

**Low-Tech Weaving without a Loom**  
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Textile making has deep historical significance as an occupation, an art, and a social event, which creates networks for sharing and support.

The origins of the craft are profoundly feminine. In English the **distaff side** indicates relatives through one's mother. (The distaff is the tool use to hold the unspun wool for the spindle). Among the goddesses of ancient Greece and Rome, only women were weavers and many are depicted holding their distaff.

**Text and textile** share a common Latin root: *texare/textere*, which means “to weave”. The root of the word for “*weaving*” and also for “*being*” are the same in Egyptian: “*nnt*”.

**Weaving Words:**

**Distaff – Spindle – Loom – Warp – Weft – Shuttle - Heddle**

**Weaving History/Myth:** There is a strong folkloric tradition of **spinning yarns** at a spinning wheel or loom (Russian fairy tales, for one, often begin with “Three maids sat spinning late one eve...”). Many a fairy tale features spinning wheels and spindles prominently

Today’s “**stitch and bitch**” quilting circles meet for the same reasons—not only to make objects, but to tell stories and vent frustrations.

While the **Logos** archetype gives us written text, and linear, logical functions associated with masculinity, **Mythos** the root of mythology, folklore, and fairy tales, is circuitous, interwoven, intuitive, paradoxical, mysterious, creative, and feminine.

By spinning, weaving, and unraveling, women master time itself. Though *master* is a masculine word, this mastery is feminine. “She makes form out of the formlessness, continuity out of fragments, narrative and meaning out of scattered incidents (Solnit, 2013).”

In Greek mythology, each human life is a thread. The three **Moirae**, or Fates, spin, measure, and cut these threads. The **Fates** are depicted as female weavers, weaving the fates of men’s and women’s lives.

In Norse mythology the three fates are the **Norns** – a word that means “**to twine**.” Uror, Verandi and Skuld; Crone, Matron and Maid; past, present, and future. Each of these names also means “**to become**” – became, becoming, about to become.

In Peruvian culture we have another **creation myth**: the top of loom is seen as the heavens and the bottom the earth. What is woven in between is a person's life.

**Scheherazade** forestalls her death by telling a tale that, like a thread that cannot be cut, she keeps spinning and spinning.

**Ovid** recounts the terrible tale of **Philomena** who was raped and her tongue cut out so that she could not tell about her violation. Her loom then becomes her voice; the story is told in the design, so that her sister **Procne** may understand and the women can take their revenge. Among Afghan women who continue to be oppressed by the Taliban regime, weaving rugs has become a way to express feelings and stories about oppression and the endless war in their country.

**Other Famous Weavers: Arachne and Athena** famous rivals as weavers; **Ariadne** with her golden thread lead Theseus out of the Labyrinth; Lord Tennyson's **Lady of Shalott**, based on themes of Arthurian legend and lore; **Briar Rose/Snow White, Rumpelstiltskin**; James Joyce's Molly Bloom, with her pins and superstitions about not "tearing a thread"; The Navajo **Grandmother Spider Woman** creation myth; **African Anansi**, the weaving spider trickster archetype.

Myths, folklore and fairytales with weavers proliferate because textile work was learned through oral and experiential traditions. The most ancient form of weaving was probably a form of architecture in woven grasses into houses ((Palmer, 2015) and baskets for food and water. **Back-strap looms**, a most primitive form of loom, involved the physical strength of the torso and an **embodied cognition** passed down from mother to daughter in Mayan culture (Greenfield, 2015). The more sophisticated **floor looms** of other cultures from India to France represent the earliest form of a computer with its **heddle** containing the capacity to hold hundreds of traditional patterns in 0-1 sequences (under/over). Charles Babbage inventor of the first numbers calculator looked at jacquard looms for his model (Cassidy, 2004).

**Weaving and Dance Movement:** Numerous folk traditions from Scandinavian to Celtic to Native American have traditional dances where the dancers' movements emulate the movement of the loom and the shuttle. Often dancers will wear scarves or ribbons to represent the threads. Maypole dances certainly have their origins in this tradition.

Weaving is a natural communal activity, often depicting communal life such as dance in its designs. In more recent years weaving has even been a rallying activity for native peoples, like those in West Timor, Indonesia, to protest and protect their land and way of life against the encroachment of development and industrialization.

### Inherent therapeutic qualities to the textile crafts:

- Soothing work with sensual, tactile materials
- Repetitive work that lends itself to spontaneous narratives and memories
- Potential for repair and transformation
- Satisfaction in unraveling and making whole again
- Acknowledging imperfection and practicing moving on from knots and snarls
- Piecing together - incorporation of disparate, fragmented items

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- 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Embodied Cognition Conference April 2017: Weaving, Cognition, Technology Culture – The Center for Science and Society, Columbia University, NY, NY. <http://scienceandsociety.columbia.edu/csevent/weaving-cognition>