

A: Perfect. Okay, so before we begin, I have some demographics questions to ask you, and we're going to start with them. The first one is can you tell me how you identify in terms of your gender?

N: Female.

A: And what is your racial identity?

N: White British.

[REDACTED]

A: And how old are you?

N: 26.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A: And I know it's a bit hard to estimate, but how many times would you say you have visited the Craft and Design Centre?

N: Say 10 times.

A: And how much would you say is your average spending per visit? It can be a range.

N: So, most times I've probably haven't spent anything, I probably bought something there on 2 visits, and I would've spent about £40 on those two times.

A: So, I can say from £0 to £40. Perfect. And what would you say is your average spending in craft and design in other spaces, not the Craft and Design Centre, approximately, per visit?

N: It's probably about the same, to be honest.

A: Perfect. That's all the demographics questions I have, so we can make a start. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and also about your relationship with craft?

N: So, in terms of about me, what kind of things would be helpful to know?

A: If you could just tell me a bit about your background and also, you know, if you like craft and the kind of relationship you have with making and craft.

N: So, I've always kind of been interested in creative things and I'd say when I moved to Manchester just over 2 years ago, I started to become more interested in independent makers and local things, because I was earning a bit more I was paying more attention to buying things like homeware and things to have around the house, and not having my own flat but renting a flat with someone, you just start to think more about buying nice things to have. I've always liked to have things that are quite unique, and you obviously get that if you're buying from independent people because it's not just a mass-produced item that everyone's gonna have, like Ikea or even John Lewis, places like that. In terms of me and crafts, and the moment I don't really do much, but I did buy a sewing machine a couple of years ago, so it's definitely something that interests me quite a lot and I think that stems from my family. My mum is really into crafts and she makes things all the time, now that she's retired and especially during lockdown, she's been doing quite a lot of those sorts of things, that's where it comes for me.

A: You've mentioned your mum, was it typical in your family when growing up, you know, making and craft?

N: Yeah, I think so, not even just crafts but home cooking, a lot of my friends wouldn't sit down and have a meal together, but we would always have home cooked food, so I think that kind of transcends to the craft thing. My mum used to make her own clothes when she was younger, so it's kind of like this attitude generally about making your own stuff.

A: And can you tell me a little bit about the making that you do, you mentioned that you bought a sewing machine at some point?

N: Yeah, so the original plan was that I was going to try and make clothes and it was all quite hard and overwhelming, so I've started off small and I've actually been to a couple of courses at the Craft Centre, so before lockdown they used to host courses in one of the rooms

downstairs, so I went on a sewing course there and the first one was about dressmaking and it was more like the beginner stage, so we made like bags and make-up bag and a tote bag, and then I did one about 6 months later that was copying the pattern of something that you already own, so I took some skirts and we traced around it and learned how to copy the pattern and make it again, in a new fabric.

A: And what would you say drew your attention to those specific courses at the Craft Centre?

N: Can't remember how I first found out about them, I don't know if I've been to the Craft Centre already and walked past and seen other people on a course or seen posters. I think I might have just been googling Manchester sewing course and then it came up, and then I saw that they did them there and thought I've been there, and I live nearby, so that's quite convenient.

A: And what was your experience from the courses, did you enjoy them, did you learn new things, did you apply anything that you've learned?

N: Yeah, it was really good. So, the first one was a full day and it was for beginners, so literally knowing nothing about how to sew or even using sewing machine, and then by the end of it, you have the basic skills and terminology, and know your way around the sewing machine, so I was happy with that and then had to go away and sort of do things again.

We've done trials, like little sewing projects online that were for beginners as well, and then the second course was also good, and that was the tracing pattern one, and after that I went home and tried tracing something else and it worked out quite well actually, which was quite a surprise. Another course that I've actually been on at the Craft Centre was a watercolours painting one, and that was run by one of the makers at the Centre, so I found out about that because I've seen her work at the Craft Centre and then I followed her on Instagram, and she

posted that she does workshops on watercolours, so I've signed up and did that as well, and that was also really good. I've since done a few paintings at home.

A: And do you do any other types of making, apart from the ones you've mentioned?

N: No.

A: I'm just curious if you're also interested in learning about new techniques, working with new materials or methods?

N: Yeah, I think I would be interested if something came up, it's just not something that I've looked into at the moment.

A: And I don't know if you've thought about this in those terms, but what does craft and making mean to you as a woman?

N: As a woman? That's an interesting one. I don't know if the woman bit crosses my mind at all, but just in general, it's just something to do that is quite satisfying and rewarding because it shows that you can go and work from scratch, and actually have something to show for it at the end, and I like having something that is a more original and a bit more special, whether that is me who made it or someone else.

A: And have you bought any feminist art, or anything that was political?

N: No.

A: Would you be interested in those sorts of art pieces or, you know, for example there's lots of more radical ceramics and that sort of thing, would you be interested in finding more about that or buying that sort of thing?

N: I'm not sure, although I would agree with the messages and the same values of feminism and any kind of political issues, I wouldn't necessarily associate that with crafts that I'd

necessarily want to have around the house. I think I tend to go for things that are more about the style, rather than giving a message to do with any kind of issues.

A: And can you tell me a bit about how did you find out about the Manchester Craft and Design Centre; how did you learn about its existence and the things that are going on in there?

N: I think it was when I moved to Manchester just over 2 years ago. I had been to Manchester quite a lot before that, but I just never knew that this building was there, so it was from just wandering around the area that it is in, the Northern Quarter, and just came across it one day, was like I just didn't know it was there and came in for a look around.

A: And did you become aware of the Manchester Craft and Design Centre's history at some point?

N: No, I've heard that it was an old fish market or something, in the Victorian times; I can't remember why I actually know that but this is all I know in terms of history, I don't know when it turned into the Craft Centre or I don't know when they got the makers in or anything.

A: And do you remember your first visit?

N: Yeah, I think so, yeah.

A: Can you tell me a little bit about your first visit?

N: Yeah, so I remember it stood out as quite an interesting looking building from the outside, and it's quite colourful, I feel like there's blue paint on the outside, and then as you go in it's quite a different, well it's just a different building because of the layout so you wouldn't necessarily, it's not similar to normal shops or mall-type places, so I remember going in and thinking it was quite a cool building because it felt quite vintage and Victorian-y with the floor tiles, and then just walked around and had a look in all the little shops, and there's a

little café in there and it's quite cool upstairs, there's like a balcony and you walk around, and there's more shops and things up there, and I remember thinking it was weird that I didn't know it existed, but also there are quite a few nice things as well. I remember thinking that I'd definitely go back again.

A: And do you remember what brought you to the Centre in your last visit?

N: Trying to think, the last time I went might have been just before Christmas because I knew there were a couple of makers selling things that I wanted to buy for people as Christmas presents.

A: And how did it go, did you end up buying anything?

N: Yes, I did, I bought a bookmark as one present, and another one with some earrings, and they were both things that I've planned to buy.

A: And why did you decide to go to the Craft Centre for your Christmas gifts?

N: So, they were for my mum who I knew would appreciate having something quite unique and made by a local maker, so that's why I kind of decided for her it would be a good place to go, and then I think I'd seen those two things before when I'd been in, because generally a lot of the stock doesn't change, so you tend to have a good idea, if you'd been once, of what is going to be there again, and then I think I probably looked and checked on Instagram just to remind myself before I went, to make sure they definitely have it.

A: And why would you say your mum would appreciate something unique and from a local maker?

N: I think it just feels a bit more special if you know that less, lower numbers of an item had been made, so there's that, and there's also it just feels like there's more work going into something if you know it's one person and their business, and they're sat there making these,

not with a machine or anything, it's all handmade so just feels a bit more special and I thought she would've liked that.

A: And can you tell me a bit more about your visits to the Centre? You know, from the moment that you walk in, do you go to every store, do you browse first?

N: So, the first few times, well maybe the first time I went, I definitely would have gone to every shop because I just wanted to see what it was, and I think gradually, over time, there are a couple that aren't to my taste so I wouldn't go into those, but I would go into all of the others and then, for example, when I went to get that gift or there's another time that I'd been in, wanted to get something specific, I would just go to that shop only, I wouldn't look around the whole place.

A: You've mentioned that some of these shops wouldn't be to your taste; could you describe to me a little bit what your taste is in terms of craft?

N: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], and she makes these ceramics, like little pots, plant pots, little dishes and just decorative pieces that are screen-printed with animals and different designs on, and I really like those so I always go and look at her stuff, and she shares the studio with person who I got the bookmark and earrings present from and I quite like her things as well. I like the watercolours that I've mentioned earlier that I've ended up doing the workshop on that, and then did you want to know the things that I don't like as well?

A: Yeah.

N: I think it's things that are a bit too out there for me, some things, I'm trying to think, downstairs where it's more like metal and I'm not really into big metal ornaments, and then yeah, it's just different taste, and I don't like anything that it too gimmicky, so it's very, feels

a bit Manchester with a lot of Manchester bees on, I think that's a little overdone and I just stay away from things like that as well.

A: So, you like more minimal and simple lines, I guess?

N: Yeah, I think so.

A: Can you recall anything that drew your attention when you walked in, either the last time or during any of your visits?

N: Yeah, I think the building in general is quite a cool building, I mean I don't know a lot about architecture or anything like that, but I always admire old, period buildings and I think that's why it has quite a nice feel to it, so I think that stands out and gives it quite a nice layout to walk around because it's a big, open space in the middle upstairs, and then going around the balcony area upstairs, just there's something that feels quite nice about it, it doesn't feel like you're crammed in into a shopping centre.

A: And how about the exhibition space? Have you ever paid attention to that particular area?

N: Not really. I think I've seen little bits around that when you go in, but yeah, I don't tend to look at that because I know it isn't for sale, so I think I can't buy it so I don't want to see something that I like.

A: And are you aware of any similar spaces in the UK?

N: Not that it is the same as that, I'm trying to think of any other crafty places I've been to.

No, not that it has so many independent people under one roof, I don't think I've been anywhere like that.

A: That's okay, I'm just curious to see if people had some similar experiences at other spaces.

Can you tell me a bit about your interactions with makers?

N: Interactions? I buy from them and I go to some markets and things, actually, which is the only other place that I've seen a lot of independent makers in one place, so like the Makers' Market that goes around the North West and comes to the Northern Quarter in central Manchester as well, so I tend to sort of find out names that I like from markets like that, the Craft Centre, and if I'm ever on holiday somewhere, like I went on holiday to the Isle of Skye last year, and it's got quite a big arts and crafts scene, so I've kind of researched before about different names, and there was actually a thing online and it was crafts trail around the isle, where you could go to the different makers' shops or galleries, so I think I'm quite active in looking at what's out there and then if I find someone that I'm a big fan of, I usually follow them on Instagram or at least save some pictures of the stuff I liked to refer back to if I'm ever looking to buy something.

A: And how does it feel when you walk into someone's studio at the Craft Centre; do you tend to ask them questions, do you have a conversation with them, do you browse more, you know, keeping to yourself?

N: I think it would depend, really, if something caught my eye that I'm quite interested in, I may have a conversation and sort of ask what's the inspiration for it or how they actually do it if it's something that I know nothing about, and then if I was going in with a sense of purpose, if there was something specific I knew I was going to buy, then I wouldn't really hang around, just go in, buy it and leave again. And then other times when I was just in a browsing mood, I would look around but keep to myself as well probably, so I guess it does vary.

A: And how do you feel about the diversity or lack of diversity at the Craft and Design Centre?

N: In terms of what they're selling or the actual people?

A: Both, actually.

N: In terms of the products they're selling, I think there's quite a good range. There's probably quite a lot of jewellery that, I mean I'm trying to remember, it all kind of blurs into one and that's probably a bad sign, so I think there could maybe more different mediums of things to buy. In terms of the people and diversity I don't really know, trying to think who works there, yeah, it's mostly white women who I'd notice there.

A: And thinking about your visits, how long they normally are and when do you tend to actually visit, which days or times?

N: So, if I was going to browse it would normally be on a weekend, on a Saturday, if it was just something nice to do, to go along and potter about and that's when I'd spend a bit longer there as well. If I was going in to buy something, I would possibly be more likely to go through the week and just pop in at lunchtime.

A: Do you tend to visit alone or with other people?

N: Most times I think I've been alone, but I've been in a couple of times with my boyfriend as well.

A: Have you taken anyone to see the Manchester Craft and Design Centre?

N: No.

A: Which one do you prefer – going by yourself or with someone else?

N: It depends, really, I wouldn't be against going with someone else but I tend to shop on my own, just because I find it easier if I'm looking for something or trying to browse, I may just go at my own pace and properly look at things, but equally, if I was with someone and wanted to show them what it was like, then I wouldn't be against that.

A: You've mentioned before that you take photographs sometimes. Have you taken any photos during your visits at the Centre?

N: No.

A: How about of products that you've bought from there?

N: Yeah, I've probably taken photos and then sent them to my boyfriend saying that I've just bought this, but I haven't taken them and shared them widely, like I wouldn't take them and share them on social media or anything like that.

A: How do you find the Craft Centre's online presence? Do you follow them?

N: I follow them on Instagram which is how I've found out about this, and I think they're quite good on Instagram, they seem to update quite a lot and post quite a lot. I don't know if I've been on their website, I can't remember, don't know what it looks like, and I don't use any other social media, so haven't seen their post on there.

A: Have you bought anything off them online? They recently did a pop-up sale on Instagram, for example.

N: No, I didn't know about that. I've bought from one of the, so the ceramics maker that I was talking about earlier, I've bought from here online a couple of months ago because she was doing a sample sale, but that was through her website directly, rather than the Craft Centre themselves.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A: Can you tell me a bit more about why this is your favourite studio?

N: I think from when I first went to Craft Centre and looked around all of the shops, her just stood out as being something that I really liked. As I've said before, I kind of like ceramics anyway and I'm quite interested in seeing different people's pottery and hers is really unique, so although I really like the minimal things, it still is fairly minimal in style, it's all white and then screen-printed with different designs on it, so it still feels very clean and timeless, but it's still a very interested design and I'm quite into stuff with animals or inspired by nature, so I think that's why I like it as well because there's quite a few different designs she has that have animals on, so the things that I've bought, one of them has a seahorse printed on it, and then another has an octopus.

A: And do you normally talk to her when you visit? I suppose you've been there a couple of times now, to her studio.

N: She hasn't been in; it's been a couple of times where she hasn't been in and it's been the person she shares the studio with. I've never really asked her or had a conversation with her, really.

A: Which is your favourite thing that you had bought from the Centre?

N: So, it probably is a little ceramic bottle that I got from her that has a seahorse on it, and I've actually bought that because she's posted on Instagram saying that she had some sample items that had slight defects to them so they were a lot, she was selling them for I think half price, so I went in to have a look one lunchtime when I was still working in the office, and I bought that and bought another little pot that I really liked, and the defects thing didn't really bother me; I think she is a perfectionist so she'll only sell stuff for full price that is absolutely perfect, but it was that one side that was slightly wonky, but you couldn't really tell.

A: Why is this your favourite thing?

N: I think I just really like the design of it. It's just a nice ornament to have and I can imagine that I will probably have it for ever because I don't think it will ever go out of style and it's just a really nicely made item.

A: From the things that you have bought, from other stuff as well, is there anything else that stands out?

N: From that I've bought from her?

A: From the Centre.

N: I think I've only, I'm trying to think, there's two other people I've bought from and one other person is where I bought the bookmark and earrings present from, and I think what stood out about that is the craftsmanship that goes into things. I look at things in there and think gosh, how does someone just sit and make this by hand? Because it just seems like quite a big undertaking, and you have to have quite a lot of skill to be able to do it.

A: How do you feel about the prices at the Centre?

N: I'm not sure how much a lot of the stuff is, but the stuff I've bought, the places I like, a lot of the ceramics place, I'd say that it is quite expensive, but knowing the process behind it and that it is an independent maker, that makes me happier to pay a little bit more because it feels more like a luxury item. That being said, I've only ever bought things that had been in the sale, just because I can justify buying it more if it is discounted, and then the gifts I thought were reasonably priced. I think there were some, so the paintings by the lady who did the watercolour course, I think her originals are quite expensive, but I think that's quite standard for paintings anyway, so I've never been shocked by how much anything is in there, and I think there are some lower priced items, and one of the things that I've bought was a little ceramic snowflake, Christmas decoration, and I think that was about £5, so I thought that was really good because it's quite similar to, well, cheaper actually than some high street places.

A: You've mentioned before that having something that is handmade is more unique versus mass-produced products; can you tell me a bit more about how you feel about this distinction, handmade versus mass-produced items?

N: Yeah, I think in general that's something that I'm more passionate about, over the past few years I've tried to actively change my shopping habits, whether it's homeware or fashion especially, I really try to move away from mass-produced, fast fashion, just because of all the things, once you start reading about it, there's some really unethical practices and I just much prefer the idea of supporting something sustainable and ethical, and in general, if you're buying with the Craft Centre, it seems to just be the one person, they make all the things so it's that reassurance, you know there's nothing dodgy going on, and they're so grateful as well. When I bought a couple of things from Kathryn, the ceramics maker online a couple of months ago, she was selling stuff through Instagram, she was just really grateful and said thanks so much for supporting a small maker, especially at the moment it really means a lot. I don't buy it to make myself feel good, but I think you feel like it's benefit to buying and I can almost justify buying things through them, I'm supporting a local business so I make it okay in my head to just buy things and spend money, because I'm supporting a local business and someone, an independent maker rather than a massive corporation, where I don't think they value the business as much.

A: You've mentioned that in the last couple of years you've tried to actively change the way that you buy things; can you tell me how you've tried to go about that?

N: Yeah, so I used to go shopping loads with clothes and just used to buy quite a lot, not like the cheapest items, but sort of mid-range high street clothes, and it was almost like a hobby, like I'd go often to the shops and I'd order quite a lot online and then I started to read more about the ethics behind it, and then I thought I'm just going to stop, so I've completely

stopped buying from all of these places, and that's when around the same time I got my own sewing machine because I thought it's better if I make my own things, which I didn't really get into, but I tried to buy more second-hand things, just buy a lot less in general, and if I do buy something new then it is from a sustainable brand, so in general I'm trying to buy less things but buy higher quality things, and I think that's probably why the Craft Centre as well because it does feel like everything, or most things in there, are a high quality and an investment.

A: And how did you start being more conscious about your purchases? Was it through reading things, was it through influences from your friends and family, and discussions you've had?

N: I think it was just from reading things online, and when I've moved to Manchester I became aware of a couple of local shops, one is homeware shop and another is clothing shop, and they're really passionate about sustainability and independent brands, so that raised the awareness for me as well to start googling things, and I'd already previously read over the years about sweatshops and things like that, so I just started doing my own research online a lot more, and that's what made me realise that I wanted to change.

A: Thank you. In terms of thinking again about the building and the Craft Centre, have you ever noticed the donation boxes that they have there?

N: No.

A: Have you ever donated to any other arts and crafts organisations?

N: No.

A: Would that be something that you would consider, or do you prefer to support artists in other ways, like, for example, by buying directly from them?

N: I think I would rather buy directly from them. If I was to donate money, I think I would have to know exactly where it was going, otherwise I wouldn't really understand, because I don't know how the Centre supports itself, maybe it is just from donations. I think it may sound a bit selfish, but I'd rather get something else out of it, so even if an item was priced slightly higher and you knew 10% would go to keep the Craft Centre running, I'd rather buy that than just give the money.

A: Would you be more or less inclined to support the Centre or to support the makers at the moment, with everything that is going on with the pandemic?

N: I think more inclined, and that's why I bought something from the ceramics maker a couple of months back. So, I think people like that will suffer a lot more, especially as the Craft Centre is shut, they maybe haven't got a massive online presence and rely on the footfall quite a lot, but my, I'm in the process of buying a house and saving, so it's slightly different for me at the moment because I'm trying not to buy stuff, but if I wasn't doing that, I probably would be buying more.

A: Can you tell me a bit about how the pandemic has impacted your engagement with arts and cultural organisations?

N: I'm still following people on Instagram and keeping an eye out on what they're doing, but obviously not engaged with anything in person which is a shame because normally I would be quite active, even if I'm not buying anything, I would be going to different places, galleries or the Craft Centre, so I think it's probably impacted quite a lot.

A: And are you planning to visit the Manchester Craft and Design Centre when they reopen?

N: Yeah, I would like to. I actually don't know when it is reopening but I'll have a look.

A: How do you feel about visiting the Centre and also other similar spaces again?

N: I think it will be fine, because I'm sure they'll have procedures in place and they'll have someone on the door doing some sort of one in, one out, and I guess each shop will have, because they're only small, so probably one or two people, or one household in at the time. I would happily go, knowing that those procedures were in place.

A: And how do you feel about social distance measures and wearing a mask and being there, do you think that will have an impact on your experience with visiting the Centre?

N: I think it will in the same way that things like that impact anywhere you go. I take it all quite seriously, and I know some people are more lax with the rules, even people that I know, whereas I'm always a bit more on edge and I'm still trying to avoid going out to places as much as possible, so I think when you're in there you'll feel a bit different than before but I think I'm used to it now, so I know to expect it to feel different and it doesn't necessarily have to take away from why I'm there. And if anything, I actually prefer places when they're less crowded and busy, so that's been a positive.

A: And I suppose visiting again similar spaces to the Craft and Design Centre wouldn't necessarily mean going to a very crowded space, even before lockdown.

N: Yeah, exactly.

A: How do you think that the pandemic will impact the Centre and also other arts and culture organisations in terms of visitors, events, in the short term and in the future?

N: Well obviously, the Craft Centre and other places have been shut so that's a massive impact if they are relying on donations and the makers themselves, I'd imagine they've lost quite a lot of business and I don't know how it works, if the studios pay the Craft Centre to be there, yeah, so I'd imagine it's been impacted quite a lot but I hope the, you know, dedicated fans have been continuing to support them online and still buying things. I think they could probably do more to raise awareness that they exist, I know they have the Instagram but

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