

# Sew YOURSELF happy

Discover the mood-boosting benefits of our favourite hobby

Written by Michelle Rowley



Does your sewing bring you greater satisfaction than your 9-5? If so, you're not alone. Research from Anglia Ruskin University has found that arts and crafts give greater life satisfaction than work. Researchers at the university analysed the results of a UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport survey of over 7000 people on the topic of 'taking part'. The 37% of the participants that engaged in an art or craft activity had greater ratings of happiness, life satisfaction and feelings that life was worthwhile than those who didn't (regardless of other factors such as age, gender, health and employment status). The findings confirm what we as sewists have long known: a creative hobby positively supports our well-being.

*'Hobbies can help us strengthen and develop our sense of identity.'*

### CRAFTING WELL-BEING

"Hobbies can also help us strengthen and develop our sense of identity – aside from our careers, relationships and other responsibilities. This kind of identity-building can be fundamental in creating a life that makes us feel fulfilled," says author and

psychotherapist Eloise Skinner (eloiseskinner.com). Whilst sewing isn't a cure for all ills and can't stand alone in supporting people with depression and other serious health conditions, it can provide numerous ways to help us feel good. So, what specifically does sewing bring to the (cutting) table?

### FITTED CLOTHES, HAPPY MIND

For myself, at 5ft 1", I'd spent most of my life struggling to find clothes that fit me properly, in which I felt good in. My struggle to find well-fitting clothes was only exacerbated when I had three children in the space of 16 months and was left with two dress sizes difference between the top and the bottom of my body.

My desire for a well-fitting dress and to find my own identity again after becoming a busy mum, led me to taking a weekend sewing course as a Mother's Day present. It was to be the best present ever.

Right author and psychotherapist Eloise Skinner. Below Michelle Rowley is a passionate sewist, here looking so happy with some of the garments that she's made herself!





**PERSONAL TIME**

Now besides living in a world of nappies, sleepless nights and constant washing I could immerse myself in an exciting world of fabrics, patterns and endless possibilities. It was wonderful to unwind at the end of another hectic day by working on my next project. I enjoyed the process as much as the satisfaction felt when it was completed. As my handmade wardrobe grew, so did my confidence. I felt my identity moving away from “the woman with three toddlers” to someone who was respected for having an interesting hobby and skill. Besides enabling me to create clothes I felt better about myself, sewing also provided me with new social connections with like-minded people. Whilst it’s been wonderful to connect online with fellow sewists, it’s the real-life meetups at events such as The Dressmaker’s Ball, The New Craft House parties and The Bridge Town Ball that have truly enriched my life and brought me new connections with those with a shared passion.

*‘Studies suggest that creative hobbies help improve our mood and reduce stress.’*

“Studies suggest that creative hobbies can help with improving our mood, reduce stress levels, and lead to an increased sense of community – especially where the hobby is combined with meeting with a group of likeminded people,” explains Eloise.

Above and right Jane Scott at the front of her shop, Haberdasherdo. Her store and the ‘sewcial’ groups that she runs, bring people with the same passion for sewing together.

**SHARING A PASSION**

As the owner of Haberdasherdo in Southbourne, Bournemouth, Jane Scott has seen how sewing can bring people together, not just through the ‘sewcial’ groups she runs in the shop but also in the daily interactions that take place between customers. “Customers say my shop feels like a safe place where they can browse at their leisure and ask for advice but also where conversations start up spontaneously between customers,

whose paths might never have crossed, offering each other advice, sharing ideas and giving encouragement and praise. I’m not sure that happens in many other shop environments,” says Jane. A few of the attendees at her sewcial group have been advised by a medical professional to learn a new skill to ease anxiety and stress. “I’m not a doctor, but I see first-hand the transformation when customers get hooked on their new hobby and find a new focus and passion.”

Dr Haleema Sheikh, a specialist in integrative women’s health and bio-identical hormone balancing for the Marion Gluck Clinic, recognises the benefits of a creative



Above Dr Haleema Sheikh explains how sewing can make us feel better. Above right: Sarah Beaumont at the Bridge Town Hall wearing her make. Below Victoria Brown, happily sewing.

hobby. “When we engage in a creative task there are multiple beneficial effects on the brain; it causes activation of multiple areas of the brain and improved connectivity between them, fostering neuroplasticity and cognitive flexibility.” Dr Sheikh advocates that a creative hobby can serve as “An effective self-care strategy which offers access to emotional wellbeing and cognitive health with neuronal connectivity benefits.” Furthermore, she explains how the creative process can help with hormonal balance “by reducing cortisol levels and promoting the release of dopamine and serotonin.” This reduction in the stress hormone but rise in hormones associated with pleasure and well-being, “can contribute to a smoother menopausal experience,” explains Dr Sheikh.

**DOPAMINE INTAKE**

Sewing is a creative hobby that not only benefits us during the process but one that can provide us with the most rewarding results: clothes that make us feel good and positively impact our life and confidence. It’s no wonder GBSB contestant Brogan Allard’s



book is titled ‘Dopamine Dressmaking’, as ultimately sewing not only makes us feel empowered when we’re working towards a goal, but it also enables us to create the clothes that we feel best in. Brogan describes dopamine dressing as “Dressing for joy. You can do this by reaching for clothes that can bring a smile to your face. Regardless of your age, your style, or where you live, you can bring some extra dopamine to your day through your fashion choices.”

The dopamine hits from donning a self-made garment or mastering a new sewing technique can come from the smallest of wins to the biggest achievements. “I’ve always been creative but that all stopped with having kids. I missed my creative hobbies, as they made me feel like me. I decided to carve out the time and started dressmaking last year with a Tilly and the Buttons pyjama pattern. I’ve now made a few pairs of pyjamas, various cushion covers, bags and a dress. It gives me a huge sense of achievement when I learn something new,” says Victoria Brown, Story Coach.

“You can bring some extra dopamine to your day through your fashion choices!”

**BEING CREATIVE**

Stepping into a fantasy themed ball wearing a gown of her own creation was “such a buzz!” for Marketing Executive Sarah Beaumont. “All my jobs have been sales and

marketing corporate jobs. There’s nothing tangible at the end of it and I’d forgotten what it felt like to create something that you can get lost in,” says Sarah. “I like figuring out how to do something and part of the reason I get so much joy out of sewing is seeing the achievement. I love that I can create something from scratch that also has my own flair on it.” In preparation for the ball, Sarah was sewing until 1am on many nights. “I was so happy!” Sarah remembers fondly. Victoria and Sarah’s accounts of their joy from sewing are just a tiny snippet from the numerous positive stories I’ve been told around the happiness that sewing can bring. It would be impossible to share all the individual stories I’ve been privileged to discover and witness, but that I believe is the true testament to the power of the hobby of sewing.

**SEWING, MORE THAN A HOBBY**

Sewing can help us to feel good in many ways, such as...

- Boosting our confidence in both ourselves and our wardrobe
- Giving us a sense of achievement and accomplishment
- Providing new social connections
- Enabling us to feel part of a community
- Reducing stress & anxiety
- Enabling us to enter into a state of creative flow



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