issue on Crafting Health, Wellbeing and Happiness, Intellect.*

We have reflected upon conversations with, and observations of, design students engaged in letterpress, and framed these reflections within psychological and design literature. The work is preliminary but has implications for both design and psychology.

As a creative activity, letterpress has concrete, symbolic and self-reward value, but, especially in comparison to digital creative techniques, it has several distinctive qualities that may be particularly beneficial to the well-being of students. Its heritage and rebirth give it significant social and cultural meaning and its renewed focus on process (taking the student into new and uncharted waters), rather than product, make it notably engaging and conducive to flow. The process itself is repetitive, messy, fiddly and painstaking, but it is also calming, satisfying, consuming and transforming.

Our exploration suggests that there is value in enabling students to immerse themselves in letterpress, and that letterpress may have psychological benefits above other forms of creative and meaningful work. By nature, it is slow, rhythmic and physical. Add to this its connectedness to heritage, culture and community, and the effects of immersion in this craft include a broader sense of purpose, connectedness and mastery. We have investigated the shift in design focus from product to process entailed in letterpress. It could be argued that developments in technology and design have resulted in the loss of the spirit of the analogue: the physicality, the laboriousness and the craftsmanship.

Against the background of the slow movement, further research should explore the implications of this shift for both creativity and well-being, and formally investigate practitioners' experiences of traditional craft – particularly in comparison to digital alternatives – both nationally and globally. Identifying if, and how, traditional crafts are differentially conducive to creativity and well-being could have broad-ranging and interesting implications for design – particularly in the development of haptic technologies – and at the interface of craft and psychology.

Sophie Homer

Sophie's research and teaching interests are in clinical psychology, mental health and well-being. She is passionate about preventative approaches and has delivered keynote presentations on this topic. Sophie is a fellow of the Higher Education Academy and in 2017 she won a British Psychological Society award for excellence in teaching of psychology.

Victoria Squire

Victoria's research explores graphic design in relation to sustainability goals, particularly well-being and sustainable communities. She is the co-founder and co-editor of *Message*; an academic graphic communication design journal. Her research as design has been exhibited in the United Kingdom, United States and Denmark.